18/08/2025

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMPLEXITY THEORY

MABRI, NEILA
LANCASTER UNIVERSITY UNITED KINGDOM, LAW SCHOOL
This Thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Law

Abstract

The World Bank's social accountability programmes promote good governance practices in developing countries. These programmes have had a mixed record of success. Existing literature reports that the success or failure of a programme is largely context-dependent, i.e., dependent on local social, economic, and political circumstances. If this is true, we cannot predict when social accountability programmes will be successful, and it will not be possible for the World Bank to develop a template for successful programmes. This thesis disagrees with the negative reading; it argues that the present analysis lacks recognition of the fact that domestic political systems in all countries are complex systems. Viewing the political system as complex requires understanding the fundamental mechanisms that make these systems more resilient and adaptable: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness. We would expect, then, that social accountability programmes would be more successful when they are aligned with the understanding that the political system is a complex system. This thesis finds this to be the case: successful social accountability initiatives promote citizens' self-organisation, reinforce positive feedback mechanisms and promote openness in the domestic political system. Therefore, while local social, political, and economic circumstances remain important, we can draw more comprehensive insights into when social accountability programmes will be more effective, and the World Bank can develop a template for successful social accountability programmes.

Word count excluding footnotes and the bibliography: 79689.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has directly and indirectly supported and guided me during my PhD journey.

First and foremost, I am incredibly grateful to my supervisors, Professor Steven Wheatley and Doctor Thomas Webb, for their constant support, encouragement, and invaluable guidance. Their expertise, patience, and insightful feedback have played a crucial role in shaping this research and encouraging my critical thinking. I sincerely appreciated their mentorship and belief in my abilities throughout this challenging, yet fulfilling process. I would also like to express my gratitude to my examiners, Professor Robert Geyer and Professor Mark Chinen, for their valuable recommendations that enhanced the quality of my final draft.

I express my sincere gratitude to my family, particularly my father, Albert Toikeusse Mabri, for his constant love, encouragement, and financial support. Their support has served as a constant anchor during my toughest moments. I am particularly grateful to my partner, Ezenwa Ugbomah, for his continual support and kindness, as well as to my late mother, Assita Laetitia Kourouma, whose memory has provided me with comfort and inspiration. I also thank my friends and all the amazing PhD students I met along this path; their experiences and insights uplifted my spirit, making this journey more fulfilling and enjoyable.

Lastly, I am grateful for the support and resources offered by Lancaster University, which created an inspiring academic environment, without which this research would not have been possible.

Author's Declaration

I, Neila Jenifer Makeuka Mabri, affirm that the work I present is my original research, carried out under the supervision of Steve Wheatley and Tom Webb, and has not been submitted in a similar form for any higher degree at another institution.

All sources of information and references used in this thesis are fully credited. Any work from other authors has been properly cited, and I have maintained the highest standards of academic integrity throughout my research process.

Neila Mabri

18/08/2025

CHAPTER 0: INTRODUCTION

0.1. Context

Since its creation in 1944, the World Bank has been working to eradicate poverty and promote economic prosperity in developing countries. This interest stemmed from the understanding that such an international organisation was needed to support poorer countries in financing their development projects at lower interest rates and improving their citizens' lives. One of the Bank's main challenges in helping developing countries has been the difficulty in matching economic growth to human development, partly because the Bank initially abstained from including sociopolitical factors in financial aid projects to remain neutral. A shift in this approach, beginning in the 1980s, led the Bank to reevaluate its understanding of development aid, moving beyond a focus on economic growth. This shift stemmed from the observation that many developing countries assisted by the Bank were developing rapidly, yet without any tangible impact on the quality of life of their populations.

As the Bank analysed the results of decades of financial aid, it concluded that alleviating poverty could not be successful without empowering citizens, as the main actors whose needs must be fulfilled to ensure sustainable development. This is how social accountability emerged in the World Bank's reports from 2003 as an approach aimed at reinforcing good governance practices and governments' accountability in developing countries. The Bank designed and implemented several social accountability programmes to reinforce citizen active participation, citizen involvement in public decision-making, and citizen access to public information. These programmes targeted the improvement of local public services and, to some extent, showcased positive results.

The existing literature on the implementation of social accountability highlighted the context-dependence of these programmes, meaning that local social, political, and economic circumstances can either foster or deter their effectiveness. Implemented in different political contexts, the impact of social accountability programmes was limited by these local circumstances, as explained in the literature. This led some authors to suggest that these programmes were ineffective, challenging to trace long-term, and too

volatile. This means it would eventually be impossible for the World Bank to establish a template for successful programmes. In disagreeing with this interpretation, this thesis aims to analyse the circumstances under which social accountability programmes are more successful. It suggests that a deeper understanding of the political system is essential to determine which programmes would achieve greater success despite contextual disparities. To explore this point, the thesis employs insights from complexity theory.

This thesis is an original contribution to knowledge because it is the first work to acknowledge the relevance of the domestic political system, viewed through the lens of complexity theory, in explaining the success or failure of social accountability programmes. By doing so, the researcher aims to fill this gap in the literature on social accountability. This gap warrants exploration to understand the extent to which social accountability programmes can be more effective in the domestic political system when they align with the three mechanisms of complex systems: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness. Based on these findings, we can gain more comprehensive insights into when social accountability programmes will be successful, enabling the World Bank to develop a template for effective social accountability programmes. This thesis seeks to enhance the literature on social accountability and complexity theory, addressing a critical gap through key objectives:

- Examining the Bank's transformation in adopting social accountability as a valid approach for holding governments accountable at the grassroots level.
- Exploring the effectiveness of social accountability programmes by categorising factors influencing their success or failure.
- Exploring the complexity of social systems, highlighting the necessity of understanding their features and dynamics, which is crucial for improving the success rates of international aid organisations like the World Bank.
- Inspiring the World Bank to develop a blueprint for effective social accountability programmes, steering clear of the rigid practices that have proven ineffective in our complex interconnected world.

The primary research question of this thesis is: Can the World Bank enhance the effectiveness of its social accountability programmes by deepening its understanding of the complex characteristics of domestic political systems? This thesis hypothesises that the most effective social accountability programmes will align with the three distinct

features of political systems, framed within the context of complexity theory. To answer the research question, the thesis advances as follows:

The present chapter, the Introduction, outlines the purpose of this thesis, situating it within its academic context and detailing its methodology. This chapter is essential as it explains the theoretical framework, research design, methodology, and the limitations faced by the researcher. The first section introduces the context of the thesis, emphasising the Bank's social accountability while clarifying the research objectives, including the research question and the central hypothesis. This provides a clear understanding of the thesis' contribution to knowledge and its claim to originality. The second section details the methodology, emphasising the applied philosophy approach that defines the thesis' epistemological and ontological stance. It begins by discussing the theoretical framework based on complexity theory, specifying the three features of complex systems examined: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness. The next part describes the research design, focusing on the rationale for selecting case studies and the methodology used to choose the three specific examples included in the thesis. The third part highlights the primary methodology adopted in the thesis: document analysis. It also addresses the limitations of the chosen methodology and how the author attempted to mitigate these issues. Finally, the last section summarises the methodological framework of the thesis within its broader context.

Chapter 1 introduces social accountability as perceived by the World Bank, the leading actor that popularised this approach in governance. While shedding light on the meaning of social accountability and its implementation, this chapter provides a general description of the World Bank, its approach to governance, and how it eventually adopted social accountability. This section is necessary before introducing social accountability in detail, as it explains the journey taken by the World Bank in its efforts to promote good governance practices and why social accountability emerged as a strategy to encourage more sustainable development in poorer countries. A section dedicated to critiquing the evolution and results of the Bank's approach will be presented to provide a better understanding of its impact on governance. The second part of this chapter presents social accountability, its actors, and the Bank's templates defining the scope of the social accountability programmes. This part will also highlight key critiques in the literature related to the Bank's definition of social accountability. This will add nuance to the

chapter, as the Bank's understanding of social accountability has evolved through lessons learned from practice, as well as the authors' analysis of this practice. The mechanisms of social accountability will also be presented, highlighting the tools used in the programmes to reinforce citizen participation, citizen feedback and citizen access to information. The last section describes the key themes identified in social accountability programmes: citizen participation, citizen engagement in decision-making and citizen access to information, as well as examples illustrating these themes. At the end of this chapter, there should be a good understanding of how the World Bank's journey led it to adopt social accountability as a governance approach, emphasising the need to empower citizens to demand more accountability from local public service providers and governments. However, to gain a better understanding of this approach, it is essential to consider not only the Bank's perspective but also that of authors who have analysed it and identified key factors supporting or limiting the programmes' effectiveness. This will be addressed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to a literature review that will provide a thorough insight into the impact of social accountability programmes. This literature review highlights the criticisms and supporting arguments for the World Bank's approach, thereby ensuring that this thesis develops an argument based on a holistic analysis rather than a one-sided perspective on social accountability. This chapter aims to explain why the literature says that social accountability is context-dependent and why the programmes had mixed results. It starts with analysing factors that make the programmes effective, grouping them into factors directly related to citizen conditions, states' conditions and the quality of the relationship between civil and state actors. It then presents factors that limited the programmes' effectiveness by grouping them into the categories mentioned above. These insights led the researcher to draw significant lessons that shaped their understanding of key arguments within the literature: the pessimistic view on social accountability programmes due to their context-dependence and the discrepancies in the definition of 'success' of these programmes. The insights from the literature reveal a gap that the thesis aims to address, specifically examining what makes some programmes more successful than others in the domestic political system and how these successful programmes navigated the uncertainty caused by contextual disparities. To address these questions, it is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the domestic system and its dynamics from a holistic or macro-level perspective, as opposed to an analysis of isolated cases typically

found in the literature. This is why the next section of this chapter focuses on a literature review of complexity and aid, highlighting the characteristics of linear thinking prevalent among international organisations in this field. It also highlights the limitations of linear thinking in development aid, the relevance of complexity theory in this field, and the benefits of viewing development aid initiatives as operating within complex systems with unique characteristics, which will be described more extensively in Chapter 3.

The insights of the previous chapters led the researcher to propose the use of complexity theory as an approach to better understand the dynamics of complex systems such as the political system. Chapter 3 introduces complexity theory, its evolution in the literature and its fundamental mechanisms applied to biological, social and political systems. Complexity theory can be described as a systems theory approach seeking to understand systems behaviour from a holistic, non-reductionist perspective, which means that it considers that it is not possible to understand an entire system's dynamics by simply isolating its parts. Although the third chapter will explain this theory in depth, its relevance in understanding the political system more effectively lies in its goal to move beyond the narrative that modern challenges, such as climate change, financial system instability, or terrorism, hinder our ability to adapt and find sustainable solutions. While defining the political system as a complex system, complexity theory does not agree with the fact that we are doomed to reside in an anarchic world that we cannot control, and neither does it agree with attempts to perfectly predict behaviours in a political system whose internal dynamics and interdependence to other systems, make it volatile. Instead, complexity theory acknowledges the interdependence of systems that increases the complexity of their behaviour, and challenges traditional cause-and-effect thinking in politics seeking perfect solutions to unpredictable issues. The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the background of complexity theory and its evolution from the natural sciences to the social sciences. A section on autopoietic theory will be included, as it represents a significant theory that opposes complexity theory, particularly in the context of law. This section is relevant as it highlights the limitations of the autopoietic theory and why it does not help the argument of this thesis, contrary to complexity theory. Then, the chapter will analyse the features of complex systems, focusing on three critical features: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness. These three features effectively highlight the dynamics of a complex system and encompass all the essential characteristics that make these systems resilient and adaptable to uncertainty. With these

insights, the thesis proceeds to analyse whether successful social accountability programmes are those that effectively align with the mentioned features, despite their context dependence.

Chapter 4 assesses the implementation and outcomes of three social accountability programmes: The Send Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme, the Nigeria's White Ribbon Alliance Initiative in Niger State, and the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP) in Cambodia, to determine whether their success aligns with the insights of complexity theory. These examples were selected because they highlight the problematic contextual circumstances in various developing countries where governments were initially unwilling to support the programmes. Also, the initial social, economic, and political challenges faced in these examples are typically described in the literature as obstacles to success. The chapter begins by summarising the conclusions of Chapters 1 and 2, highlighting the purpose of social accountability as understood by the World Bank and the limitations to its effectiveness identified in the literature. The second part of the chapter applies the insights of complexity theory to the three social accountability programmes mentioned, starting with a synopsis of each feature of a complex system. This part of the chapter, then, provides some background to the three examples discussed above and analyses whether social accountability initiatives could yield more positive outcomes when they align with the features of complexity theory. Aligning with complexity theory would mean reinforcing self-organisation in social accountability by facilitating citizen mobilisation and diversifying citizen networks; reinforcing positive feedback mechanisms by involving citizens in policymaking and reducing asymmetries; and increasing government openness to improve local responses to contextual issues and optimising actors' awareness of the system's complexity. We find that by recognising the complexity of domestic politics, the World Bank can design social accountability programmes to be more successful, as demonstrated by the case studies. Thus, social accountability programmes designed with this perspective can benefit communities more sustainably, as they will be implemented in ways that combine flexibility and complexity management, rather than rigid beliefs.

The next section introduces the methodology of this chapter and the rationale behind choosing complexity theory and a case study analysis.

0.2. Methodology

The intricate interconnections and dependencies among the components of a complex system pose significant challenges to conventional methodologies employed in social and political science. Traditional approaches often emphasise identifying cause-and-effect relationships and crafting universal solutions for complex challenges in development aid. This thesis adopts an ontological perspective that views political systems as complex entities. By focusing on complexity theory, this work transcends the conventional linear causation model of political systems. Such traditional methods frequently overlook critical aspects that hinder accurate predictions and the effective implementation of development programmes across varying contexts.

This thesis' epistemological stance centres on recognising successful patterns in social accountability programmes. It employs the applied philosophy methodology outlined by Ben Hale, integrating insights from complexity theory into social accountability. Hale's understanding of applied philosophy entails a practical philosophical approach aimed at 'clarifying and illuminating principles' to assist policymakers more efficiently by distilling 'philosophical issues to their essential concepts' without making them overly simplistic.[1] This thesis extends beyond a theoretical overview of complexity theory; it examines actual case studies to identify successful social accountability initiatives and their alignment with the principles of complexity theory. However, this thesis aims not to present a one-size-fits-all solution to the complex challenges of development initiatives, such as social accountability. Instead, it seeks to inspire the World Bank to develop a blueprint for effective social accountability programmes, steering clear of the rigid practices that have proven ineffective in our complex interconnected world. As supported by Turner and Barker, social sciences would benefit from beginning their 'investigations through the lens of complexity theory', as addressing 'tomorrow's problems' requires considering the intricate dynamics of social systems to which complexity theory offers a more realistic interpretation.[2]

[1] Ben Hale, 'The Methods of Applied Philosophy and the Tools of the Policy Sciences' (2011) 25 (2) International Journal of Applied Philosophy 215, 227.
[2] John R. Turner and Rose M. Barker, 'Complexity Theory: An Overview with Potential Applications for the Social Sciences' (2019) 7 (1) Systems 1,19.

The next section will highlight the relevance of applying insights from complexity theory to social accountability, specifically the reasons for choosing self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness.

0.2.1. Theoretical Framework: Complexity Theory

Research on the World Bank and its path toward embracing social accountability indicates that its development programmes often adhere to a simplistic mental model, which fails to align with the complex and dynamic challenges of the real world. Additionally, the literature on social accountability programmes simplifies the reasons for the success or failure of some programmes compared to others, mainly highlighting the context-dependence of those programmes. The methodology of this thesis is based on the understanding that the political system is complex, dynamic and nonlinear. This thesis posits that while the context-dependence of social accountability programmes is crucial to understand, oversimplifying the intricate nature of the political system and having a limited grasp of its essential characteristics are significant factors contributing to the varying success of these programmes across different contexts. International organisations like the World Bank often operate under outdated mental models that adhere to a rigid, linear framework for aid, which fails to grasp the complex nature of social systems, particularly the political system, that should be perceived as a complex system with unique characteristics.[3] Complexity theory can help pinpoint successful patterns in development programmes while realistically clarifying why some struggle to succeed in self-organising, open systems that rely on feedback mechanisms. Hence, complexity theory provides insights that facilitate a more realistic and comprehensive examination of real-world systems.[4] While recognising that the most effective actions depend heavily on local contexts, complexity theory defines new perspectives on addressing local and global issues.

Self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness are key traits of complex systems. While the literature describes several features of complex systems, this thesis emphasises three specific ones for clarity. These features are frequently mentioned in the literature,

[3] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) p16 <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> accessed 25/06/2025.
[4] Ibid ix.

which underscores their essential role in understanding how complex systems function and their ability to adapt flexibly to uncertainty. Additionally, these features were selected for greater clarity, as there is no unified definition of a complex system and its features within the existing literature. The three mechanisms mean that social systems are defined by a complex network of interconnected self-organising agents and feedback loops that link micro-level behaviours, interaction dynamics, and systemic trends. Self-organisation in complex systems describes how interactions among lower-level components result in the emergence of patterns or behaviours at higher levels, all without central control. In social systems, the interactions of individuals at lower levels can unpredictably influence the entire system, leading to unforeseen events despite established laws and norms. Feedback mechanisms in complex systems typically either amplify or attenuate changes. They operate like a butterfly effect, causing the actions of individuals or their networks to have unpredictable repercussions throughout the system. The butterfly effect serves as a metaphor for how small events in nonlinear dynamic systems can lead to significant changes in a system's trajectory. This is illustrated by the image of a butterfly flapping its wings on one side of the world, which can ultimately cause a hurricane on the other side.[5] Moreover, openness in complex systems entails that these systems are receptive to both internal and external influences, enabling them to adapt and evolve continuously.

On the other hand, understanding complexity theory requires contextual sensitivity and recognising transferable patterns reinforced by feedback mechanisms. Thus, employing case studies to examine the central argument of this thesis is essential. To ensure conceptual clarity and rigour, this thesis included a comprehensive literature review on both social accountability and complexity theory, which situates the case studies contextually and conceptually, establishing a solid foundation before exploring the main argument in the final chapter. This provided an in-depth understanding of essential concepts, clarifying each without oversimplification. The next section describes the reasons for selecting the case studies in this thesis, justifies the relevance of the three chosen examples, and outlines the methodology used to do so.

0.2.2. Research Design: Case Studies

[5] Papa Mbengue et al., Management and Chaos Theory, Complexity Theory, and Self-Organizing Systems Theory' (2018) 9 Asia Pacific Journal of Research in Business Management 1, 2.

This thesis employs three case studies to test the applicability of insights from complexity theory to social accountability programmes.

Selecting appropriate case studies is crucial for comprehending complex real-world scenarios that necessitate 'experience' or 'learning from specific cases'.[6] While there is a perspective that case studies may not contribute to the 'collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in society', they still present an 'opportunity for generalisation'.[7] The newly gathered information allows for past events to be viewed in a 'new light', facilitating the generation of hypotheses instead of 'theory building'.[8] This is relevant in this thesis, which is based on the hypothesis that effective social accountability programmes correspond with the insights of complexity theory. Nonetheless, to enhance the rigour of a case study approach, scholars suggest that 'overall theoretical relevance and the quality of inquiry are improved when existing theories (of various types) are thoughtfully integrated into the research', enabling the researcher to contribute critically to the field through innovative interpretations of data.[9] This highlights the relevance of complexity theory in analysing the case studies.

This thesis employed purposive sampling to select cases from developing countries that exemplify challenging local circumstances, particularly the lack of government support and the limited capacity of civil society actors to organise and participate actively. Purposive sampling is frequently used in qualitative research within the social sciences to 'generate insights and deep understanding of a specific phenomenon without aiming to achieve any external statistical generalizability', as quantitative research would do.[10] Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy that focuses on deliberately selecting 'context, materials or participants' who share specific qualities that are relevant and have the potential to answer the inquiry about the phenomenon of interest'.[11] This approach differs from convenience sampling, which is based on the availability of cases regardless of information richness or relevance to the research goals.[12] The process of using purposive sampling in this thesis follows Ahmad and Wilkins' proposed framework of the purposive sampling approach by starting with the definition of the 'research goals

[6] Tony Harland, 'Learning about case study methodology to research higher education' (2014) 33 (6) Higher Education Research & Development 1113, 1116.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ahmad Maiss and Stephen Wilkins, 'Purposive sampling in qualitative research: a framework for the entire journey' (2025) 59 Quality & Quantity 1461, 1462.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid 1463.

and questions', establishing the qualitative research design (i.e. case studies in this thesis), choosing the data collection methodology (thoroughly analysing accessible and relevant data which addresses the research question, and can help achieve the research goals), and reporting the results.[13]

The three case studies in this thesis represent comparable political systems facing context-related challenges that have been highlighted in the literature review on social accountability programmes as hindering factors to successful implementation and results. While, SEND Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme Monitoring, Nigeria's White Ribbon Alliance Initiative in Niger State, and the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project in Cambodia all demonstrated alignment with self-organisation, strengthened positive feedback mechanisms, and fostered government openness, each case study is used to illustrate alignment with one of these features of complex systems. This is because each of the case studies emphasised a particular feature of the complex systems, even though other features could be observed, as will be explained in Chapter 4. Furthermore, the sources selected to support the analysis of the case studies were chosen based on whether they provided an adequate interpretation of the results, thorough assessments, and a cohesive analysis backed by reliable data.

SEND Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme Monitoring is a good example of reinforcing self-organisation in social accountability by facilitating citizen mobilisation and diversifying citizen networks. The challenges faced included corruption and insufficient government accountability. The programme successfully addressed these issues by fostering collaboration among stakeholders; enhancing citizen self-organisation by building their capacity to monitor smuggling and demand greater accountability; and mobilising and training local civil society organisations.

The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria's Initiative in Niger State serves as a prime example of a successful social accountability effort that reinforces positive feedback mechanisms by involving citizens in policymaking and reducing asymmetries. Challenges involved the initial reluctance of the local government to participate in conversations about citizen-led accountability initiatives, as well as the limited capacity of citizens and civil society to hold authorities accountable. The initiative effectively addressed these challenges by dedicating considerable time to enhancing the capacity of actors before the programme's

[13] Ibid 1467.

implementation. It facilitated discussions among civil actors to foresee local issues and strengthen positive feedback loops through consistent negotiations between citizens and the state, as well as empowering citizens to amplify their communities' voices.

The Community Scorecards for Health Services Project in Cambodia was a great example, specifically emphasising how to increase government openness to improve local responses to unpredictability and develop actors' awareness of the system's complexity. Challenges included weak accountability systems, which restricted the responsiveness of political institutions, difficulties in encouraging local communities to participate in meetings, and limited capacities of both the state and citizens. The programme effectively addressed these challenges by initiating an extended pre-implementation project that enabled public institutions to become familiar with social accountability and community scorecards, while also facilitating the exchange of pertinent information between government agencies and civil society actors.

The next section outlines the primary data collection method employed in the thesis, namely document analysis.

0.2.3. Data Collection Method

0.2.3.1. Document Analysis

Document analysis is an important qualitative research method in the social sciences. It involves examining various document types.[14] This thesis used preexisting textual sources to enhance the study's trustworthiness. A diverse range of sources was utilised to reduce biases through triangulation, confirming the accuracy of findings and fostering a deeper understanding of the investigated topic.[15] The preference for existing data over methods like interviews stemmed from the affordability, stability, and accessibility of databases and textbooks, which facilitated uninterrupted, high-quality research and the timely achievement of objectives.[16] This approach also mitigated ethical concerns. The selection of documents adhered to four essential criteria identified by Flick: authenticity (verifying the authenticity of documents), credibility (ensuring there are no mistakes),

[14] Hani Morgan, 'Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis' (2022) 27 (1) The Qualitative Report 64, 64.
[15] Ibid 65.
[16] Ibid.

representativeness (evaluating how typical a document is), and meaning (reflecting on the importance of the document's content).[17]

Document analysis is a crucial component of this study's methodology. It establishes a basis for understanding the World Bank's motivations, design, implementation, and evaluation of social accountability programmes. The data collection process emphasised the assessment of secondary sources, particularly programmes' evaluations, policy documents, and internal reports from both the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Social Accountability's open-access database, in addition to books, journal articles, and international working papers. Focusing on the World Bank required the use of document analysis to examine records that detail the programmes' 'origin, history, operation, and impact' to provide a comprehensive understanding of their credibility.[18]

Other document types used include academic literature, such as peer-reviewed articles that analyse specific programmes or offer a comparative meta-analysis of various social accountability initiatives. Additionally, appraisal and implementation status reports from the World Bank open-access database are included where available, along with books published by the World Bank or independent authors, as well as conference or working papers. Data was gathered using a document that notes the authors' names, publication year, study location, study design, types of social accountability mechanisms employed in the initiative, outcomes, enabling and limiting factors, as well as key actors and their roles. This ensured that the information from the documents was accurately referenced, maintaining strict academic integrity.

This document analysis provided detailed insights into social accountability programmes, encompassing their design, goals, implementation methods, and internal evaluations. In addition, the reports of nongovernmental organisations and local partners complemented the World Bank documents to create a comprehensive argument. This was necessary due to frequent restrictions on access to the World Bank database, which complicated the retrieval of documents related to specific programmes, including the case studies presented in Chapter 4. Furthermore, the document analysis provided a comprehensive insight into how the three characteristics of complex systems were qualitatively reflected

[17] Ibid 70.
[18] Gregory T. Owen, 'Qualitative Methods in Higher Education Policy Analysis: Using Interviews and Document Analysis' (2014) 19 (26) The Qualitative Report 1, 11.

in social accountability programmes, both during their implementation and afterwards, in cases where reports described the long-term results.

The document analysis entailed systematically gathering all sources through electronic searches, beginning with the documentation available from the World Bank, and then branching out to additional websites, including the Internet Archive, ProQuest, OneSearch, JSTOR, Sage Journals, and PubMed. Some search terms used included: 'World Bank social accountability', 'Social accountability programmes in developing countries', 'Social accountability programmes meta-analysis', 'Citizen participation social accountability programmes', 'Citizen involvement in decision-making social accountability', 'Citizen information social accountability', 'Social accountability programmes Africa', 'Social accountability programmes Asia', and 'Social accountability healthcare and education'. This qualitative research method prioritised the collection of authentic and credible documents, organised by specific focus areas, such as the World Bank's viewpoints on development or detailed assessments of its social accountability programmes. The analysis involved extracting key insights from these documents, identifying connections with other authors, and summarising the findings and relevance to the thesis. The documents collected allowed the thesis to directly address the research question by providing a better understanding of programmes' theories of change, intended outcomes, timelines, internal evaluations and external assessments.

The next section highlights the challenges encountered due to the methodological choices and how the thesis tried to overcome them.

0.2.4. Limitations of the methodology

This thesis acknowledges the limitations inherent in its methodological choices, particularly regarding the generalisability of its findings and data accessibility.

Incorporating complexity theory's insights poses challenges for numerous international organisations and stakeholders involved in development programmes. This approach requires a transformation, shifting from a rigid policymaking framework to a more adaptive and innovative strategy for developing effective methods that truly support local communities. Such a shift may restrict the generalisability of the findings, especially in contexts where projects are implemented within fixed timelines and with limited

resources. This thesis recognises that focusing on complexity might appear biased, as the argument relies on the premise that political systems are inherently complex. Nonetheless, it contends that complexity provides a clear and robust framework for effectively understanding the dynamics of political systems, offering practical guidance applicable to real-world scenarios. The insights derived from complexity theory facilitate 'cross-case generalisation', enabling the development of overarching principles based on the specific cases studied.[19] It identifies key patterns through shared challenges and interconnected themes across these cases. Additionally, adopting the insights of complexity theory requires implementing smaller localised initiatives with a more extended preparation period. This allows for a deeper understanding of local needs and the customisation of funding to support citizen-centred and citizen-led efforts beyond the programmes.

While document analysis offers valuable insights, some documents are inherently biased and shaped by institutional, political, or reputational agendas, particularly in the case of internal World Bank documents. Document analysis can be impeded by organisations providing access only to content that aligns with their values and objectives, which can restrict data accessibility and impact how researchers can use the available data and the claims they can make based on it.[20] Understanding this reality, the analysis is keenly aware of the implications of what is omitted. This thesis acknowledges that findings from document analysis could have been further strengthened through interviews, providing a means to validate or question the initial interpretations. This is a potential avenue for future research. Nevertheless, the literature on social accountability provides various quantitative analyses to illustrate the effects of social accountability programmes and outline methods for measuring their impact while assessing their sustainability across different contexts. In contrast, this thesis seeks to identify patterns using the theoretical framework of complexity theory, which necessitates the use of a qualitative methodology.

Data accessibility also posed a significant challenge in this thesis, particularly for case studies, as the World Bank's open database often did not provide access to certain documents related to some social accountability programmes. Additionally, only a few articles detailed the implementation and evaluation of the case studies. This is precisely why this thesis expands its focus beyond the documents published by the World Bank,

[19] Helen Simons, Case study Research in Practice (SAGE, 2009) p 192.
[20] Hani Morgan, 'Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis' (2022) 27 (1) The Qualitative Report 64, 67.

striving for a more objective and holistic argument. Moreover, it recognises the variability in document quality and accessibility across different contexts, particularly in cases where the World Bank lacks comprehensive documentation or where evaluations from third parties are limited. Therefore, this research deliberately used specific sources to fill in gaps where documentation was lacking.

0.4. Conclusion

This thesis challenges the dominant narratives surrounding social accountability programmes by applying insights from complexity theory. The document analysis guiding the first two chapters reveals the limitations of social accountability programmes, which had mixed results attributed to their dependence on contextual circumstances. However, the literature review on complexity and development aid emphasises that international organisations must shift from their traditional, linear mental models to adopt a more adaptive approach grounded in a deeper understanding of political systems and their dynamics. Using applied philosophy to apply the insights of complexity theory to the World Bank's social accountability programmes, this thesis posits that many analyses neglect the intrinsic complexity of political systems, which varies significantly across different domestic contexts.

This thesis hypothesises that social accountability programmes can realise far-reaching successes by acknowledging and adapting to the specific characteristics of complex political systems. The research question examined whether aligning with complexity theory's insights can improve the World Bank's design of social accountability programmes, effectively addressing local challenges and enhancing success rates. Self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness are identified in this thesis as essential characteristics of complex systems. This choice enhances clarity and is supported by the document analysis methodology, which showed their significance in much of the literature. Moreover, these features are crucial for comprehending how complex systems function and their ability to adapt effectively to uncertainty.

The thesis concludes that embracing complexity theory can enhance social accountability by bolstering self-organisation among citizens, catalysing citizen mobilisation, and diversifying citizen networks. Furthermore, it advocates for positive feedback loops by

incorporating citizen input in policymaking and reducing power asymmetries. The thesis also emphasises the importance of promoting openness in social accountability programmes by enhancing the political system's response to unpredictability and increasing actors' awareness of the political system's complexity to improve success rates. This thesis utilised purposive sampling to select three case studies that shared similar challenging initial conditions. The civil actors in each case study successfully navigated contextual limitations, demonstrating that aligning social accountability initiatives with insights from complexity theory enhances citizen engagement and yields significant developmental results. Limitations in accessing additional resources and data regarding the case studies, from both the World Bank's database and independent evaluations, resulted in a significant dependence on certain sources. The thesis recognises that this reliance may restrict the accuracy of its findings and attempts to mitigate this by utilising diverse sources for a more comprehensive analysis.

CHAPTER 1: THE WORLD BANK AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Introduction

This thesis seeks to answer the following question: Can the World Bank design more effective social accountability programmes taking into account the complexities of domestic political systems? To address this question, this chapter introduces the World Bank and its purpose; how its policies on domestic governance changed over time; what led it to adopt social accountability; and what the scope, the actors, the mechanisms, and the main themes of social accountability programmes are. As a citizen-led approach to demand more accountability from public service providers and governments, social accountability has been used by the World Bank to promote sustainable development in developing countries. This chapter is based on the World Bank's perspective on social accountability to define the meaning and the scope of the programmes, underlining its goal to reinforce three key factors: citizen participation, citizen engagement in decision-making, and citizen information.

As the leading actor that popularised this approach in governance, the first part of this chapter is dedicated to the World Bank and how its understanding of domestic governance evolved towards adopting social accountability. This section generally introduces the creation and purpose of the World Bank, the institutions that formed the World Bank Group, and their areas of expertise. It is essential to note that this chapter will refer to the World Bank, the leading institution advocating for social accountability, not the World Bank Group, which comprises five separate institutions. A section dedicated to the critiques of the Bank's approach will then discuss some issues with the Bank's new perspective on domestic governance. The second part of this chapter focuses on social accountability, specifically its actors and the key World Bank reports that introduced and framed this approach. This part also highlights the main tools used in the programmes to reinforce citizen participation, citizen feedback and citizen access to information. The

final section of the chapter outlines the key themes identified in social accountability programmes: citizen participation, citizen engagement in decision-making, and citizen access to information, along with examples that illustrate these themes. With these insights, this chapter provides a general understanding of how the World Bank's journey led it to adopt social accountability as a governance approach, emphasising the need to empower citizens in developing countries to demand more accountability from local public service providers and governments. Understanding the World Bank's social accountability practice is essential as it defines the foundation of social accountability and what it was intended to achieve before introducing other perspectives to analyse its practice. After presenting the Bank's perspective on social accountability, the next chapter will highlight its limitations and advantages in a literature review.

1.1. Introduction to the World Bank

1.1.1. General Presentation of the World Bank

Established following the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference to help reconstruct Europe and Japan after the Second World War, the World Bank has become an international organisation focused on fostering development and eradicating poverty in developing countries.[1] Initially called the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the Bank started with 38 members before increasing its membership to most countries worldwide.[2] The emphasis on helping poorer countries fund their development projects came from the realisation that these countries needed a place to borrow money at lower rates than those proposed by commercial banks.[3] The World Bank Group now comprises five institutions: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).[4] Out of these five institutions, only the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Development Association constitute the World Bank, which is what will be referred to when mentioning the World Bank in this thesis.

The Bank's main objective is to promote global economic development and poverty alleviation through lending, producing research and providing technical, policy, and financial advice to its member countries.[5] While having different specialisations and distinct legal frameworks, the five institutions of the World Bank Group work in synergy to address development challenges. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) aims to financially assist credible middle-income and low-income countries through loans and financial expertise.[6] The IBRD ensures that the loans provided have low interest rates and longer repayment terms than the private market could

[1] World Bank, A Guide to the World Bank (3rd Edition World Bank Publications, 2011) p 18.
[2] World Bank, 'Getting to Know the World Bank' (World Bank, July 26th 2016) https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/07/26/getting_to_know_theworldbank accessed 26/06/2025.
[3] Ibid.
[4] World Bank, A Guide to the World Bank (3rd Edition World Bank Publications, 2011) p 19.
[5] Christopher Gilbert, Andrew Powell and David Vines, 'Positioning the World Bank' (1999) 109 The Economic Journal 598, 598.
[6] World Bank, A Guide to the World Bank (3rd Edition World Bank Publications, 2011) p 13.

offer.[7] The International Development Association (IDA) focuses on boosting the economies of the least developed countries by providing grants and loans with low to zero interest.[8]

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) provides loans to their private sector partners without 'any governmental guarantee', which has been criticised for not always aligning with the Banks' priorities.[9] The Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) aims to reassure private investors by guaranteeing investment protection against 'non-commercial risks'.[10] This means that the MIGA ensures a global guarantee of their investment through a holistic analysis of significant risks, including non-economic factors, that can affect them. The International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID)'s role is to settle international disputes between private enterprises and financial organisations.[11]

Following this general presentation introducing the World Bank, the next section will give more information about its purpose when supporting developing countries and how its policies on domestic governance have changed over time.

1.1.2. Evolution of the World Bank Policies on Domestic Governance

1.1.2.1. From Governance to Good Governance

The World Bank used the term 'governance' to define how governments effectively provide quality public goods and services, as well as the resources and measures they use to address related challenges.[12] Governance can represent a challenge in some developing countries as they exhibit a lower capacity to protect the fundamental rights of their population. Still, the World Bank believed this issue could be solved by encouraging them to adopt a 'sustainable, shared, poverty-reducing development'.[13] Hence, in the context of developing countries, the Bank defined governance as the measures to strengthen the

[7] Christopher Gilbert, Andrew Powell and David Vines, 'Positioning the World Bank' (1999) 109 The Economic Journal 598, 598.
[8] World Bank, A Guide to the World Bank (3rd Edition World Bank Publications, 2011) p 19.
[9] Christopher Gilbert, Andrew Powell and David Vines, 'Positioning the World Bank' (1999) 109 The Economic Journal 598, 599.
[10] World Bank, A Guide to the World Bank (3rd Edition World Bank Publications, 2011) p 19.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Julia Gallagher, 'Chopping the world into bits: Africa, the World Bank, and the good governance norm' in Claudia Aradau and David Welch (eds) International Theory (Cambridge University Press, 2014) 332, 340.
[13] Ibid.

rule of law, improve public service delivery efficiency, and protect vulnerable populations and the environment.[14] Another definition of the Bank's understanding of 'governance' is 'the procedure through which institutional decisions are made and exercised in a country'.[15] This perspective on governance and its role in guiding states towards more effectiveness in public service delivery follows a 'simplified and unambiguous' idea of state structures and functions.[16] The idea of good governance emerged as the Bank realised that a state-centred definition of governance did not encompass some crucial factors that could benefit all parties concerned.

International organisations, such as the World Bank, view good governance as necessary because economic development cannot guarantee a country's stability.[17] In some developing countries' political societies' members belong to networks of power and mutual support that are 'ethnically defined', which prevents these members from being isolated.[18] This reinforces the idea that good governance must consider the intricacies of these networks and how members are connected through diverse factors, rather than adopting a simplistic analysis and solutions to development challenges.[19] This was not initially reflected in the Bank's approach, as it firmly believed that good governance encompassed all the political practices that foster robust economic development. This approach to governance has often ignored the intricacies of 'historical, social, and political' settings and focused on an idealistic view of governance that does not leave any room for 'uncertainty'.[20] The good governance rules were presented as 'good and self-evident' or 'natural' and embodied a rigid understanding of world dynamics.[21] From this perspective, good governance was primarily used to define what was and was not working regarding governments' practices, especially in developing countries, based on economic factors.[22] Despite the Bank's will to stay neutral and apolitical in its operations, the terms 'good' and 'bad' governance have been criticised as they qualify the 'exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs'.[23]

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibitomi Taiwo et al., 'Test of Good Governance in Nigeria using World Bank indicators' (2024) 3(1) Global Sustainability Research 25, 26.
[16] Julia Gallagher, 'Chopping the world into bits: Africa, the World Bank, and the good governance norm' in Claudia Aradau and David Welch (eds) International Theory (Cambridge University Press, 2014) 332, 344.
[17] Ibid 341.
[18] Ibid 342.
[19] Ibid 340.
[20] Ibid 345.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid 340.
[23] Guhan Subramanian, 'World Bank on Governance: A Critique' (1998) 33(4) Economic and Political Weekly 185, 185.

In 1989, the Bank used the concept of good governance to address development challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa and redefine its understanding of the role of governments.[24] In its report, the Bank had a simplistic idea of governments as either 'good' or 'bad' and used it as a challenge to 'turn bad states into good states'.[25] Furthermore, the idea of good governance promoted an agenda of shared practices for the 'universal good' that can be implemented in every country.[26] The Bank justified this perspective by the idea that 'economic relations are natural'; hence, economic development aid should not be seen as imposing an idea of what is good but rather assisting an inherently natural process in development.[27]

To support this perspective on governance and to measure governments' performance and track good governance practices worldwide, the Bank later established six indicators of good governance: 'voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption'.[28] Voice and accountability can be defined as the level of citizen participation in the election of their representative, as well as the degree of 'freedom of expression, association and freedom of the press' conferred by a government.[29] Political stability and the absence of terrorism refer to the government's ability to overcome disruptions and the probability of a government experiencing illegal, unconstitutional, or violent disruptions, including terrorism.[30] The government's effectiveness is defined by its legitimacy and reliability regarding policy commitments and the 'quality of policies' created and implemented'.[31] In addition, the regulatory quality of a government is determined by its ability to utilise its policies and regulations to enhance the performance of both the public and private sectors. The rule of law refers to indicators of how aware and accepting citizens are of their country's rules and regulations, and how law enforcement institutions and agencies work to protect the rights of their citizens.[32] Also, corruption is a key indicator of good

[24] Julia Gallagher, 'Chopping the world into bits: Africa, the World Bank, and the good governance norm' in Claudia Aradau and David Welch (eds) International Theory (Cambridge University Press,2014) 332, 340.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Julia Gallagher, 'Chopping the world into bits: Africa, the World Bank, and the good governance norm' in Claudia Aradau and David Welch (eds) International Theory (Cambridge University Press,2014) 332, 341.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibitomi Taiwo et al., 'Test of Good Governance in Nigeria using World Bank indicators' (2024) 3(1) Global Sustainability Research 25, 27.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

governance as it affects countries' economic development and thus requires 'appropriate measures' to control or reduce it.[33]

The World Bank's understanding of governance changed over time to encompass more variables outside of economic factors. Although the notion of good governance aimed to curb governance issues such as corruption, the lack of accountability and poor management of economic resources, one criticism is that good governance indicators seem to have been used as desirable factors only when they contribute to economic growth.[34] However, key events occurred that led to a shift in the Bank's understanding of governance and redefined its role in advocating for good governance beyond economic development. The next part will explain the shift in the Bank's policy on governance.

1.1.2.2. The Shift in the Bank's Understanding of Governance

Politics lies at the core of governance shortcomings. However, the World Bank has historically approached this issue indirectly rather than addressing it head-on. As an international institution that must uphold its reputation for impartiality and objectivity while earning the trust of its member countries, the Bank has been cautious about delving into topics that might be perceived as breaching that trust.[35] In 1989, the governance crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa became an important topic for the World Bank, following a 'Long Term Perspective Study' which exposed development challenges in the region. As a response, in 1990, the Bank developed a framework called a Legal Memorandum, encouraging innovative approaches to address future challenges effectively.[36] This resulted in a shift in the Bank's approach, strengthening its stance against exercising political influence unless the country in question was experiencing economic issues caused by political factors. The Bank also began advocating for a new role: promoting 'good order'.[37] The memorandum led the Bank to promote the improvement of institutional effectiveness while upholding the rule of law.[38]

---

[33] Ibid 28.
[34] Guhan Subramanian, 'World Bank on Governance: A Critique' (1998) 33(4) Economic and Political Weekly 185, 186.
[35] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/433301485539630301-0050022017/original/WDR17BPEvolutionofWBThinkingonGovernance.pdf accessed 26/06/2025 p28.
[36] Ibid i.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

Following the creation of this Memorandum, combining economic growth aid with social development programmes became increasingly important in the World Bank's strategy to promote sustainable development in poorer countries.[39] In the 1980s, the World Bank considered economic progress and human development the primary development factors, which still emphasised economic factors.[40] From the 1990s, the Bank's understanding of development went beyond economic growth. It included human development, which is impacted by variables such as 'education, health, nutrition and fertility'.[41] The shift towards a stronger partnership with the public sector started in 1991, with a discussion paper titled 'Managing Development – the Governance Dimension'.[42] This paper explained the need for more accountability within the public sector, more predictability in governance processes, and a more robust legal framework conducive to development initiatives in the World Bank.[43]

This shift increased the World Bank's involvement in governance issues, focusing on the state's role in a changing world and the importance of states aligning their economic development with their population growth. However, it took over a decade for the Bank to broaden its activities to address domestic governance issues and public sector challenges in developing countries.[44] These gradual changes were presented in the yearly World Development Reports.[45] The World Bank emphasised structural adjustments in its poverty alleviation programmes because it believed economic growth and social development were interconnected.[46] Thus, the Bank's primary goal was to promote economic development and eradicate poverty while considering the importance of empowering disadvantaged groups to make economic growth more inclusive and sustainable. For instance, poverty alleviation programmes aimed to increase the financial power of poor populations by providing opportunities for them to get involved in their countries' economic progress and develop their 'income-earning assets'.[47]

[39] World Bank, A Guide to the World Bank (3rd Edition World Bank Publications, 2011) p 19.
[40] Antje Vetterlein, 'Economic growth, poverty reduction, and the role of social policies: the evolution of the World Bank's social development approach' (2007) 13(4) Global Governance 513, 518.
[41] Ibid.
[42] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/489281487588362200/world-development-report-2017-evolution-of-the-world-bank-s-thinking-on-governance p 2 Accessed 26/06/2025.
[43] Ibid i.
[44] Ibid 2.
[45] Ibid i.
[46] Antje Vetterlein, 'Economic growth, poverty reduction, and the role of social policies: the evolution of the World Bank's social development approach' (2007) 13(4) Global Governance 513, 519.
[47] Ibid.

In 1991, the World Bank created a Legal Memorandum as a framework highlighting the correlation between political stability and economic growth. Although the Bank dismissed the relevance of being politically involved in developing countries due to its compliance with its Articles of Agreements, it acknowledged the governance challenges some of its borrowing members faced.[48] Thus, the Bank aimed only to provide assistance and support regarding political reforms that would support the economic stability of its members without following a specific political party, being influenced by the political influence of its donors or interfering in political affairs.[49] The Memorandum also emphasised the Bank's will to pursue 'good order', meaning the reinforcement of the rule of law in support of economic reforms, requiring a stable and legitimate system to be effectively implemented.[50] In addition, it defined critical terms in the area of governance, such as accountability, predictability, and information and transparency. Accountability was defined as measures holding public officials responsible for managing public resources, specifically economic ones.[51] Predictability referred to the Bank's role in providing a minimum level of certainty by defining general standards that government institutions should follow.[52] To maintain the financial markets' stability, increase government accountability, and prevent corruption, information and transparency were deemed necessary for governments to be clear about trade practices and disseminate accurate information through the mass media.[53]

The 1997 World Development Report (WDR) emphasised the importance of public partnership and the state's role as a 'catalyst and facilitator of growth' instead of limiting its role to just being a provider.[54] The report advocated for strengthening public institutions by reinforcing the rule of law, establishing effective mechanisms of checks and balances among public institutions, and increasing competition within the civil service to benefit citizens. This aimed to raise citizens' voices and increase their participation.[55] This report was essential in redirecting the Bank's approach towards a

[48] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/489281487588362200/world-development-report-2017-evolution-of-the-world-bank-s-thinking-on-governance p 5 Accessed 26/06/2025.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid 6.
[51] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/489281487588362200/world-development-report-2017-evolution-of-the-world-bank-s-thinking-on-governance p 8 Accessed 26/06/2025.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid 9.
[54] Ibid i.
[55] Ibid.

more consensual position and a less economically focused or 'pro-market emphasis'.[56] In addition, the Bank's understanding of the notion of poverty evolved.

The focus on the rule of law and the reinforcement of government institutions has been criticised by various authors. The World Bank encouraged many legal and judicial reforms to make development more sustainable and comprehensive in developing countries.[57] This was promoted by a legal codification of the notion of accountability, which came from creating a Comprehensive Development Framework. This Framework was based on the understanding that 'effective and equitable legal systems' are crucial to reducing poverty in the long term.[58] Effective laws were understood as empowering marginalised actors and increasing their influence, lowering the cost for governments to comply with citizens' requests and improve, and strengthening the cooperation among actors to effectively operate changes.[59] This marked the Bank's emphasis on strengthening the 'legal governance framework.'[60] This framework has been criticised for its inability to effectively prevent corruption and accounting fraud in developing countries like Ghana, where implementing the framework did not help reduce public mismanagement effectively.[61] The framework also accentuated the customer or client-to-market relationship between citizens and governments. This perspective has been criticised for promoting a neoliberal market approach, which does not accurately represent the nature of the relationship between citizens and governments.[62]

In its 2000 WDR, the Bank explained the importance of viewing poverty as including 'powerlessness and voicelessness, and vulnerability and fear'.[63] These variables in question were less tangible and not primarily focused on economic aspects, as they highlighted citizens' importance in increasing government accountability by reinforcing the client-provider relationship and addressing the failures in public service delivery. The World Bank aimed not to propose a one-size-fits-all solution to governance challenges in developing countries but to provide a framework for rethinking public service delivery.

[56] Ibid.
[57] Chandana Alawattage and John De-Clerk Azure, 'Behind the World Bank's ringing declarations of "social accountability": Ghana's public financial management reform' (2021)78 Critical Perspectives on Accounting 1, 24.
[58] Ibid 17.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid 18.
[62] Ibid 19.
[63] Antje Vetterlein, 'Economic growth, poverty reduction, and the role of social policies: the evolution of the World Bank's social development approach' (2007) 13(4) Global Governance 513, 521.

It demonstrated that addressing issues in public service delivery had to include the needs of poorer population groups to be effective.[64]

The 2000 WDR also introduced the interdependence of social and economic development programmes to reduce poverty based on three key concepts: 'opportunity, empowerment and security'.[65] This change was triggered by the criticisms against the World Bank's structural adjustment programmes, whose outcomes were unsatisfactory in developing countries.[66] Challenges such as extreme famine in some Sub-Saharan African countries led international organisations, such as UNICEF and other non-governmental organisations, to raise awareness of the adverse social and environmental outcomes of the World Bank's projects and to demand the incorporation of social policies.[67] In response to these criticisms and internal debates within the World Bank and the lack of significant poverty reduction despite previous efforts, the Bank decided to embrace a participatory and people-centred approach to its social development programmes.[68]

The 2002 WDR built upon the lessons learned from the 1997 WDR and sought to explore how public institutions could effectively support market activities. In this report, the World Bank presented the idea of decentralisation as a concept that could hinder the ability of states to effectively conduct 'arbitrary action'.[69] It viewed markets as information channels, important tools in defining property rights and contracts, as well as competition regulators that could help support public institutions.[70] This meant that reinforcing markets' institutional support was seen as an effective way to promote open trade and facilitate the exchange of information, thus effectively regulating and stabilising the market. While emphasising the principles of institutional economics, i.e. the influence of institutions on controlling the behaviours and developing productivity and the capabilities of economic actors, the report recognised the significance of political institutions and an independent judiciary system in ensuring the sustainability and

[64] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/489281487588362200/world-development-report-2017-evolution-of-the-world-bank-s-thinking-on-governance p ii Accessed 26/06/2025.
[65] Antje Vetterlein, 'Economic growth, poverty reduction, and the role of social policies: the evolution of the World Bank's social development approach' (2007) 13(4) Global Governance 513, 521.
[66] Ibid 524.
[67] Ibid 525.
[68] Antje Vetterlein, 'Economic growth, poverty reduction, and the role of social policies: the evolution of the World Bank's social development approach' (2007) 13(4) Global Governance 513, 526.
[69] Julia Gallagher, 'Chopping the world into bits: Africa, the World Bank, and the good governance norm' in Claudia Aradau and David Welch (eds) *International Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) 332, 344.
[70] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of the World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/489281487588362200/world-development-report-2017-evolution-of-the-world-bank-s-thinking-on-governance p ii Accessed 26/06/2025.

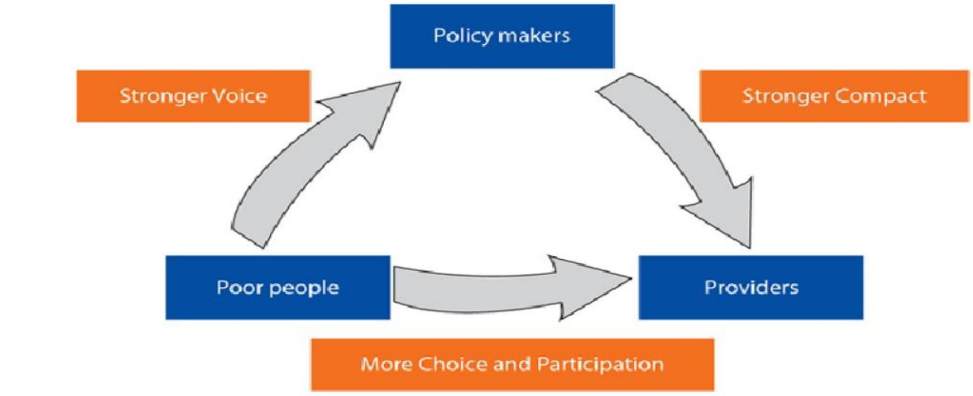
stability of markets.[71] Following this report, the Bank's approach evolved towards focusing on environmental and social development to empower citizens and have more impact on the sustainability of their countries' development.[72]

In political science, accountability traditionally refers to citizens' ability to hold government accountable by voting. Voting has been considered a democratic tool of expression for citizens to either punish or reward their public officials based on their performance. Thus, demanding accountability has been associated with representative democracy, with voting being the main channel. The World Bank considers this way of holding politicians accountable as a long route to demand accountability from governments. With criticisms exposing the limitations of voting in developing countries, the focus on the long route to accountability has shifted, with experts and the World Bank highlighting the benefits of the short route of accountability to counter the issues of 'corruption, clientelism and state capture' in developing countries.[73] In this case, the short route refers to a direct engagement of citizens with their local governments and public service providers to hold them accountable.[74]

The World Development Reports of 2003 and 2004 considered citizens the main actors in governance within developing nations. The 2003 WDR broadened the concept of sustainability to include the management of environmental and social assets while highlighting the significance of social capital in countries' development. On the other hand, the 2004 WDR focused on disadvantaged citizens, particularly those facing economic challenges, positioning them at the core of the service delivery accountability triangle.[75] This report was adapted to address broader governance issues, with a particular emphasis on political governance and the responsibility of governments towards their citizens.[76]

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid 23.
[73] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) paper number 671 < https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 7 accessed 26/06/2025.
[74] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 7 accessed 26/06/2025.
[75] See Figure 1 on p 25.
[76] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/489281487588362200/world-development-report-2017-evolution-of-the-world-bank-s-thinking-on-governance > p 23 accessed 26/06/2025.

Figure 1: The Public Service Delivery Accountability Triangle[77]



Source: World Bank 2003.

In addition, the 2003 WDR discussed the role of institutions in promoting sustainable development, especially those defending environmental and social interests. It highlighted significant challenges such institutions face, such as being often 'underprovided' despite their importance in relaying citizens, the private sector and civil society organisations' voices.[78] This was because these institutions encountered coordination issues when attempting to align themselves with other institutions with common interests. However, when effectively supported, the report explained that they could generate more significant long-term commitments to address environmental or societal issues.[79]

Following the Bank's goal of strengthening accountability in public institutions to serve the benefits of populations effectively, the 2004 WDR emphasised public service delivery for the poor and the need to reinforce public service providers' and policymakers' accountability.[80] The 2004 WDR delved deeper into analysing the relationship between public service providers and users. It explained the ineffectiveness of the long route to accountability, representing citizens' ability to influence public service provision through voting. The World Bank considered this route ineffective in raising citizens' voices and

[77] Qaiser M. Khan et al, Improving Basic Services for the Bottom Forty Percent : Lessons from Ethiopia (World Bank Publications, 2014) p 26.
[78] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/489281487588362200/world-development-report-2017-evolution-of-the-world-bank-s-thinking-on-governance > p ii accessed 26/06/2025.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

improving the relationship between public service providers and policymakers. In opposition, the short route promoting citizens' direct engagement to demand government accountability beyond elections, was seen as an effective alternative to reinforce the relationship between service providers and clients while empowering citizens. Consequently, the 2004 World Development Report established a framework to rethink public service delivery and understand its failure towards the poor.[81]

The 2004 WDR significantly influenced the Bank's approach to governance by introducing a framework that has been adapted and utilised in various publications. Its most crucial application has been to examine the broader topic of governance and the relationship between politicians' accountability to citizens and the citizen-politician compact. This enabled the World Bank to address the limitations of its previous economic-focused approach to governance while discussing important topics such as the judicial resolution of disputes between governments and citizens, the importance of the media in governance, and political mismanagement of public affairs.[82] The report suggested that citizens or clients could be pivotal in tailoring services to their needs, such as actively requesting girls' toilets to encourage female school attendance, or advocating for more convenient health clinic hours.[83] Allowing clients to choose among service providers could also help identify the gaps in public service delivery and which providers would fill those gaps effectively. The report also highlighted the benefits of allowing citizens to monitor providers' performance and empowering clients to hold these providers accountable. In addition, it was acknowledged that each solution had its own set of issues. The primary goal was not to present a one-size-fits-all solution but to provide a framework that enabled policymakers and citizens to identify what might work in their unique context proactively.[84]

This change in the World Bank's approach to fostering development led to the implementation of various initiatives, such as the Community Driven Development approach and the Strategic Framework for Mainstreaming Citizen Engagement. The Community Driven Development approach emphasises empowering local communities to have a central role in local public decisions and resource allocation, directly affecting

[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid 18.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid 17.

them.[85] This initiative prioritises the inclusion of poor communities according to their needs and local challenges, facilitating communities' access to information and partnering with local institutions to demand more accountability, transparency and responsiveness.[86] Moreover, the Strategic Framework for Mainstreaming Citizen Engagement aims to reaffirm the Bank's goal of increasing citizen participation and achieving '100 per cent beneficiary feedback in projects'.[87] The Bank also created an Advisory Council to ensure the implementation of this framework and to improve the outcomes of the Bank projects.[88]

The World Bank shifted its simplified approach to governance to better accommodate the challenges of the political system and the relationships between the actors involved in the system. While government institutions use various incentives to encourage good behaviours from citizens, citizens expect governments to be transparent and promote a free flow of information to monitor public officials.[89] To reach its social development goals, the World Bank strategically used a bottom-up approach to raise the voices of locally marginalised communities and complement top-down initiatives to foster development.[90] The Millennium Development Goals played a vital role in shifting the Bank's perspective on governance. They helped moving the Bank's priorities towards sustainable development goals, highlighting bottom-up approaches to development challenges. The next section will explain the relevance of the Millennium Development Goals in the Bank's approach to governance and development and how it evolved to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals.

1.1.2.3. From the MDGs to the SDGs

Endorsed by the World Bank, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) embodied the international community's commitment to prioritise human development as a crucial factor impacting worldwide socioeconomic development.[91] The MDGs addressed

[85] World Bank Group, World Bank Group A to Z (World Bank Publications, 2014) p 64.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid 59.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Julia Gallagher, 'Chopping the world into bits: Africa, the World Bank, and the good governance norm' in Claudia Aradau and David Welch (eds) *International Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) p 344.
[90] World Bank Group, World Bank Group A to Z (World Bank Publications, 2014) p 243.
[91] World Bank, A Guide to the World Bank (3rd Edition World Bank Publications, 2011) p 20.

significant economic and social rights challenges, from 'child mortality and primary education to gender equality, maternal mortality and safe water and sanitation'.[92] Lessons learned from implementing the MDGs revealed the 'lack of consistency' in countries' development and the lack of effective accountability mechanisms.[93] These translated the limitations of the Millennium Development Goals.[94] The results of implementing the MDGs eventually led them to be replaced by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016, which aimed at finding more sustainable accountability mechanisms and became one of the World Bank's priorities.[95] The SDGs differ from the MDGs by their additional focus on empowering marginalised societal groups and addressing environmental challenges.[96]

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the World Bank also underscores the importance of promoting social sustainability by increasing local communities' engagement and fostering inclusiveness and accountability in governance. The World Bank used the SDGs as a country-specific approach to implement projects, paying greater attention to contextual factors such as a country's cultural background.[97] This led to the recommendation of a social analysis before implementing the World Bank's social projects to mitigate 'social impact and risks'.[98] Social sustainability also focuses more on poverty alleviation programmes, emphasising vulnerable groups' inclusion and overall social cohesion.[99]

Despite their fast economic growth, developing countries have been the main beneficiaries of these programmes due to high social and economic inequalities and the failure of public service delivery at various levels, which affects vulnerable groups the most. These countries have experienced notably higher economic growth, which can be attributed to their increased economic openness and a surge in commodity prices that boosted some economies and created demand for others. Additionally, their economies have become more integrated, driven by rapid urbanisation and advancements in

[92] Shantayanan Devarajan and Ritva Reinikka, 'Making Services Work for Poor People' (2004) 13(1) Journal of African Economies 142, 143.
[93] Kate Donald and Sally-Anne Way, 'Accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals: A Lost Opportunity?' (2016) 30(2) Ethics & International Affair 201, 202.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Anuradha Joshi, 'Do They Work? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives in Service Delivery' (2013) 31(1) Development Policy Review 29, 29.
[96] Heather Dittbrenner and World Bank, Results and Performance of the World Bank Group 2012 (World Bank Publications, 2013) p 12.
[97] World Bank Group, World Bank Group A to Z (World Bank Publications, 2014) p251.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

transportation and communication.[100] However, a significant part of the population in developing countries did not benefit from their economic growth, as significant social and economic disparities still impact access to assets and information. Insecurity has continuously impacted the Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, which created an 'increasingly unmanageable' refugee crisis, while within many countries, access to more information to initiate a tangible sociopolitical change is hindered by local challenges.[101]

Following an observation and analysis of these challenges, the World Bank has highlighted the importance of promoting transparent and accountable governance.[102] The World Bank Group and Governance (WBG) stressed that building partnerships, including those of the public and private sectors and non-governmental actors, building local actors' capacity, and increasing public scrutiny of public institutions are crucial to remedying these governance challenges effectively.[103] Approaches such as social accountability, which will be our focus in the following part of this chapter, have consequently been used by the World Bank to strengthen accountability in public service delivery while reinforcing these partnerships and empowering citizens to monitor their local public sector's performance.[104]

Thus, the observation of governance challenges in developing countries and the Millennium Development Goals' limitations in reinforcing government accountability led the World Bank to change its perspective on governance progressively. The Bank focused on developing an approach to hold governments accountable through active citizen involvement in politics to create realistic solutions where economic growth did not match human development. The idea of addressing governments' lack of accountability through the implementation of social accountability was therefore promoted by the World Bank.[105] This is because the Bank believed that reinforcing citizen voice and citizen participation in public affairs would effectively fight poverty and promote sustainable development.[106] This can be demonstrated by the hundreds of

[100] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/433301485539630301-0050022017/original/WDR17BPEvolutionofWBThinkingonGovernance.pdf accessed 26/06/2025 p30.
[101] Ibid 31.
[102] World Bank Group, World Bank Group A to Z (World Bank Publications, 2014) p 128.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid 176.
[105] Frida Boräng and Marcia Grimes, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects', in Andreas Bågenholm, Monika Bauhr, Marcia Grimes, and Bo Rothstein (eds), The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government (OUP, 2021) 268, 269.
[106] Ibid.

community development initiatives supported by the World Bank that promote a bottom-up solution to development challenges by empowering citizens to demand accountability from public service providers vis-à-vis their local community.[107]

This section analysed the World Bank's view of governance and how its policies on governance evolved from focusing on domestic economic development to considering sociopolitical factors affecting the growth of developing countries, eventually leading to the creation of good governance indicators. The section also explained the shift in the Bank's policies on domestic governance, which was materialised by a higher focus on social factors, such as the inclusion and empowerment of disadvantaged groups. This shift is even more relevant since the Bank adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, following major governance challenges that were observed after the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. Adopting the Sustainable Development Goals led the Bank to develop new governance approaches, such as social accountability, to counter governments' lack of accountability. This is explained by the fact that governments' lack of accountability was identified as a central issue hindering human development. This shift encouraged the creation of institutions such as the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA), which focuses on promoting the Bank's agenda in terms of social accountability in developing countries while reinforcing the partnership between civil society actors and governments. The following section will delve deeper into the background and purpose of the GPSA.

1.1.3. The Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA)

1.1.3.1. Background and Evolution of the GPSA

In 2012, the World Bank established the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) to foster a collaborative relationship between civil society organisations and governments and increase citizen engagement in developing countries.[108] The creation of the GSPA aimed to bridge the 'accountability gap between citizens and governments' and

[107] Babken Babajanian, 'Promoting empowerment? The World Bank's Village Investment Project in Kyrgyzstan', (2015)34 Central Asian Survey 499, 499.
[108] Anhelina Levchenko, 'Financing of projects of civil society organisations by donor funds of international financial institutions' (2021) 6(1) Economics & Education 72, 73.

improve public service delivery.[109] To achieve its goals, the GSPA conducted projects to address issues in various sectors and specific political challenges, such as the lack of transparency in public budget allocation.[110] This initiative also facilitated a robust global partnership with the United States and the United Kingdom by partnering with multiple donors from the public and private sectors.[111]

Supported by the World Bank and other donors to increase the capacity of local civil society organisations, the Global Partnership for Social Accountability requires governments' approval to implement social accountability.[112] Enrolling in the GPSA social accountability programmes requires consenting states to submit a letter allowing the GPSA to contact local, regional, or national civil society organisations operating within that country.[113] With over 55 countries opting in, the GPSA programmes touch a variety of sectors, such as the health sector, agriculture, education, governance, the environment, and social protection. In Rwanda, for instance, the GPSA's social accountability initiatives focused more on the agriculture sector, whereas Madagascar's social accountability programmes focused on the health sector. The programmes can also touch different sectors simultaneously, as demonstrated in Jordan with climate and education initiatives or in Indonesia with health and climate initiatives. The GPSA programmes have been implemented in multiple countries across South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.[114]

As an additional support to foster the dissemination of social accountability and to reach the World Bank's governance and development goals, the Global Partnership for Social Accountability advocates for country-led programmes and reforms in partnership with civil society organisations. This partnership seeks to empower citizens by amplifying their voices, addressing their needs, and promoting transparency and accountability in the design and implementation of development programmes. Furthermore, the social accountability initiatives implemented by the GPSA adhere to four fundamental rules

[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid 76.
[112] Grace Sinaga, Nagia Delicia and Jeffrey M. Thindwa, ' GPSA in Review: Collaborative Social Accountability for Development – 2021-2022' (World Bank Group, January 10 2023) https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099511001102315321/idu0e11381d2000170499e08ccf02c68a41d3578 > accessed 26/06/2025 p8.
[113] Global Partnership for Social Accountability, 'GPSA Operational Manual' (World Bank, January 31 2013) World Bank < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/438531483708114727/pdf/Global-Partnership-for-Social-Accountability-GPSA-Operation-Manual.pdf > p 6 accessed 26/06/2025.
[114] Grace Sinaga, Nagia Delicia and Jeffrey M. Thindwa, ' GPSA in Review: Collaborative Social Accountability for Development – 2021-2022' (World Bank Group, January 10 2023) https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099511001102315321/idu0e11381d2000170499e08ccf02c68a41d3578 > p 8 accessed 26/06/2025.

outlined in the GPSA operational manual. First, these initiatives must involve local civil society organisations to promote transparency and accountability. Secondly, funding these initiatives must reinforce the capacity of civil society organisations. Thirdly, the funding must support emerging local civil society organisations. Fourthly, the grants allocated by the World Bank must be used to build government capacity and to provide technical assistance on social accountability.[115]

This means that the Global Partnership for Social Accountability's programmes promote the dissemination of knowledge about social accountability to stakeholders and strategically reinforce the capacity of local civil society organisations to implement social accountability programmes more effectively. These programmes are particularly relevant in countries where social accountability initiatives have never been implemented or in countries where civil society organisations are not empowered enough to represent citizens' interests or lack actionable knowledge related to social accountability. To improve its programmes over time, the GPSA provides a platform to learn from previous implementations of social accountability by developing strong networks of civil society organisations, researchers, donors and governments.[116]

Moreover, to benefit from funding from the Global Partnership for Social Accountability and implement a social accountability initiative, civil society organisations must not be associated with the public sector or any for-profit institution. Regional and national civil society organisations must also demonstrate their effective partnership with local or smaller civil society organisations. It is important to note that funding for civil society organisations is allocated through a competitive process. This process assesses how well each organisation aligns with the country's needs, the feasibility of their proposals, and their potential for fostering 'constructive engagement' among all stakeholders, ultimately contributing to improvements in governance.[117] The proposals are then reviewed by experts and assessed by the GPSA board before a final grant is disbursed with a customised project framework.[118]

---

[115] Global Partnership for Social Accountability, 'GPSA Operational Manual' (World Bank, January 31 2013) World Bank < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/438531483708114727/pdf/Global-Partnership-for-Social-Accountability-GPSA-Operation-Manual.pdf > p 4 accessed 26/06/2025.
[116] Global Partnership for Social Accountability, 'GPSA Operational Manual' (World Bank, January 31 2013) World Bank < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/438531483708114727/pdf/Global-Partnership-for-Social-Accountability-GPSA-Operation-Manual.pdf > p 5 accessed 26/06/2025.
[117] Ibid 6.
[118] Ibid 12.

In sum, the Global Partnership for Social Accountability promotes collaborative social accountability programmes involving diverse stakeholders. The primary participants in these programmes are citizens, civil society organisations representing citizens' interests, and public service providers. These actors are encouraged to collaborate in developing solutions that effectively address local challenges and align with community needs regarding public service delivery. This context-specific collaboration addresses broader governance issues and enhances social accountability efforts, aiming to extend local programmes nationwide while building the knowledge and capacity of involved actors and institutions.[119] The effectiveness of these programmes relies on citizen empowerment to hold governments accountable but requires the active involvement of civil society organisations and governments. This collaborative approach to demand accountability highlights the importance of uniting bottom-up and top-down actors to seek more effective results at a broader scale.[120]

The creation of the GPSA also marked the inclusion of a human rights-based approach in the World Bank's conceptualisation of social accountability. The Association, Resources, Voice, Information, and Negotiation (ARVIN) framework was introduced to promote individual liberties, such as freedom of association, expression, and access to information.[121] This framework also included contextual factors such as countries' economic, sociocultural and political specificities, as well as their legal frameworks.[122] The GPSA also established a strategy to improve social accountability initiatives over time, based on lessons learned in each context in which they were implemented. The GPSA's Theory of Action promotes a practice-as-you-learn approach to customise social accountability programmes for each context.

The next section will elaborate on this approach.

1.1.3.2. The GPSA's Theory of Action

[119] Tom Aston and Grazielli Faria Zimmer Santos, 'Social Accountability and Service Delivery Effectiveness: What is the Evidence for the Role of Sanctions?' (World Bank, August 2022) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099534209302293819/pdf/IDU0aff7666c06b8804bc00a9170ce2d26867056.pdf > p 2 accessed 26/06/2025.
[120] Ibid 3.
[121] Hans Otto-Sano, Social Accountability in the World Bank: Does it overlap with Human Rights? in Ladawn Haglund, Robin Stryker (eds), *Closing the Rights Gap: From Human Rights to Social Transformation* (University of California Press, 2015) p 227.
[122] Ibid.

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability's Theory of Action lies in an adaptive and experimental approach based on lessons learned from implementing social accountability programmes. The GPSA focuses on tailoring its support to each country while using the results from every experience to provide more accurate advice to the actors involved.[123]The Theory of Action consists of fostering collaboration among actors in social accountability programmes to enhance their capacity and knowledge, thereby increasing programmes' success and meaningfulness for local populations.[124] This approach categorises programmes' results into short-term or long-term goals.[125] Concerning short-term results, the collaborative approach of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability aims to achieve three primary objectives.

First, encouraging cooperation among all involved parties aims to enhance the local success of programmes by providing a platform for greater government transparency in disclosing important information about public service performance. This allows local citizens and civil society organisations to assess the effectiveness of political and administrative responses to their needs and address deficiencies. Secondly, increased citizen engagement in governance processes at the local level aims to encourage the government to adopt collaborative social accountability practices beyond the programmes, to make the government more responsive to citizens' demands. In this instance, receiving direct feedback from citizens on better addressing their needs provides more information about obstacles and inefficiencies in delivering public services. This has the potential to significantly enhance the overall response of public institutions, extending far beyond short-term social accountability initiatives. Thirdly, the Theory of Action aims to strengthen the global social accountability community, thus encouraging a more widespread implementation of initiatives beyond those funded by the GPSA.[126]

In terms of long-term outcomes, the theory of change advocates for national reforms that seek to address the needs of citizens effectively, beyond temporary programmes. The increased participation of civil society organisations, equipped with greater knowledge and more robust capacity, aims to promote the adoption of such reforms, thus ensuring

[123] Grace Sinaga, Nagia Delicia and Jeffrey M. Thindwa, ' GPSA in Review: Collaborative Social Accountability for Development – 2021-2022' (World Bank Group, January 10 2023)< https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099511001102315321/idu0e11381d2000170499e08ccf02c68a41d3578 > accessed 26/06/2025 p9.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Grace Sinaga, Nagia Delicia and Jeffrey M. Thindwa, ' GPSA in Review: Collaborative Social Accountability for Development – 2021-2022' (World Bank Group, January 10 2023) https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099511001102315321/idu0e11381d2000170499e08ccf02c68a41d3578 > p 9 accessed 26/06/2025.

the sustainability of social accountability initiatives. Hence, the GPSA's Theory of Action aims to strengthen the partnership between the actors involved locally, regionally and nationally while providing them with 'flexible financial and non-financial support' to improve the public sector's response to communities' demands.[127] The collaboration aims to foster stronger leadership that will enhance collective knowledge and improve social accountability initiatives in the future.[128]

This section gave a brief presentation of the World Bank, discussing the changes in its governance policies from the Millennium Development Goals to the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals. There has been a shift from focusing solely on economic growth to emphasising human development and holding governments accountable to their citizens. Establishing the Global Partnership for Social Accountability reflects this change in the Bank's approach, particularly in implementing social accountability programmes that empower citizens and civil society organisations to hold their governments accountable directly. However, this perspective has been criticised in the literature for various limitations. The next section will provide a comprehensive analysis of the criticisms of the World Bank's policies on governance.

1.1.4. Critiques of the Bank's Perspective on Governance

The evolution of the World Bank's perspective on governance has been criticised based on various factors. The legal codification of the notion of accountability, the technological and administrative enhancement of the disciplinary gaze, and the social accountability agenda are elements of the World Bank's perspective on governance and accountability, which have been heavily criticised.[129] This section will begin by discussing the first two elements, with a more in-depth examination of critiques related to social accountability reserved for the next chapter. It will also highlight key criticisms, such as the Bank's limited understanding of strengthening constitutions and its tendency to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to implementing development programmes. Additionally, this section

[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Chandana Alawattage and John De-Clerk Azure, 'Behind the World Bank's ringing declarations of "social accountability": Ghana's public financial management reform' (2021)78 Critical Perspectives on Accounting 1, 24.

will present some positive critiques of the Bank's strategy and outline the benefits and limitations of the short route for demanding accountability in the literature.

Concerning the legal codification of the notion of accountability, the World Bank encouraged many legal and judicial reforms to make development more sustainable and comprehensive in developing countries.[130] The legal codification of the notion of accountability came from the World Bank creating a Comprehensive Development Framework. This Framework was based on the understanding that 'effective and equitable legal systems' are crucial to reducing poverty in the long term.[131] The idea of strengthening the rule of law in developing countries was further pushed by the World Bank, as seen in its 2017 World Development Report. Effective laws were understood as empowering marginalised actors and increasing their influence, lowering the cost for governments to comply with citizens' requests and improve, and strengthening the cooperation among actors to operate changes effectively.[132] This marked the Bank's emphasis on establishing a 'legal governance framework'.[133] This framework has been criticised for its ineffectiveness in preventing corruption and accounting fraud in developing countries, such as Ghana, where its implementation yielded limited positive results.[134] The legal governance framework also accentuated the idea of viewing citizens as customers, thus reinforcing a client-to-market relationship between citizens and governments. This perspective has been criticised for promoting a neoliberal market approach, which does not accurately represent the nature of the relationship between citizens and governments.[135]

The second element concerning the technological and administrative improvement of the disciplinary gaze aimed at promoting 'global disciplinary intervention' as a political incentive for states to be more accountable.[136] The notion of disciplinary gaze addressed the lack of fiscal discipline, the mismanagement of public resources, the absence of government commitment to uphold the rule of law, and the weakness of oversight institutions that negatively impact the quality of public service delivery in a country.[137] To support this global disciplinary intervention, the Bank developed a Government

[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid 17.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid 18.
[135] Chandana Alawattage and John De-Clerk Azure, 'Behind the World Bank's ringing declarations of "social accountability": Ghana's public financial management reform' (2021)78 Critical Perspectives on Accounting 1, 19.
[136] Ibid 20.
[137] Ibid.

Integrated Financial Management System (GIFMIS) software to assist countries struggling with fiscal discipline in tracking their budget management, conducting financial audits, and accurately recording their economic activities.[138] Although this software improved the management of finances in some countries by encouraging more transparency and efficiency in public administration, its effectiveness was limited by various factors such as the insufficient training of public servants, technical issues slowing down data input, or other irregularities coming from governments themselves, who could 'fabricate information' to suit their personal agenda.[139] Thus, the efforts to promote technological and administrative improvement were seen as ineffective due to the lack of transparency of governments in some contexts, as well as the asymmetry of power between powerful political figures and civil servants, adding to the already high level of corruption, which led certain irregularities to be ignored.[140]

The World Bank has also been criticised on other fronts, such as its limited knowledge about effectively reinforcing constitutions to foster sustainable development. The 2011 WDR analysed the causes of intrastate conflicts to understand states' weakening, while emphasising the importance of strengthening states' institutions to ensure 'security, justice and jobs for citizens. It is widely recognised that institutions evolve slowly and are deeply influenced by a country's history and culture, making it challenging to transplant across different societies or even within the same society over time. Despite this, the Bank has offered guidance on institution-building, often attempting to apply 'unmodified elements' from developed countries' institutions to diverse developing countries with different contexts, resulting in predictable failures. In addition, the Bank was criticised for its analytical work and promotion of good governance, which overlooked the fact that some of the world's fastest-growing economies exhibit poor governance. Another criticism is the Bank's tendency to sidestep political issues and recommend technical solutions rather than acknowledging the underlying contextual factors that reinforce poor governance.[141]

A related critique is that the World Bank's guidance on governance and institutions, especially as presented in the World Development Reports (WDRs), often appears to

[138] Ibid 21.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid 24.
[141] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/489281487588362200/pdf/World-development-report-2017-evolution-of-the-World-Bank-s-thinking-on-governance.pdf > p iii accessed 26/06/2025.

follow a one-size-fits-all approach. Some authors explained that the recommendations in those reports frequently overlook the vast diversity in developing countries, which exhibit complex economic conditions, requiring advice tailored to specific contexts.[142] Furthermore, customising advice to suit individual countries' situations can be challenging for the Bank despite its attempts to provide clear guidance because precision may not always be feasible given the current state of knowledge.[143]

The World Bank's short route to accountability has some benefits and limitations. Various authors, such as Ackerman, have defended this perspective as a solution to increase government transparency and citizen participation, based on the notion of 'principal-agent' relationships.[144] Local participatory initiatives promoting a short route to demand accountability, aim to increase citizens' access to information, promote citizen empowerment to voice their needs, and hold public officeholders accountable.[145] The significance of these initiatives is due to the challenges faced by legislative and judicial institutions in monitoring executive power in specific contexts, stemming from high levels of 'corruption and authoritarianism'.[146] Thus, solely strengthening institutions has yet to effectively hold governments accountable. Some scholars encouraged the Bank's short route to demand accountability in weak states, to increase citizen engagement as a trigger for state responsiveness.[147] This is because participatory governance initiatives, such as social accountability, provide a space for citizens, primarily underrepresented citizens to collectively 'engage directly with the policy process' by allowing them to oversee the management of public facilities in different sectors, such as the education or the health care sectors.[148]

Some disagreed with the efficacy of the World Bank's short route to demand accountability from powerholders. Fox emphasised the limitations of this approach by explaining the importance of the legislative and judicial systems in overseeing the public sector's performance. According to him, the short route to accountability is limited by its exclusive focus on local service providers, which assumes that the failure of political

[142] Ibid 24.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 7 accessed 26/06/2025.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid 8.
[147] Ibid 8.
[148] Ibid 33.

institutions is 'primarily local rather than distributed up the governance supply chain'.[149] His perspective was supported by other arguments defending that a short route to accountability does not exist, as there is 'no way around the central issue of political accountability'.[150] These critics also influenced the creation of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, which highlighted the World Bank's understanding that solely raising citizen voices does not necessarily equate to improving elected officials' responsiveness.[151]

The fact that there is no short route to accountability means that demanding accountability cannot solely rely on a group of actors, i.e., citizens, due to the importance of the government's responsiveness in ensuring the success of participatory initiatives. Various authors, such as Vloeberghs and Bergh, defended the importance of combining short and long routes to demand accountability. They addressed the limitations of considering shorter routes of accountability as more effective than longer routes of accountability. According to them, neither short routes nor longer routes have, as isolated variables, led to improved governance. Thus, neither solely focusing on state agencies' oversight nor solely focusing on elections to gain citizens' feedback has effectively promoted democracy.[152]

As a short route to demand accountability, social accountability can be defined as a bottom-up strategy that utilises vertical and diagonal mechanisms to amplify citizen voices and empower them to provide feedback on and improve local public sector performance. Social accountability programmes encompass a 'wide range of actions and mechanisms' employed by citizens, communities, and non-state actors to demand accountability from public officeholders beyond elections.[153] For greater clarity, it is essential to differentiate between horizontal, vertical, and diagonal approaches. Horizontal approaches to address public service mismanagement assume that political actors will have a strong will to implement the required mechanisms to address public issues, which is not always the case.[154] Vertical accountability, which emphasises

[149] Chandana Alawattage and John De-Clerk Azure, 'Behind the World Bank's ringing declarations of "social accountability": Ghana's public financial management reform' (2021)78 Critical Perspectives on Accounting 1, 27.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 March 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 7 accessed 26/06/2025.
[153] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > p 5 accessed 26/06/2025.
[154] Ibid 4.

citizens' direct engagement and participation, has been promoted as a more effective alternative to horizontal approaches, where there is a perceived 'lack of political will'.[155] On the other hand, diagonal accountability mixes horizontal and vertical approaches to promote a collaboration between all actors involved.[156] Within the literature, various perspectives consider social accountability as purely vertical, while others see it as a diagonal path to demand accountability. This thesis will focus on the latter, as social accountability, as understood by the World Bank, relies on a collaboration between citizens and states, not purely on citizen action.

This section highlighted some important critiques of the World Bank's perspective on domestic governance and how to hold governments in developing countries accountable. As highlighted by critiques, the Bank's short-route strategy is limited and often lacks the effectiveness to address bad governance at a deeper level. The next chapter will provide a deeper analysis of the implementation of social accountability programmes, explaining the advantages and limitations of the Bank's short route to demand accountability from public service providers and local governments. Before delving into the literature review, it is important to clarify the purpose of social accountability programmes. The next section will highlight the main actors of social accountability programmes, the key World Development Reports addressing their scope, and the main tools and themes characterising them.

1.2. Introduction to Social Accountability

As its approach to governance evolved, the World Bank has placed citizens at the centre of its development strategies. Social accountability is an approach that emphasises the role of citizens in holding governments accountable for challenges in local public service delivery, thus strengthening the social contract between local populations and their governments. Political accountability can be understood as 'accountability through periodic free and fair elections', whereas social accountability can be described as 'in-

[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.

between election accountability'.[157] Social accountability, as understood by the World Bank, arose from the recognition that focusing solely on political accountability and economic stability in developing countries did not yield the expected development outcomes.[158]

However, social accountability is not a new concept; it has been utilised to enhance accountability in various sectors before being popularised by the World Bank in governance.[159] Various disciplines offer different perspectives on the definition of social accountability. For instance, some fields associate social accountability with social responsibility.[160] The understanding of social accountability in the medical field illustrates this. Social accountability in the medical field means that medical schools are responsible for educating, conducting research, and providing services based on the primary needs and challenges raised by the local communities.[161] On the other hand, social accountability has been associated with the corporate responsibility to analyse and prioritise the constant evolution of local societal needs in the business sector. This was even more important when deciding which investment would be the most fruitful and using this analysis to satisfy the 'social process'.[162] Although understanding social accountability in various fields includes social considerations, the World Bank's definition of social accountability has a different implication in the context of governance.

1.2.1. Features of Social Accountability Programmes

As a bottom-up collaborative approach that relies on citizens and civil society organisations to expose issues in local public service delivery and, ultimately, wrongdoing in domestic governance, various national and international actors have supported social accountability programmes. This part emphasises the role of national actors, i.e. citizens, civil society organisations, public service providers and policymakers

[157] Esbern Friis-Hansen and Signe Marie Cold Ravnkilde, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms and Access to Public Service Delivery in Rural Africa' (Danish Institute For International Studies December 2013) < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265300089_Social_Accountability_Mechanisms_and_Access_to_Public_Service_Delivery_in_Rural_Africa > p 181 accessed 26/06/2025.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Lars Brummel, 'Social Accountability between consensus and confrontation: Developing a theoretical framework for Social Accountability relationships of Public Sector Organizations' (2021) 53(7) Sage Journals 1046, 1049.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Deepak Gupta, Corporate Social Accountability: Disclosures and Practices (1st edition Mittal Publications) 1995, p 2.

in social accountability programmes. It also addresses key World Development Reports that shaped the World Bank's understanding of social accountability.

1.2.1.1. Main Actors of Social Accountability Programmes

Social accountability entails understanding top-down (downward) and bottom-up (upward) accountability. Citizens and other non-state actors, such as civil society organisations, initiate bottom-up or upward accountability initiatives.[163] Top-down or upward accountability initiatives utilise traditional institutional protocols and mechanisms, such as legislative oversight, legal reforms, or grievance-redress mechanisms.[164] Bottom-up alternatives to exert political change can be seen from two perspectives: representative democracy or active citizen participation, such as social accountability. Representative democracy entails the involvement of citizens in decision-making through the election of their local representatives, as well as other modes of deliberative democracy. The second perspective focuses on more active citizen participation beyond elections, focusing on 'transparency and oversight', which prioritises citizens' needs in the decision-making process.[165] These bottom-up approaches to governance emphasise the need for more citizen involvement in public decision-making.[166]

The idea of citizenship can be understood by the totality of behaviours expected from an individual in a society and how these behaviours influence the society's evolution and dynamics. Citizens are said to be responsible when they challenge the behaviour of public officials, when they are aware of their local community's issues, and when they make informed and relevant choices.[167] The idea of 'voice' in social accountability relates to citizens' ability to express their needs and demand their 'basic rights' by holding power holders accountable.[168]

---

[163] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025 p29.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid 24.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Jason Nkyabonaki, 'Youths' Engagement in Social Accountability: A Case of Toangoma Ward in Temeke Municipal Council, Dar es Salaam' 2019 00(0) Journal of Asian and African Studies 1, 3.
[168] Muhammad Hamza Abbas and Vaqar Ahmed, 'Challenges to Social Accountability and Service Delivery in Pakistan' (2016) 46(4) Social Change 560, 561.

The focus on social accountability was driven by the limitations of 'institutional protocols' or 'institutional arrangements', focusing on the three government branches. Traditional institutional protocols, meaning the checks and balances procedures aimed at overseeing each branch's actions, originated from citizens' attempts to demand more accountability from their rulers. This later translated into representative democracy, enabling citizens to hold their governments accountable through their voting duty.[169] Representative democracies illustrate the World Bank's long route to accountability, enabling citizens to delegate their authority to politicians and policymakers. Their decisions are meant to enhance public service delivery in favour of their constituents.[170] On the other hand, the short route to accountability emphasises improving public service delivery by strengthening the relationship between citizens and governments, making them more transparent, and enhancing citizen participation.[171] It promotes citizen oversight over local governments, and reinforces the idea of viewing citizens as the 'principal agents of improved governance'.[172]

The implementation of social accountability involves the participation of a variety of actors. The World Bank identifies three sets of actors: policymakers and politicians, public service providers, and citizens, whose distinct roles and relationship dynamics shape social accountability programmes.[173] Policymakers and politicians, service providers and citizens are key actors whose influence over one another determines the effectiveness of accountability programmes' implementation.[174] There are various reasons explaining this point.

First, the relationship between policymakers and politicians, as well as the second set of actors represented by public service providers, involves various factors. The implementation of the rule of law, the level of transparency in public affairs management, the establishment of effective regulatory systems to monitor and evaluate the public service provision and accurate public financial budgeting are key variables affecting accountability levels in the public sector.[175] Both sets of actors rely on those variables to

[169] Ibid 26.
[170] Ibid 26.
[171] Ibid 27.
[172] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 27 accessed 26/06/2025.
[173] Alaka Holla, Margaret Koziol, Santhosh Srinivasan, Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in human development sectors (World Bank Publications, 2011) p 4.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

ensure accountability in the public service provision. Other variables, such as easy access to public information and the existence of formal control mechanisms such as external audits and 'incentive arrangements' between international institutions, are also important factors regulating the relationship between both sets of actors and defining their effectiveness[176].

Secondly, regarding the relationship between citizens and public service providers, 'client power' is represented by citizens' ability to influence the public service provision directly[177]. The concept of 'client power' encourages citizens to engage directly in public service delivery in various ways, such as by monitoring the performance of public service providers.[178] This empowers citizens to take a more active role in ensuring the quality of public services. In addition, citizens' ability to express their client power through 'choice' is essential to demand accountability from powerholders.[179] Various tools used in social accountability programmes, discussed later in this chapter, enable citizens to exert their client power by exposing them to accurate information about their rights and the standards they should expect from their public service providers.[180]

Thirdly, when it comes to the relationship between citizens and policymakers and politicians, its productivity lies in policymakers' ability to increase transparency in the public sector by facilitating citizens' access to accurate, timely, and quality information.[181] Citizen active participation depends on making information about public services accessible to citizens, ultimately converting the knowledge they gain into action.[182] Moreover, as beneficiaries of public services, citizens can use their client power to draw policymakers' attention to specific local challenges related to social services.[183] Policymakers also play an essential role in ensuring the effectiveness of social accountability mechanisms as they establish the 'incentives and processes' regulating citizens' and public service providers' behaviour and performance according to citizens' requests.[184]

[176] Ibid.
[177] Alaka Holla, Margaret Koziol, Santhosh Srinivasan, Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in human development sectors (World Bank Publications, 2011) p 5.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid 6.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.

Notions such as 'voice' and 'teeth' are fundamental to understanding citizen participation and state responsiveness in social accountability programmes. The World Bank believes that creating channels for citizens to express their voices is an important characteristic of social accountability programmes.[185] This is because citizens and policymakers interact through voting, taxation, parliamentary representation and political institutions.[186] Social accountability enhances the expression of citizens' voices through various mechanisms. For example, it promotes the establishment of national legal frameworks that ensure citizens have access to public information. Additionally, it encourages the use of tools like report cards to evaluate the performance of public service providers.[187]

The notion of teeth is related to the capacity of governments to respond to citizens' demands.[188] The World Bank explained that governments' answerability is an essential factor of success in social accountability programmes. The World Bank promotes the importance of combining answerability and enforcement to increase accountability in governance.[189] Answerability refers to public service providers' ability to respond to citizens' questions by providing accurate information and explanations related to their actions.[190] However, answerability is not sufficient to demand accountability; thus, the need to include enforcement, or negative sanctions for public officials to 'bear the consequences' of their actions.[191] Consequently, social accountability programmes include grievance redress mechanisms to demand more accountability. These mechanisms allow citizens to give feedback or express complaints about public service delivery.[192] Usually used as a last resort accountability channel to handle complaints not addressed by public service providers, they can influence programmes and policies related to public service provision.[193] Three types of redress mechanisms channels exist:

[185] Ibid 5.
[186] Ibid 5.
[187] Alaka Holla, Margaret Koziol, Santhosh Srinivasan, Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in human development sectors (World Bank Publications, 2011) p 5.
[188] Nimesh Dhungana, 'Doing Civil Society-Driven Social Accountability in a Disaster Context: Evidence from Post-Earthquake Nepal' (2020) 8(4) The Politics of Disaster Governance 395, 397.
[189] Tom Aston and Grazielli Faria Zimmer Santos, 'Social Accountability and Service Delivery Effectiveness: What is the Evidence for the Role of Sanctions?' (World Bank, August 2022) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099534209302293819/pdf/IDU0aff7666c06b8804bc00a9170ce2d26867056.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025 p6.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Alaka Holla, Margaret Koziol, Santhosh Srinivasan, Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in human development sectors (World Bank Publications, 2011) p 5.
[193] Ibid 11.

court systems, non-governmental independent redress institutions and government agencies.[194]

First, legal redress mechanisms are delivered by the court system. Courts play an important role in redressing public service providers and line agencies' failure to comply with their 'statutory and contractual obligations'.[195] Based on a review of current regulations in a country, the court system can improve laws dedicated to the provision of public services.[196] This, however, depends on each country's constitutional frameworks, customary law and political context.[197] Secondly, some non-governmental, independent redress institutions such as civil society organisations, watchdogs or 'sector-specific entities' can create complaints-handling mechanisms.[198] Operating outside formal governmental channels also means that these redress institutions do not benefit from the same level of authority to ensure stakeholders' compliance after publicising their findings.[199] Thirdly, some government agencies, such as ministries, can collect citizens' feedback and complaints by creating 'various venues established at the policy, program and project level'.[200] The venues can be placed within government ministries in specialised offices or service provision points such as 'hospitals or schools'.[201]

Therefore, social accountability programmes require the collaboration of voice and teeth to reach their objectives, specifically the improvement of public services through increased local citizen participation and public sector agents' responsiveness. The three sets of actors mentioned, i.e. policymakers and politicians, public service providers, and citizens must work in synergy for programmes to be effective as they all play an important role in facilitating citizen participation, promoting more transparency in public decision-making, ensuring the compatibility between public services performance and citizen's needs, and relaying feedback on this performance for actions to be taken in favour of constituents. The World Bank has defined the scope of social accountability programmes in various reports over the years. The next section highlights the main reports that clarify

[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid 12.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Alaka Holla, Margaret Koziol, Santhosh Srinivasan, Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in human development sectors (World Bank Publications, 2011) p 9.
[199] Ibid 11.
[200] Ibid 9.
[201] Ibid 11.

the purpose of social accountability programmes and how this purpose has evolved from the Bank's perspective.

1.2.1.2. Key World Development Reports Introducing Social Accountability

Various frameworks in the form of World Development Reports explained the social accountability agenda and clarified its purpose over time.

In 2000, the original definition of social accountability, as supported by the World Bank, stated that 'societal accountability is a nonelectoral, yet vertical mechanism of control that rests on the actions of a multiple array of citizens' associations and movements and on the media, actions that aim at exposing governmental wrongdoing, bringing new issues onto the public agenda, or activating the operation of horizontal agencies.'[202] This definition acknowledged that social accountability relies on a dense network of actors and various mechanisms, bypassing the challenges of traditional electoral mechanisms.[203] The 2001 World Development Report also focused on citizens as the most important actors in demanding accountability while highlighting the significance of accountable governments in empowering citizens and alleviating poverty.[204]

In 2003, the World Bank's Participation and Civic Engagement Group wrote a note explaining the importance of civic engagement and social accountability in governance. The Participation and Civic Engagement Group aimed to empower underprivileged communities to recognise and set their own priorities, while also actively encouraging public and private institutions to be more accountable responsiveness.[205] Additionally, the Participation and Civic Engagement Group encouraged these communities to raise their voices within local civil society organisations to meet the development goals set by the World Bank.[206] The note explained how social accountability could help attain sustainable development goals. It was established that social accountability promotes more transparency and representation in public institutions while assisting these

[202] Catalina Smulovitz and Enrique Peruzotti, ' Societal accountability in Latin America' (2000) 11(4) Journal of Democracy 147, 150.
[203] Ibid 151.
[204] World Bank Group, World Bank Group A to Z (World Bank Publications, 2014) p 221.
[205] William Reuben, 'The Role of Civic Engagement and Social Accountability in the Governance Equation' (World Bank, March 2003) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/327691468779445304/pdf/310420PAPER0So1ity0SDP0Civic0no1076.pdf > p 1 accessed 26/06/2025.
[206] Ibid.

institutions in meeting the needs of their population.[207] The group also paid more attention to the relevance of social accountability in non-democratic settings experiencing conflicts between citizens and public institutions, which is sometimes the context of developing countries welcoming social accountability initiatives.[208]

In addition, in 2003, the World Bank emphasised improving governments' service provision and the allocation of public funds by establishing participatory mechanisms to track and monitor public expenditures.[209] This led to the creation of 'social programmes' to educate citizens.[210] The 2003 World Development Report explained that public service delivery could be improved by providing opportunities for communities, especially marginalised ones, to oversee their local public service provision while ensuring their needs were included in the design of public policies.[211] This was also supported by the Participation and Civic Engagement Group's note in the same year. It stated the importance of setting high standards for public service delivery by 'strengthening the incentives for providers to serve the poor'.[212]

The 2004 World Development Report gave more depth to the definition of social accountability as understood by the World Bank. In this report, social accountability was defined as an 'approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organisations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability.[213] The report emphasised addressing the new millennium challenges, especially governments' failure to provide basic public services for marginalised populations in developing countries.[214] It enabled the differentiation of short and long routes to obtain accountability, highlighting social accountability's relevance and why it is considered a faster route for citizens to hold public officials to account.[215]

---

[207] Ibid 4.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid 1.
[211] Ibid 4.
[212] William Reuben, 'The Role of Civic Engagement and Social Accountability in the Governance Equation' (World Bank, March 2003) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/327691468779445304/pdf/310420PAPER0So1ity0SDP0Civic0no1076.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025 p 4.
[213] Carmen Malena, Reiner Forster and Janmejay Singh, 'Social Accountability: an introduction to the concept and emerging practice' (World Bank, 01 December 2004) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/327691468779445304/pdf/310420PAPER0So1ity0SDP0Civic0no1076.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025 p 3.
[214] Shantayanan Devarajan and Ritva Reinikka, 'Making Services Work for Poor People' (2004) 13(1) Journal of African Economies 142, 147.
[215] Frida Boräng and Marcia Grimes, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects', in Andreas Bågenholm, Monika Bauhr, Marcia Grimes, and Bo Rothstein (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government* (OUP, 2021) 268, 270.

Long routes to accountability are represented by traditional accountability mechanisms, including elections, top-down approaches to make public officials accountable, and bureaucratic mechanisms overseeing public service providers.[216] They promote a longer path and indirect citizen participation to hold public institutions accountable, as citizens' influence on public service providers occurs through the government or local representatives.[217] Long routes to demand accountability may be less effective as they do not provide enough opportunities for marginalised societies to express their needs to policymakers.[218] On the contrary, social accountability is considered a short route to demand accountability, as it directly influences public institutions through the involvement of participatory initiatives to mobilise citizens.[219] Short routes to demand accountability also enable citizens to put more pressure on service providers through results assessments, which means that citizens can monitor the performance of the public sector, establish feedback and verify the implementation of their feedback.[220] The 2004 World Development Report defined the scope of short routes to demand accountability within local governance, thus putting more pressure on local governments for states' institutional failure.[221] Furthermore, the report recommended using short routes to accountability to complement long routes, as described by the Bank's 'accountability triangle'.[222] Although short routes to accountability increase citizens' influence on policymakers and public service providers, policymakers play a major role in creating sanctioning mechanisms that encourage positive behaviour from providers.[223]

The 2004 World Development Report mainly addressed challenges of public service delivery in developing countries, stating that accountability dynamics could explain states' inability to deliver basic public services to poor populations.[224] This report stressed the need for citizens to hold politicians accountable by monitoring the process and outcomes of resource allocations. It also expressed the importance of politicians holding

[216] Ibid.
[217] Qaiser M. Khan et al., Improving Basic Services for the Bottom Forty Percent: Lessons from Ethiopia (World Bank Publications, 2014) p17.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Claudia Baez Camargo, Eelco Jacobs, 'Social Accountability and its Conceptual Challenges' in the Authors (eds) *Accountable Governance for Development Setting an Agenda Beyond 2015* (Institute of Governance Studies ANSA-SAR, June 2013) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341509318_Social_Accountability_and_its_Conceptual_Challenges#fullTextFileContent accessed 26/06/2025 p105.
[220] Qaiser M. Khan et al., Improving Basic Services for the Bottom Forty Percent: Lessons from Ethiopia (World Bank Publications, 2014) p 25.
[221] Jonathan A. Fox, 'Social Accountability: What does the evidence really say?' (2015) 72 World Development 346, 347.
[222] Qaiser M. Khan et al., Improving Basic Services for the Bottom Forty Percent: Lessons from Ethiopia (World Bank Publications, 2014) p 25.
[223] Ibid 27.
[224] Ibid 12.

public servants accountable regarding the quality of the public services delivered.[225] The World Bank recommended mechanisms promoting 'transparency and accountability' to strengthen the outcomes of social accountability projects.[226] In addition, the report emphasised the interconnected relationships between 'clients, providers, and policymakers'.[227] Although poorer populations were the focus of social accountability programmes, the report stressed their utility for all citizens.

The 2004 World Development Report demonstrated that even in well-functioning democracies, the extended path of accountability shown by the accountability triangle was inherently weak.[228] It emphasised that accountability should include both answerability and enforceability, which is referred to as 'Teeth'.[229] This is because solely focusing on vertical accountability has proven to be insufficient in achieving true accountability. While elections are important to reinforce democracy, the report stressed that local populations often vote based on their ideological or ethnic affiliations rather than evaluating the quality of public service delivery. The report also highlighted the limitations of protests, which could impose significant costs on the poor regarding time and lost wages. Other issues related to focusing on vertical accountability were addressed. For instance, poor individuals lacked direct means to influence policymakers, and the local service provision was often manipulated due to clientelism and political patronage, primarily benefiting those individuals who had direct connections with policymakers.[230]

The 2004 WDR identified key challenges in social accountability programmes, emphasising that enhanced information, citizens' charters, and report cards were key factors for increasing government accountability. Decentralisation was also deemed effective when information about service quality was directly shared with citizens. Moreover, the report emphasised that politicians and policymakers faced challenges in ensuring effective service delivery, which could be addressed by clarifying roles, carefully selecting public service providers, monitoring performance, and ensuring the fulfilment of contracts by public service providers. In some contexts, the implementation

[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid 78.
[227] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/433301485539630301-0050022017/original/WDR17BPEvolutionofWBThinkingonGovernance.pdf > p 16 accessed 26/06/2025.
[228] See Accountability Triangle in Figure 1, p 37.
[229] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/433301485539630301-0050022017/original/WDR17BPEvolutionofWBThinkingonGovernance.pdf > p 16 accessed 26/06/2025.
[230] Ibid.

of social accountability programmes has shown that public sector providers face staffing difficulties and widespread corruption. Community pressure through protests sometimes impeded officials, and public service providers juggled multiple responsibilities which should have been taken by local governments. This prompted the World Bank to recommend that policymakers address these issues by establishing various oversight sources to monitor public service providers, implementing performance-based payments, promoting competition among provider organisations, and involving NGOs in performance monitoring.[231] Furthermore, the 2004 World Development Report highlighted the notion of 'principal-agent', which aimed to redefine the relationship between citizens and public institutions.[232] The principal-agent framework gave a central role to citizens as the 'principals' or main actors, regardless of the type of political regime. Citizens were seen as a homogenous group with the same aspirations.[233] The report also presented the state-society relationship as a 'two-way market relationship' in which citizens delegate authority to public officials to meet their needs.[234]

In 2005, the World Bank's Social Development Strategy emphasised making institutions more accountable to empower poor people.[235] Six critical dimensions of social accountability were highlighted: incentive, accountability's goal, institutionalisation, involvement, inclusiveness, and the use of social accountability in different branches of government.[236] First, the incentive dimension refers to social accountability, employing a balanced approach that combines sanctions and rewards to encourage 'good behaviour' in public institutions.[237] Although governments have traditionally been held accountable through punishment for misconduct via economic incentives or public shaming, an exclusive focus on punishment was described as counterproductive to improving the government's performance.[238] The report clarified that social accountability does not focus exclusively on sanction mechanisms to avoid fear-based paralysis in the public

[231] Ibid.
[232] Jonathan A. Fox, 'Social Accountability: What does the evidence really say?' (2015) 72 World Development 346, 347.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Hans Otto-Sano, Social Accountability in the World Bank: Does it overlap with Human Rights? in Ladawn Haglund, Robin Stryker (eds) *Closing the Rights Gap: From Human Rights to Social Transformation* (University of California Press, 2015) 219, 221.
[236] World Bank Institute 'Social Accountability in the Public Sector, A Conceptual Discussion and Learning Module' (World Bank, January 1 2005) < https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/859141468135312999/social-accountability-in-the-public-sector-a-conceptual-discussion-and-learning-module > p 25 accessed 26/06/2025.
[237] Ibid.
[238] Ibid 13.

sector.[239] In contrast, social accountability seeks a productive partnership between governments and civil society organisations.[240]

Secondly, the accountability goal refers to the need to reinforce citizen participation to monitor the public sector's performance and to enforce the best governance practices.[241] The 2005 World Development Report viewed citizens as public service consumers and observers.[242] It stressed that the increased bottom-up monitoring of social accountability initiatives could enable the reduction of government malpractices.[243] However, although monitoring governments' performance has been the focus of many social accountability programmes, an exclusive focus on performance was seen as overshadowing the reinforcement of active citizen participation.[244] Therefore, the World Bank recommended that the best accountability strategies must involve both: monitoring the public sector and increasing citizen participation beyond elections.

The third dimension emphasised the importance of institutionalising social accountability. The World Bank defines three ways participatory mechanisms can be institutionalised. First, participatory mechanisms can be included in state agencies' strategic planning and mandated through specific procedures.[245] Secondly, they can be promoted by dedicated government agencies, encouraging citizen participation and uniting societal actors.[246] Thirdly, participatory mechanisms can be directly included within the law.[247] Additionally, the report stated that fully institutionalising social accountability would require the collaboration of political parties with the legislative branch.[248]

The fourth dimension relates to the involvement of citizens or civil society organisations in the state's decision-making process to create an open dialogue, reinforcing the public sector's accountability.[249] The 2005 World Development Report associated the 'depth of involvement' of societal actors with their proximity to the 'core of the state'.[250] This is because greater influence from societal actors in local governance leads to improved

[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid 16.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Ibid 18.
[249] Ibid 17.
[250] Ibid.

monitoring of public officials' behaviour. It is, however, important to consider the funding of societal actors, such as civil society organisations, as the origin of the financing impacts the ability to demand more accountability from the government. For instance, in cases where those organisations were funded by governments, the effectiveness of social accountability initiatives was undermined.[251]

The fifth dimension of social accountability promotes the inclusive participation of citizens and civil society organisations. This inclusive participation aims to amplify the voices of marginalised and underrepresented groups, ensuring that discussions with governments are not exclusive to only those social groups deemed 'well-behaved'.[252] The goal of including a variety of civil society organisations is to enhance the participation of specific groups often excluded from participatory initiatives, such as 'grassroots movements, uneducated citizens, and leftist politicians'.[253] The exclusion of these groups usually comes from the fear that different variables, such as 'language, class, and cultural barriers', would make their participation difficult.[254] The report, however, demonstrated the importance of promoting widespread inclusive, participatory initiatives based on three key facts. First, a 'broad-based participation' can make civic engagement more effective, as governments won't be able to anticipate all civil society organisations' actions.[255] This will consequently prevent complicity due to the lack of predictability.[256] Secondly, more productive discussions between societal actors and governments can occur when there is a certain level of distrust, leading societal actors to be more vigilant.[257] Thirdly, increased bottom-up monitoring of public institutions is beneficial in legitimising 'pro-accountability structures'.[258]

The sixth dimension promotes social accountability mechanisms in all government branches, not only the executive branch.[259] The World Bank considers legislatures as the 'untapped gold mine for developing innovative new pro-accountability initiatives grounded in civic engagement'.[260] This is because policymakers can support citizens in demanding accountability from other branches. Moreover, the Bank considers the

[251] Ibid 20.
[252] Ibid 22.
[253] Ibid 31.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid 18.
[260] Ibid 24.

legislative branch a 'productive location for citizen participation'.[261] This can be explained by policymakers' closer proximity to the population.[262] Social accountability initiatives are consequently targeting the three branches of government, even though the judiciary branch appears to be the most difficult to reach due to its lesser exposure to the public eye and its private procedures.[263]

Following debates[264] within the World Bank, there was a need to clarify the notions of supply and demand in the state-society relationship.[265] The 2015 World Development Report aimed to guide practitioners' application of the concept. It acknowledged the importance of sustaining horizontal accountability mechanisms such as checks and balances, institutional capacity-building and grievance redress mechanisms.[266] It also considered public institutions as the supply side, while civil society organisations represented the demand side of accountability.[267] This also raised the need to make the implementation of social accountability a 'tailor made'[268] approach, and to promote new information technologies as a tool to reinforce social accountability mechanisms.[269] It also expressed the importance of involving social accountability tools at every step of policy design.[270]

Social accountability is still evolving, as expressed by recent World Bank reports. In 2018, in its World Development Report, the World Bank stressed the importance of rethinking social accountability's role in promoting citizen participation in the education sector.[271] This framework emphasised the need for governments to invest in 'human capital' as an important development factor.[272] The focus on the education sector derived from four key observations in developing countries: children are not prepared to learn, teachers are not motivated to teach, financial contributions do not have tangible outcomes

[261] Ibid 25.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Jonathan A. Fox, 'Social Accountability: What does the evidence really say?' (2015) 72 World Development 346, 347.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Helene Grandvoinnet, Ghazia Aslam and Shomikho Raha, 'Opening the Black Box: the Contextual Drivers of Social Accountability' (The World Bank, April 11 2015) < https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/235561468321545065/opening-the-black-box-the-contextual-drivers-of-social-accountability > p 287 accessed 26/06/2025.
[269] Ibid 288.
[270] Ibid 72.
[271] Florencia Guerzovich, Emilie Fokkelman and Maria Poli, ' The learning Crisis and its Solutions: Lessons from Social Accountability for Education' (The World Bank, January 1 2019) < https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/468311606905286817/the-learning-crisis-and-its-solutions-lessons-from-social-accountability-for-education > p 2 accessed 26/06/2025.
[272] Ibid.

in the education system, and the government's failure affects the quality of the education system, which creates a learning crisis.[273]

In 2022, the GPSA emphasised the critical role of civil society organisations in promoting inclusion and transparency when addressing the COVID-19 crisis.[274] Promoting a collaborative social accountability approach to support the healthcare sector, the GPSA stressed the need for civil society organisations to use social accountability tools to increase their 'financial integrity' and facilitate citizen access to accurate information.[275] Various tools have been used in social accountability initiatives. These tools aim to promote active citizen participation, collect citizen feedback on the public sector performance and encourage governments to provide citizens with open access to information related to the management of public services and resources.

The next section provides some examples of social accountability programmes in different contexts, showcasing their effectiveness in strengthening actors' capacity while improving public service delivery.

1.2.1.3. Some Examples of Social Accountability Programmes

Social accountability programmes enhance communities' ability to influence the public sector, foster a collaborative environment to improve the quality of public services, and strengthen the social contract between citizens and local governments. Various examples can be used to illustrate the impact of social accountability programmes.

Social accountability programmes aim to strengthen communities' capacity to influence public sector decision-making. This is evident in social accountability initiatives in Rwanda, Mauritania, and Madagascar, where the voices of local, marginalised groups were raised to adapt public service delivery to their feedback and needs. The Transparency of the Mauritanian Education Budget (TOME) Project effectively enhanced the delivery of local public services in primary education by engaging various actors, including teachers, parent-teacher associations, and students. This collaboration helped advocate for community needs and evaluate the performance of public education

[273] Ibid 5.
[274] Linnea Mills and Jeff Thindwa, 'Social Accountability For a Strong Covid-19 Recovery A Review and Analysis of the Role of Civil Society' (GPSA, September 30 2022) < https://documents.banquemondiale.org/fr/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099545209302225981/idu04a5e75580e593044b10bfff054c9280410d5 > p 8 accessed 26/06/2025.
[275] Ibid.

providers. The creation of committees representing the interests of citizens in 40 primary schools facilitated negotiations with local governments and pressured public providers to address the challenges in the education sector.[276]

Also, social accountability programmes aim to improve the quality of public service delivery by facilitating access to information about the public sector's performance. The 2006 RECURSO project in Peru improved the quality of public service delivery in various sectors, such as health care and education, by facilitating citizens' access to information. It emphasised providing citizens with basic information about the standards they should expect from the public sector through various tools such as educational videos and brochures translated into local languages. The videos shown to citizens allowed them to gain greater knowledge and mobilise themselves to identify solutions that could address their daily challenges, such as child malnutrition and poor-quality education.[277] While facilitating social reforms in favour of the wellbeing of local populations, this social accountability programme supported civil society organisations in increasing their influence on the public sector. The success of the social reforms had a significant impact on other countries, such as Bolivia, South Africa, and Mexico, which utilised educational videos to increase healthcare providers' awareness of 'chronic malnutrition'.[278]

Social accountability initiatives aim to create a platform for enhanced collaboration between all actors involved. These actors include local civil society organisations, local communities and local governments. This was the situation in Tajikistan with the Third-Party Monitoring (TPM) programme, which funded and mobilised civil society organisations to tackle the public service delivery challenges and economic issues brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. This programme established a rapid emergency response initiative led by a coalition of local civil society organisations, aimed at enhancing accountability in the public sector and providing social assistance to vulnerable

[276] Grace Sinaga, Nagia Delicia and Jeffrey M. Thindwa, ' GPSA in Review: Collaborative Social Accountability for Development – 2021-2022' (World Bank Group, January 10 2023) < https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099511001102315321/idu0e11381d2000170499e08ccf02c68a41d3578 > p 19 accessed 26/06/2025.
[277] Agarwal, Sanjay, Heltberg, Rasmus and Diachok, Myrtle, 'Scaling-up social accountability in World Bank operations' (World Bank, May 01 2009) < https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/423211468164948681/scaling-up-socialaccountability-in-world-bank-operations > p 8 accessed 26/06/2025.
[278] Ibid.

communities. Public hearings and grievance redress mechanisms were also used to collect citizen feedback and to ensure the public sector's responsiveness during the pandemic.[279]

The collaborative approach used in social accountability programmes also strengthened the relationship between the state and citizens by reinforcing the social contract in various contexts. Reinforcing the social contract, in turn, influenced the government's response to cater to citizens' requests more effectively. In Ghana, for instance, social accountability was institutionalised by creating a Directorate for Social Accountability in the Ministry of Local Government. This initiative was made possible after the successful collaboration between the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, the government and civil society organisations, such as SEND Ghana. In Indonesia, as well, collaborative social accountability initiatives have led to improvements in the relationship between citizens and local public service providers in the health sector. This facilitated citizen access to information, improved citizens' access to healthcare and increased citizens' positive feedback on the public sector's performance in the healthcare system.[280]

The next section will highlight some of the main tools used in social accountability programmes. These tools are used to promote more active citizen participation, promote citizen feedback on the public sector performance and facilitate citizen access to information.

1.2.2. Tools used in social accountability programmes

1.2.2.1. Tools Promoting Active Citizen Participation

1.2.2.1.1. Community Participation

[279] Grace Sinaga, Nagia Delicia and Jeffrey M. Thindwa, ' GPSA in Review: Collaborative Social Accountability for Development – 2021-2022' (World Bank Group, January 10 2023) < https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099511001102315321/idu0e11381d2000170499e08ccf02c68a41d3578 > p 18 accessed 26/06/2025.
[280] Ibid 9.

Community participation is a social accountability tool that aims to decentralise power by increasing citizens' ability to solve the challenges within their community.[281] While encouraging active citizen participation, this tool seeks to unite local communities to define mutual needs and mobilise volunteers in communities with limited resources to improve public service provision.[282] Due to its tendency to focus on local governance challenges, community participation requires understanding contextual challenges, considering both public service beneficiaries' and providers' views, and enhancing citizens' capacity-building.[283] Another type of community participation is community action. Community action groups specifically promote the involvement of marginalised groups within a community, ensuring their needs are considered in social accountability programmes.[284] This tool often focuses on underprivileged women and seeks to raise their voices collectively to increase their impact on local governments and public service providers.[285]

We can take the example of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the National Health Mission (NHM) in India, which are policies aiming at increasing citizen participation and oversight, promoting the decentralisation of public service delivery, and encouraging collaboration between legitimate civil society organisations and local governments agencies.[286] Decentralising power to local communities was a key strategy to achieve these goals. Committees and groups, including local citizens, healthcare workers and local government representatives, were established to create a platform to raise citizen voices and demand more accountability from local governments.[287] This empowerment of local communities enabled policy reforms to improve public service providers' performance based on citizens' demands. Policies such as the ICDS derived from the Indian 2006 Supreme Court order, demanding a 'universalisation' of public service quality from the government.[288] This led the central government to increase decentralisation to give more leverage to local communities and local state departments.[289] Self-help groups mobilising citizens, particularly the most vulnerable,

[281] Nahitun Naher, Dina Balabanova , Eleanor Hutchinson, Robert Marten, Roksana Hoque, Samiun Nazrin Bente Kamal Tune, Bushra Zarin Islam and Syed Masud Ahmed, 'Do social accountability approaches work? A review of the literature from selected low- and middle-income countries in the WHO South-East Asia region' (2020) 35 Health Policy and Planning 76, 90.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Ibid 91.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Francesca Feruglio and Nicholas Nisbett, 'The challenges of institutionalizing community-level social accountability mechanisms for health and nutrition: a qualitative study in Odisha, India' (2018) 18 BMC Health Services Research 1, 3.
[287] Ibid 5.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid.

emerged to empower communities and improve their financial independence.[290] The creation of the Mothers' Committee (MC), for instance, proved effective at directly addressing women's needs and discovering irregularities in the healthcare system.[291] The members of this committee helped their local community by improving their access to information and public services.[292]

1.2.2.1.2. Scorecards

Scorecards are a quantitative tool for social accountability programmes, used to collect feedback from citizens on public service delivery through surveys, facilitate discussions between citizens and public service providers, and identify solutions to implement following those discussions.[293] The advantages of using scorecards lie in their participatory approach to informing and empowering public service beneficiaries.[294] Therefore, scorecards are used to monitor public service delivery and track the results of discussions between citizens and public officials. Although scorecards can be seen as tools used to obtain feedback, they are also important in increasing citizen participation by going beyond criticisms of public sector performance to monitor the implementation of criticisms and the improvement of services.

We can take the example of a World Bank randomised experience in Uganda in 2007, which encouraged local communities to draft a 'community action plan' to improve public service delivery in the healthcare sector.[295] This initiative enabled citizens to establish surveys evaluating the performance of local healthcare providers, with report cards translated into local dialects to facilitate 'community monitoring activities'.[296] Furthermore, community meetings were organised to present survey results in an accessible manner and build an action plan based on communities' suggestions.[297] Although various factors challenged the process, it enabled public service providers to compare communities' suggestions with their own data to analyse their performance

[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid 6.
[292] Ibid 7.
[293] Nahitun Naher et al., 'Do social accountability approaches work? A review of the literature from selected low- and middle-income countries in the WHO South-East Asia region' (2020) 35 Health Policy and Planning 76, 90.
[294] Ibid.
[295] Alaka Holla, Margaret Koziol, Santhosh Srinivasan, Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in human development sectors (World Bank Publications, 2011) p 55.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid.

accurately.[298] This community scorecard project led to 'significant improvements', such as an increase in child immunisation, a 33% reduction in infant mortality rate, a decrease in healthcare workers' absenteeism and a 20% increase in the utilisation of services.[299]

1.2.2.2. Tools Promoting Citizen Feedback

1.2.2.2.1. Participatory Complaint Surveys

Participatory complaints surveys are social accountability tools requiring citizens to provide feedback on public service delivery. Participatory complaint surveys allow citizens to voice their concerns about the quality of public services, thereby holding officials accountable for any deficiencies present.[300] They represent a practical tool to identify gaps in public service delivery and can provide solutions to address these gaps locally.[301] Furthermore, participatory complaints surveys aim to empower citizens and make them more alert to irregularities in the local public service provision.[302]

We can take the example of the World Bank poverty alleviation program implemented in Nepal, which complemented 'existing feedback mechanisms' with a grievance handling procedure.[303] This initiative provided a platform for local public service beneficiaries, which they could use to contact a spokesperson from the programme and express criticisms and recommendations related to the programme's specific sector of interest.[304] A variety of communication channels, such as the radio, text messages, phone calls and online platforms, made the feedback process as inclusive as possible.[305] This led to improvements in the public service delivery, including a reduction in food insecurity and an increase in school enrolments.[306]

[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid 56.
[300] Nahitun Naher et al. 'Do social accountability approaches work? A review of the literature from selected low- and middle-income countries in the WHO South-East Asia region' (2020) 35 Health Policy and Planning 76, 90.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Björn-Sören Gigler, Savita Bailur , Closing the Feedback Loop: Can Technology Bridge the Accountability Gap (World Bank, 2014) p 231.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Ibid 232.

1.2.2.2.2. Public Hearings

Public hearings provide a platform for citizens within a community to face local public officials and express their dissatisfaction with the quality of the public services provided.[307] Public hearings involve organising official public meetings to hold service providers accountable for public service delivery issues in specific areas.[308] Furthermore, this tool has been proven effective in exposing local government's malpractices, as it encourage citizens' access to information related to their local public service management so they can address discrepancies.[309] In addition, as an inclusive social accountability tool, public hearings promote the participation of diverse groups within a community, aiming to include people from all backgrounds.[310] They are, therefore, an effective way to demand accountability at any stage of a programme's implementation.[311]

We can take the example of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) initiatives in Orissa, India. These initiatives, led by the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood in India, targeted women and involved a coalition of nonstate actors and civil society to decrease the death and morbidity rates of mothers and newborns.[312] These initiatives facilitated the organisation of public hearings[313] to raise communities' awareness, support communities in confronting public service providers, and change the mindset of those communities to make them believe in their ability to initiate a change.[314] They were also targeting women from significantly marginalised backgrounds.[315]

The public hearings partnered with women-led self-help groups to disseminate accurate information about maternal health and women's rights related to healthcare.[316] This helped to increase women's empowerment in a context where social norms hindered the prioritisation of women's health during pregnancy.[317] Additionally, crucial issues such as gender discrimination, which further exacerbated women's experiences of poverty and classism, were discussed during public hearings, thereby creating a safe space for women

[307] Nahitun Naher et al., 'Do social accountability approaches work? A review of the literature from selected low- and middle-income countries in the WHO South-East Asia region' (2020) 35 Health Policy and Planning 76, 91.
[308] Ibid.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Susan A. Papp, Aparajita Gogoi & Catherine Campbell, 'Improving maternal health through social accountability: A case study from Orissa, India' (2013) 8(4) Global Public Health 449, 454.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Ibid 453.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Ibid 455.
[315] Ibid 453.
[316] Ibid 455.
[317] Ibid 456.

to voice their concerns.[318] Another fundamental impact of those public hearings was the improvement of the 'collective consciousness around maternal health'[319], as women shared personal struggles that they did not necessarily talk about previously.[320]

1.2.2.3. Tools Promoting Citizen Access to Information

1.2.2.3.1. Reports Cards

Report cards are concise documents that provide feedback from citizens regarding the performance of public service providers, while also informing citizens about these providers' performance.[321] The data in those surveys is then compiled and published.[322] In addition, report cards used in information campaigns can establish a ranking or compare various services from different public service providers. This tool is more passive as it does not require direct interactions between citizens and service providers. In some instances, it can facilitate the creation of 'joint action plans' that will match the capacity of public service providers to the needs of local populations.[323]

Information mechanisms such as community scorecards proved successful in various contexts such as Uganda and Malawi.[324] Björkman and Svensson demonstrated through their randomised field experiment, that using citizen report cards in social accountability programmes led to a positive behavioural change of health care providers and public servants.[325] In addition, report cards can be used to have a better understanding of communities' perceptions about challenges in local public service delivery.

1.2.2.3.2. Social Audits

[318] Ibid.
[319] Ibid 457.
[320] Ibid 458.
[321] Esbern Friis-Hansen and Signe Marie Cold Ravnkilde, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms and Access to Public Service Delivery in Rural Africa' (Danish Institute For International Studies December 2013) < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265300089_Social_Accountability_Mechanisms_and_Access_to_Public_Service_Delivery_in_Rural_Africa > p 50 accessed 26/06/2025.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Doreen Nico Kyando, 'Social accountability initiatives in the Delivery of public services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic literature review' (Institute of Development Policy, June 2022) < https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/ad52f6/195405.pdf > p 9 accessed 26/06/2025.
[325] Georges Danhoundo, Khalidha Nasiri and Mary E. Wiktorowicz, 'Improving social accountability processes in the health sector in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review' (2018) 18 BMC Public Health 1, 5.

Social audits are a social accountability tool aiming at increasing citizen participation to improve public service delivery, by making public service providers more transparent about their actions.[326] Social audits enhance transparency and accountability in the public sector, serving as practical tools to tackle major governance challenges. They increase citizens' awareness of policy implementation issues and engage them in the decision-making process.[327]

To illustrate the implementation of social audits, we can take the example of the grassroots organisation in India called the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS).[328] This organisation initiated social audit experiments in different districts in Rajasthan, India. These experiments involved comparing the data provided by official sources with the field's outcomes and organising mass public hearings to expose irregularities in the official documents provided by the local government.[329] The audits included participants from various sectors, such as citizens, government officials, and representatives from academia, the legal system, and the media. They enabled the discovery of many wrongdoings in the bureaucracy, including corruption and the embezzlement of public funds.[330] Furthermore, this experience led to the national implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act.[331] This Act promoted free public access to information related to state departments' actions and was considered a significant step in making government agencies more transparent in India.[332]

Three significant themes can be found in social accountability programmes: citizen participation, citizen engagement in decision-making, and citizen access to information. These themes characterise the purpose of the programmes as understood by the World Bank. The next section will address the meaning of each theme for the Bank, with an example to illustrate them.

[326] Nahitun Naher et al., 'Do social accountability approaches work? A review of the literature from selected low- and middle-income countries in the WHO South-East Asia region' (2020) 35 Health Policy and Planning 76, 82.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Rupa S. Karmakar, 'A Thematic Review of Social Audit in India' (2017) 6(4) International Journal of Social Science, New Delhi Publishers 227, 229.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Ibid.
[332] Ibid.

1.3. Major Themes from the Practice of Social Accountability

Social accountability programmes aim to enhance active citizen participation, enabling citizens to unite in promoting their collective interests and overseeing local public services, all while ensuring the inclusion of marginalised groups. They also aim to promote citizen engagement in decision-making processes. This involves creating opportunities for citizens to directly access policymakers and public service providers. The goal is to encourage open discussions about public service performance, gather feedback on areas for improvement, and establish a plan of action - including new policies and potential sanctions - to address citizens' needs. Additionally, social accountability programmes aim to improve citizen access to public information, as access to information is crucial for promoting more active and effective citizen participation, which can genuinely hold governments and public service providers accountable. Ensuring citizens have access to information requires governments to publish this information in clear and accessible formats while actively seeking and incorporating citizens' feedback for continuous improvement. This section will explain the background and meaning of citizen participation, citizen engagement in decision making and citizen access to information according to the World Bank. We will use the Faisons Ensemble (Working Together) Project, the Publish What You Pay Indonesia project, and the 2005 Information Campaigns in Indonesia to illustrate these themes in social accountability programmes.

1.3.1. Citizen Participation

1.3.1.1. Background and meaning

Stimulating citizen interest is a crucial determinant of citizen participation. The evidence on the practice of social accountability showed the importance of increasing citizen interest for more effective mobilisation.[333] The degree of citizens' implication is vital in social accountability initiatives, as citizens' collective participation influences their

[333] Marcia Grimes, 'The Contingencies of Societal Accountability: Examining the Link Between Civil Society and Good Government' (2012) 48 Studies in Comparative International Development 380, 385.

outcomes.[334] Furthermore, involving other actors, such as civil society organisations which are closer to citizens and can find effective ways to mobilise them, increases the success of participatory accountability initiatives. As explained by Marcia Grimes: 'the available evidence suggests that societal and participatory accountability both benefit from the existence of a dense web of civic association.'[335] Thus, to promote the active participation of citizens, social accountability programmes rely on civil society organisations to mobilise them and increase their interest in the programmes. The inclusion of marginalised groups proved to be important to increase citizen participation. Social accountability programmes echo citizens' voices to ensure their needs are met at the local and national levels.[336] Therefore, they stress the importance of including minorities and marginalised groups to ensure that programme outcomes are as inclusive and equitable as possible. Furthermore, social accountability initiatives seek to empower citizens by redistributing power, which helps to enhance the participation of marginalised groups that are often excluded from spaces where their voices can be heard.[337]

In social accountability programmes, citizen participation involves citizens' monitoring of public service providers' performance. This is because these programmes provide opportunities for citizens to have a tangible impact on the quality of public service delivery.[338] In fact, citizen participation is linked to citizens' ability to ensure government's responsiveness to their demands.[339] This active civic engagement enables a better evaluation of public service delivery and a better allocation of public funds tailored to citizens' needs.[340] This can be explained by the fact that citizens are considered to be 'direct beneficiaries' in social accountability initiatives.[341] Hence, social accountability programmes aim to reduce the accountability gap between citizens' expectations and public service providers' actions.[342]

Citizen participation also requires a productive relationship between the different actors involved. Social accountability programmes promote the collaboration of state actors

[334] Ibid.
[335] Ibid.
[336] Diogo Pereira & Ariane Roder Figueira, 'Effects of citizen participation in the social accountability of budget amendments' (2020) 27(1) The Journal of Legislative Studies 30, 35.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Jun Ma, 'The Rise of Social Accountability in China' (2012) 71(2) The Australian Journal of Public Administration 111, 118.
[339] Jose Dias and Tassiana Tomé, 'Inverted State and Citizens' Roles in the Mozambican Health Sector' in Nelson, E., Bloom, G and Shankland, A. (Eds) Accountability for Health Equity: Galvanising a Movement for Universal Health Coverage (2018) 49(2) Institute of Development Studies 34, 36.
[340] Ibid.
[341] Ibid.
[342] Diogo Pereira & Ariane Roder Figueira, 'Effects of citizen participation in the social accountability of budget amendments' (2020) 27(1) The Journal of Legislative Studies 30, 46.

represented by the executive, the legislative and the judicial branches, and nonstate actors represented by citizens, civil society organisations, the media and other external actors.[343] An effective collaboration of all actors involved is essential, as it creates the opportunity for open discussions on how to address local public issues.[344] This is even more important as citizen participation is hindered in specific settings, such as in weak states experiencing political instability, which affects their ability to effectively provide for their population.[345]

Weak or failed states often have a challenging relationship with their citizens, as demonstrated by the lack of trust from the population and low civic engagement due to challenges in public service provision.[346] The evidence on social accountability initiatives in fragile settings has shown positive outcomes, including improved state-citizen relationships, increased citizen engagement in evaluating local public services, and a more responsive government at both local and national levels.[347] Social accountability programmes effectively stimulated citizens' participation by reinforcing their 'sense of connection' with their government and local public service providers in various contexts.[348]

1.3.1.2. Example: The Faisons Ensemble (Working Together) Project

We can take the example of the Faisons Ensemble (Working Together) project in Guinea, which aimed to mobilise citizens to reinforce the local governments' capacity, especially in the health, education, agricultural and financial sectors.[349] Guinea is a West African country that has experienced a lack of effective civil society mobilisation, political instability, and economic challenges that have limited the availability of resources.[350] It has also experienced a high degree of centralisation within the public administration.[351]

[343] Davison Muchadenyika 'Civil society, social accountability and service delivery in Zimbabwe' in the Authors (eds), *Development Policy Review* (2017) 35(2) Institute for Social Development 178, 182.
[344] Jose Dias and Tassiana Tomé, 'Inverted State and Citizens' Roles in the Mozambican Health Sector' in Nelson, E., Bloom, G and Shankland, A. (Eds) Accountability for Health Equity: Galvanising a Movement for Universal Health Coverage (2018) 49(2) Institute of Development Studies 34, 36.
[345] Pieternella Pieterse, 'Citizen feedback in a fragile setting: social accountability interventions in the primary healthcare sector in Sierra Leone' in Disaster, Special Issue: Humanitarian Governance (2019) 43(2) 132, 132.
[346] Ibid 133.
[347] Ibid 135.
[348] Ibid 135.
[349] Derick W. Brinkerhoff and Anna Wetterbeg,'Gauging the Effects of Social Accountability on Services, Governance and Citizen Empowerment' (2015) 76(2) Public Administration Review 274, 277.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Ibid 278.

The fragile setting in this country has been characterised by a weak government with limited capacity to support the implementation of social accountability programmes.[352] Consequently, Guinea represented a significant challenge for the Faisons Ensemble project, especially regarding improving its public service provision.

The project demonstrated successful results in terms of citizen empowerment by promoting active citizen participation through the creation of citizen committees. Committees in various sectors, such as the health and education sectors, have enabled local populations' voices to be raised.[353] Furthermore, the active citizen participation encouraged by the programme enabled citizens to assume the roles traditionally held by public officials. For instance, some committees could oversee the allocation of public funds in local schools, develop plans to improve the education system, find ways to fund these plans, and monitor schools' attendance.[354] Health committees helped improve the local healthcare system by initiating renovations, monitoring drugs' procurement and revenues, and improving healthcare workers' awareness of sensitive topics such as patients' confidentiality.[355]

The increase in citizen participation through this project had a positive impact on the country's public service delivery and overall governance. Transparency in the management of public funds increased in most communes, thereby reinforcing trust between communities and local governments.[356] Also, another positive outcome was the establishment of 'formal public procurement procedures' and 'internal audits', as well as 'council sessions', organised with the participation of local communities, which provided the space for citizens to be involved in the decision-making process.[357]

1.3.2. Citizen Involvement in Decision-making

1.3.2.1. Background and meaning

[352] Ibid 279.
[353] Ibid 288.
[354] Ibid 280.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ibid 279.
[357] Ibid.

Social accountability programmes create the space for citizens to influence public institutions, especially local ones, directly. It utilises institutional tools, such as 'activating legal actions or claims before oversight agencies,' alongside non-institutional tools, including 'social mobilisations,' to increase the programmes' chances of success.[358] Those non-institutional tools aim to increase citizens' pressure on public institutions to preserve the rule of law and advocate for citizens' rights. The fragility and interdependence of 'legal and political systems of new democracies', especially in the context of developing countries, hinder citizens' ability to ensure public institutions respect the rule of law.[359] Based on its experience, the World Bank developed various strategies to scale up social accountability, through the increase in citizen engagement in public decision-making. This includes promoting 'demand-side governance issues in policy dialogue and country strategies'.[360] This means that the Bank emphasised its support of public sector reforms based on communities' needs and encouraged participatory initiatives in the design of public policies.[361] This also entails demanding greater state transparency by making public information accessible to citizens, thereby enabling their engagement to be productive.[362]

One goal of social accountability programmes is to ensure respect for the rule of law, so increasing the legitimacy of public institutions through a higher level of citizen involvement is a key determinant of promoting more accountability in the public sector. This is because social accountability programmes recognise the importance of citizen involvement in decision-making programmes to preserve citizens' interests and increase legitimacy and inclusiveness in governance.[363] Also, social accountability can be used as a psychological tool influencing public officials to serve citizens' interests in decision-making, by imposing 'symbolic sanctions on their reputation'.[364] Citizen involvement in decision-making serves as a tool to legitimise public institutions by enabling citizens to directly impact how these institutions respond to them. Hence, by making public

[358] Mário Aquino Alves, 'Social Accountability as an Innovative Frame in Civic Action: The Case of Rede Nossa São Paulo' (2014) 25(3) Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations 818, 833.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Agarwal, Sanjay, Heltberg, Rasmus and Diachok, Myrtle, 'Scaling-up social accountability in World Bank operations' (World Bank, May 01 2009) < https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/423211468164948681/scaling-up-socialaccountability-in-world-bank-operations > p 9 accessed 26/06/2025.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid.
[363] Mário Aquino Alves, 'Social Accountability as an Innovative Frame in Civic Action: The Case of Rede Nossa São Paulo' (2014) 25(3) Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations 818, 833.
[364] Diogo Pereira & Ariane Roder Figueira, 'Effects of citizen participation in the social accountability of budget amendments' (2020) 27(1) The Journal of Legislative Studies 30, 37.

decisions more oriented towards citizen needs, citizen engagement in social accountability programmes seeks to solve the 'accountability traps by changing individual cost-benefit calculations of public officials […], fostering a virtuous circle in society […].'[365]

1.3.2.2. Example: Publish What You Pay (Indonesia)

We can take the example of the Publish What You Pay Indonesia initiative, which reinforced citizen involvement in assessing the mining sector's performance in three Indonesian provinces. This initiative was created in response to the mismanagement of public revenues and licensing in the mining sector. It aimed to address the lack of capacity among citizens to organise themselves effectively to track the sector's compliance with national laws and policies and to demand greater accountability from the government.[366]

To improve government performance and reduce the knowledge gap between public service providers and local communities in those provinces, a collaborative approach was used to promote more citizen involvement through participatory mechanisms and training. By providing communities with a platform to learn and demand more accountability through 'group discussions' and 'learning events', this social accountability initiative raised the voices of local communities, enabling citizens to assess the performance of the mining sector and reveal its current challenges.[367] This initiative also enabled local communities to track public funding allocations and collaborate with local representatives to find more effective solutions to the challenges they faced.[368]

A change in the behaviour of all actors involved contributed to the success of this initiative. In fact, in some instances, public service providers and private leaders in the mining sector decided to use more sustainable practices in the long term in response to communities' requests. They recognised the negative effects of mining practices on the environment and the well-being of local communities and decided to support the

[365] Ibid.
[366] Grace Sinaga, Nagia Delicia and Jeffrey M. Thindwa, ' GPSA in Review: Collaborative Social Accountability for Development – 2021-2022' (World Bank Group, January 10 2023) < https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099511001102315321/idu0e11381d2000170499e08ccf02c68a41d3578 > p 24 accessed 26/06/2025.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Ibid.

communities directly impacted.[369] This led to the enforcement of a 'corporate social responsibility legislation'.[370] This initiative showcased the importance and positive impact of citizen involvement in decision-making.[371]

1.3.3. Citizen access to information in social accountability programmes

1.3.3.1. Background and meaning of citizen access to information

The World Bank launched various information campaigns to enhance citizen access to information, thereby promoting informed and active civic participation. Information interventions promoted by the World Bank refer to 'projects and policy measures ranging from simple information provision, such as right-to-information legislation, information campaigns and report cards, to more active steps such as scorecards and social audits, which increase citizens' access to information to influence providers […]'.[372]

Information campaigns can either be passive or active.[373] This depends on whether they focus on simply providing citizens with information about the public sector's performance or going beyond the dissemination of information to increase citizen engagement.[374] This aims to encourage citizens to demand more accountability and greater quality in the public service provision by publicising relevant information about 'rights, standards and performances'.[375] Report cards are a social accountability tool that is more on the 'passive end of the spectrum' as they focus on providing 'comparative information on services'.[376] However, information campaigns can lead to more active participation if citizens use this information to mobilise themselves.[377] Social accountability tools, such as scorecards and social audits, effectively encourage direct citizen participation by facilitating face-to-face interactions between citizens and public service providers.

---

[369] Grace Sinaga, Nagia Delicia and Jeffrey M. Thindwa, ' GPSA in Review: Collaborative Social Accountability for Development – 2021-2022' (World Bank Group, January 10 2023) < https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099511001102315321/idu0e11381d2000170499e08ccf02c68a41d3578 > p 24 accessed 26/06/2025.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Alaka Holla, Margaret Koziol, Santhosh Srinivasan, Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in human development sectors (World Bank Publications, 2011) p8.
[373] Ibid 10.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Ibid.

The 2004 World Development Report emphasised that better access to information motivates citizens to participate more actively in improving the quality of public services.[378] The report stressed that informed citizens can use information about public sector performance and 'redress channels' to influence policymakers and public service providers.[379] Several information campaigns conducted, demonstrated positive outcomes when it comes to the benefits of disseminating public information in developing countries with low to middle income to increase citizens' active participation.[380] Hence, social accountability programmes aim to provide citizens with accurate and relatable knowledge of public affairs, thus enabling them to participate more effectively.[381] Capacity building enables citizens to acquire skills for engaging in discussions about public service delivery issues. This is especially important for marginalised groups whose voices are often overlooked.[382] In addition, for social accountability initiatives to be successful, the transparency of governments is essential, alongside the dissemination of information that can be 'analysed and then publicly used to hold decision-makers to account'.[383] For example, the government's capacity to enforce access-to-information laws within the 'political and institutional context' could facilitate the development of citizen-centred policies. These policies will enable citizens to access information regarding their rights, thereby supporting social accountability programmes.[384]

Furthermore, the World Bank's practice of social accountability highlights the need to present information in a relatable and straightforward manner to serve its purpose of supporting civic action.[385] As citizens may only sometimes be able to obtain and understand complex information on public affairs, social accountability enables information to be disseminated by public officials transparently and simply for all citizens to benefit from it. This is because the success of social accountability initiatives lies in the degree to which citizens are exposed to clear and transparent information that is easily accessible for them to utilise.[386]

---

[378] Alaka Holla, Margaret Koziol, Santhosh Srinivasan, Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in human development sectors (World Bank Publications, 2011) p 12.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Ibid.
[381] E. Kay M. Tisdall, 'Conceptualising children and young people's participation: examining vulnerability, social accountability and co-production' (2017) 21(1) The International Journal of Human Rights 59, 65.
[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Ibid.
[385] Pieternella Pieterse, 'Citizen feedback in a fragile setting: social accountability interventions in the primary healthcare sector in Sierra Leone' in Disaster, Special Issue: Humanitarian Governance (2019) 43(2) 132, 135.
[386] Sam Hickey & Sophie King, 'Understanding Social Accountability: Politics, Power and Building New Social Contracts' (2016) 52(8) The Journal of Development 1225, 1229.

1.3.3.2. Example: Information Campaigns in Indonesia

We can take the example of information campaigns in Indonesia, which aimed to increase the population's awareness of specific education reforms.[387] The reforms targeted were 'the introduction of school committees', to monitor the implementation of the 2005 'national school grant program' funding 'public and private schools on a per-student basis'.[388] In 2009, although 86% of parents knew about the reform, only 45% specifically knew about its goals, and merely 10% were actively involved in school committees.[389] Moreover, only 7% of parents had information about the reform's expense report.[390] Consequently, a partnership between the government and the World Bank led to the use of various approaches to increase parents' participation in the programme's monitoring and encourage interactions between school committees' members and local communities.[391]

To achieve its goals, the first tier of the information campaign utilised media outlets to disseminate information on a broader scale.[392] The second tier was geographically limited to local areas, especially in districts. It emphasised increasing local authorities' transparency and accountability. It also reinforced the 'collaboration between schools and parents'.[393] Moreover, the creation of 'districtwide social events' enabled the widespread dissemination of information related to the programme, strengthened the relationship between teachers and parents, and used the media for advocacy campaigns.[394] The third tier of this information campaign successfully established channels to disseminate accessible information that was shared on a daily basis.[395] For instance, regular texts were sent to parents about the programme.[396] Parents also received school letters regularly containing information on the programme's implementation and the outcomes of school meetings.[397]

[387] Alaka Holla, Margaret Koziol, Santhosh Srinivasan, Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in human development sectors (World Bank Publications, 2011) p 59.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid 60.
[390] Ibid.
[391] Ibid.
[392] Ibid.
[393] Ibid.
[394] Ibid.
[395] Ibid.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Ibid.

Conclusion

From the 1990s, the World Bank's idea of governance and development evolved from a focus on economic growth towards the realisation of the importance of sociopolitical factors in the long-term development of poorer countries. Initially, governance was viewed in a simplistic, state-centred manner, where the Bank focused primarily on economic factors affecting the stability of developing countries. However, this perspective shifted to emphasise the importance of citizens in holding states accountable. From this shift emerged social accountability, an approach used by the World Bank to increase citizen participation, citizen engagement in public decision-making, and citizen access to information. This approach seeks to enhance government accountability to constituents and improve local public sector performance, despite some programmes, such as information campaigns, having a national impact. Social accountability programmes use various tools to increase active citizenship beyond elections, as illustrated by the multiple examples in this chapter. This chapter introduced the Bank's perspective on social accountability, tracing its evolution and underscoring its purpose of reinforcing three key themes: citizen participation, citizen engagement in decision-making, and citizen information. The chapter lays the foundation for clarifying the definition of social accountability in this thesis, the relevance of the World Bank in promoting and implementing social accountability programmes, and the key themes of these programmes. According to the Bank, this short route to accountability is believed to be more effective in ensuring sustainable development and empowering citizens due to its collaborative perspective. This is not supported by various authors who analysed the implementation of these programmes. The next chapter will provide us with more information on the effectiveness of the World Bank's practice of social accountability in enhancing domestic good governance. This literature review offers a critical perspective of social accountability practice beyond the Bank's analysis, addressing its limitations within the domestic political context.

CHAPTER 2: LITTERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Building on Chapter 1, which focused on social accountability and its purpose in the domestic political system of developing countries, this chapter is dedicated to a literature review addressing the effectiveness of social accountability programmes. The chapter highlights the factors that make social accountability more or less effective while identifying the gaps found within the literature. This will help provide nuance to the World Bank's perspective, ensuring that this thesis develops an argument based on a holistic analysis incorporating multiple viewpoints rather than presenting a one-sided perspective on social accountability. The practice of social accountability resulted in mixed outcomes influenced by various contextual factors, i.e. social, political, and economic elements. The literature cannot conclude with any certainty whether social accountability programmes have been successful or not.

The chapter begins by highlighting how the literature defines social accountability, highlighting the lack of consensus on its scope. The chapter then analyses factors that make the programmes effective, grouping them into social, political, and economic factors that facilitate success. It then presents factors limiting the programmes' effectiveness by grouping them into the abovementioned categories. These insights lead us to draw significant lessons from the literature: 1) Social accountability programmes demonstrated some positive results in terms of citizen participation, improvement of the relationship between the supply and demand sides of domestic governance, and the improvement of the public sector's performance. 2) The pessimistic view of social accountability programmes is due to their context dependence and the discrepancies in the definition of success for these programmes. This thesis challenges the negative interpretations found in the literature and proposes that the current analysis lacks an acknowledgement that domestic political systems in every country are complex systems . This is why the last section focuses on a literature review of complexity and aid, highlighting the characteristics of the linear thinking prevalent among international organisations in this field. This section exposes the limitations of linear thinking in

development aid, the relevance of complexity theory in this field, as well as the benefits of viewing development aid initiatives as operating within complex systems with unique features, which will be described more extensively in the third chapter.

2.1. Overview of the Bank's Practice of Social Accountability

Social accountability is an approach that includes various strategies to enhance citizens' ability to articulate their needs and evaluate public sector performance, ranging from participatory methods to conventional protests and advocacy campaigns. Social accountability programmes aim to support citizens and civil society organisations in effectively addressing local challenges and demanding more accountability from governments and public service providers. Ultimately, the goal would be an overall 'equitable and just society.'[1] This perspective, supported by various authors, aligns with the Bank's view that enhancing citizens' ability to hold their government accountable, beyond voting, can help make the state more responsive to their needs.[2] The consensus in the literature is that social accountability is not a one-size-fits-all approach. However, it has been shown to yield positive results in mobilising citizens for effective activism, strengthening relationships among all involved parties, and encouraging local governments to expand localised social accountability initiatives for a broader national impact.[3]

The discussion on combining long and short routes to accountability has grown, as there is a better understanding that both vertical and horizontal channels are essential for demanding increased accountability from power-holders. Short routes promote a more active citizen participation and mobilisation to directly influence public institutions outside of formal channels. This aims to encourage citizens to put more pressure on public service providers through results assessments, which means that citizens can monitor the performance of the public sector, provide feedback, and verify its implementation.[4] In contrast, long routes to accountability encompass traditional accountability mechanisms, such as elections, top-down approaches to hold public officials accountable, and bureaucratic mechanisms that oversee public service providers.[5] Tailoring social

[1] Joseph Yaw Asomah, 'What role do social accountability actors play in resisting media capture in sub-Saharan Africa? Evidence from Ghana' (2022) 43(8) Third World Quarterly 2025, 2027.
[2] Chandana Alawattage and John De-Clerk Azure, 'Behind the World Bank's ringing declarations of "social accountability": Ghana's public financial management reform' (2021) 78Critical Perspectives on Accounting 1, 24.
[3] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > p 32 accessed 26/06/2025.
[4] Qaiser M. Khan, Jean-Paul Faguet, Christopher Gaukler, and Wendmsyamregne Mekasha, Improving Basic Services for the Bottom Forty Percent : Lessons from Ethiopia (World Bank Publications, 2014) p 25.
[5] Frida Boräng and Marcia Grimes, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects', in Andreas Bågenholm, Monika Bauhr, Marcia Grimes, and Bo Rothstein (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government* (OUP, 2021) 268, 270.

accountability interventions to the context in which they are implemented, while targeting both the demand and supply sides of governance, demonstrated more success than solely empowering citizens.[6] Taking the example of the Philippines, where this dual approach led to better results for public providers and health sector users, Waddington et al. noted the importance of 'top-down political will' and public service providers' capacity to effectively respond to citizens' needs.[7] Therefore, political will is essential for ensuring the sustainability of social accountability programmes.[8]

This raised the discussion on the legitimacy of the short route to accountability. The idea that demanding accountability cannot depend solely on a group of actors, namely citizens, because of the significance of governmental responsiveness for the success of participatory initiatives, prompts a discussion on whether a short route to accountability actually exists. This highlights the discussion around integrating both short and long routes to accountability, as some argue that shorter routes should not be considered more effective than longer ones. Vloeberghs and Bergh explained that neither short routes nor longer routes have, as isolated variables, led to improved governance.[9] Hence, neither the focus on citizen mobilisation to monitor state performance nor solely concentrating on elections has effectively promoted democracy, particularly in developing countries. Concerning long routes to accountability, the 'size or complexity of the bureaucracy' limits the effectiveness of the institutional oversight of public officials.[10] Simultaneously, the effectiveness of shorter routes for demanding accountability is influenced by the various actors involved, the environment in which they interact, and the overall condition of the political system in a country. For instance, high corruption can lead 'self-interested individuals' to derail even well-conceived oversight procedures.[11] Therefore, diverse factors influence the outcomes of each route to demand accountability.

Critics of the World Bank's short route to demand accountability pointed out the shortcomings of social accountability programmes in addressing the diverse range of actors involved in governance, particularly those from the private sector. This perspective

[6] Hugh Waddington et al. 'Citizen engagement in public services in low-and middle-income countries: A mixed-methods systematic review of participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability (PITA) initiatives' (2019) 15(1-2) Campbell Systematic Reviews 1, 18.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 7 accessed 26/06/2025.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

was also supported by some donors who also stressed the need for increased private sector involvement in public services and policymaking at a broader level.[12] This critique also echoes other perspectives advocating for a reduction in the focus on national governance, due to the depth of connections between actors at the national, regional, and global levels of governance. Ruppen and Brugger have emphasised the importance of global governance dynamics in influencing social accountability programmes.[13] This is primarily attributable to the involvement of various actors whose roles can overlap across different sectors, the diversity of governance systems, and the rapid changes that can happen at the global level, all of which can affect national contexts.[14] This thesis considers that involving private actors in social accountability programmes could undermine their original purpose, which aimed to empower civil actors and enhance government responsiveness. This is because private actors may have interests that do not align with those of local populations. Additionally, this thesis will focus solely on the significance of domestic governance, as the World Bank's programmes primarily operate at local and national levels. While external dynamics involving international relations and other aspects of globalisation have relevance to every local context, they will not be addressed in this chapter. This thesis focuses on intrastate dynamics, taking local governments, national governments, citizens and civil society organisations as the primary actors of social accountability programmes.

There are various perspectives on the role of social accountability in the political system. The literature highlighted that the practice of social accountability does not necessarily consider the relationship between political analysis and its relevance for engagement strategies.[15] This is explained by the fact that the Bank's perspective of social accountability tends to be too 'simplistic' and 'apolitical', placing too much emphasis on a binary understanding of 'supply versus demand' or 'state versus citizen'.[16] Hence, there is a need to go beyond this simplified conceptualisation of social accountability towards a more comprehensive understanding of pro-accountability actors.[17] This can be achieved by promoting a 'coordinated approach' involving actors from various sectors,

[12] Désirée Ruppen and Fritz Brugger, '"I will sample until things get better – or until I die." Potential and limits of citizen science to promote social accountability for environmental pollution' (2022) 157World Development 1, 3.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Désirée Ruppen and Fritz Brugger, '"I will sample until things get better – or until I die." Potential and limits of citizen science to promote social accountability for environmental pollution' (2022) 157 World Development 1,3.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

emphasising a 'sandwich strategy' to effectively resolve low accountability traps.[18] Moreover, the political society plays a critical role in the success of social accountability projects.[19] However, when social accountability becomes too embedded in the political system by being overly concerned with political debates, it can lose its ability to enforce accountability.[20] Hence, it would be difficult to defend that social accountability should remain apolitical, as this could lead to the preservation of 'existing power hierarchies and limiting the scope for critical evaluation of prevailing reform agendas'.[21] This thesis considers social accountability a politically oriented approach that aligns with the World Bank's liberal, or in some views, neoliberal agenda, making it inherently challenging for programmes to remain apolitical.

An interesting discussion within the literature regards the scope of social accountability programmes. Alawattage and Azure explained that social accountability is a strategy that economically short-circuits the state by bypassing a democratically elected government.[22] This perspective views social accountability as a 'pure economic version of accountability' that relies on the notion of 'client power', which they find questionable.[23] The 'client power' concept describes citizens' ability to influence their governments, positioning them as clients of public services rather than mere citizens.[24] The issue with the idea of 'client power' is the fact that the term 'client' is more market-oriented and more suited to the Bank's economic perspective than the citizens' political role.[25] Furthermore, the notion of 'client power' overrides national governments' sovereignty by prioritising a 'market sovereignty of private capital', promoting neoliberal values.[26] The political orientation of the World Bank, having been explained in the previous chapter, makes it impossible to use the Bank's understanding of social accountability without acknowledging the political values that might come with adopting this approach. This thesis contends that citizens participating in social accountability programmes are not diminished in their citizenship, but rather more empowered. Social accountability

[18] Ibid.
[19] Derick W. Brinkerhoff and Anna Wetterbeg,'Gauging the Effects of Social Accountability on Services, Governance and Citizen Empowerment' (2015) 76(2) Public Administration Review 274, 275.
[20] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025 p 6.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Chandana Alawattage and John De-Clerk Azure, 'Behind the World Bank's ringing declarations of "social accountability": Ghana's public financial management reform' (2021) 78 Critical Perspectives on Accounting 1, 26.
[23] Ibid 27.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

programmes challenge the conventional understanding of citizenship, often linked to an individual's ability to vote. Instead, they aim to engage citizens more broadly and enhance their influence beyond elections.

Discussions about social accountability raise significant questions regarding the roles of various actors in these programmes. On the one hand, there is a focus on the influence of citizens and civil society on public institutions. For example, Joshi and Houtzager define social accountability as the ongoing collective engagement of different actors within civil society, aimed at enhancing the state's accountability in delivering public services.[27] On the other hand, there is an emphasis on states as the leading actors able to enforce accountability according to citizens' needs. Brummel, for example, defined social accountability as a horizontal accountability mechanism in which public institutions are accountable vis-à-vis the society.[28] Some definitions also focus more on fragile contexts where there is no democracy or a higher level of political instability. Fox stated that social accountability is particularly important in contexts where societies experience a lack of government responsiveness, or where states are weaker.[29] He considered social accountability an effective mechanism for addressing the lack of accountability in public institutions within fragile settings.[30] We would argue that, per the Bank's definition, citizens and civil society are the main actors in social accountability programmes. In contrast, state actors play the role of providing a supportive environment for social actors to thrive.

Considering the design of social accountability programmes, Fox identified two types: tactical and strategic social accountability initiatives.[31] He explained the importance of promoting strategic approaches over tactical approaches in social accountability programmes. The tactical approach emphasises disseminating information perceived as 'useful and actionable by stakeholders' to foster citizen participation.[32] This approach prioritises citizens as the main actors in social accountability programmes and focuses exclusively on local interventions.[33] Tactical approaches can be problematic, as they are not user-centred due to their unrealistic assumption that disseminating large amounts of

[27] Anuradha Joshi and Peter P. Houtzager, 'Widgets or Watchdogs? Conceptual Explorations in Social Accountability' (2012) 14(2) Public Management Review 145, 150.
[28] Lars Brummel, 'Social Accountability between consensus and confrontation: Developing a theoretical framework for Social Accountability relationships of Public Sector Organizations' (2021) 53(7) Sage Journals 1046, 1053.
[29] Jonathan A. Fox, 'Social Accountability: What does the evidence really say?' (2015) 72 World Development 346, 347.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid 352.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

information is enough to increase citizen engagement.[34] Moreover, they do not consider that citizens might be unable to express their voice due to the 'fear factor', i.e. concern over the consequences of voicing grievances.[35] Without legal empowerment and grievance mechanisms, tactical social accountability initiatives can 'fall short' when increasing citizen participation in some contexts.[36] This presents the challenge of employing a sandwich strategy to ensure citizen participation occurs in a political climate that fosters greater success.

Unlike tactical approaches, strategic approaches recognise the importance of disseminating actionable information to enable citizens to participate more effectively, while also providing incentives and enhancing service providers' ability to respond to citizens' requests. The strategic approach extends beyond local initiatives for broader impact, enhances coordination among citizens and stakeholders, and promotes both vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms.[37] Fox explained that a 'sandwich approach' is the best strategy to make social accountability more effective, as it combines teeth and voice, i.e. institutional capacity and citizen capacity, to counter the low accountability challenges 'embedded in both state and society'.[38] This perspective faced criticism for advocating a 'top-down reasoning', despite Fox's recognition of the essential role of 'pressure from below' in numerous accountability campaigns.[39] Another criticism of this perspective is that in some regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the question is not to promote top-down facilitation of citizen mobilisation but rather to 'ensure that when pressure builds from below, there will be receptive openings at the top […]'.[40] This is because social accountability programmes are viewed as avenues to harness citizen frustration as a tool for 'socio-political transformation', rather than as tools used by governments to initiate change.[41] In challenging contexts, a top-down approach to implementing social accountability initiatives would prioritise state actions over empowering citizens. This focus may

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid 353.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid 352.
[38] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 13 accessed 26/06/2025.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

inadvertently perpetuate the same patterns that initially hindered effective state accountability.

This section demonstrated that perspectives within the literature differ regarding how social accountability should be defined, who the main actors should be and which strategies should be used to make the initiatives effective. The next section will focus on analysing the practice of social accountability. It will review the effectiveness and limitations of social accountability following its implementation. The factors explaining the success and limitations of the programmes can be grouped into three categories: social, political and economic.

2.2. Analysing the causes of the effectiveness of the practice

2.2.1. Social Factors Facilitating Successful Programmes

Citizen's will and capacity to participate are vital to the success of social accountability programmes. This is because their participation is tied to 'individual and collective capacities, including knowledge, skills, rights awareness, confidence and social capital', promoting a more productive engagement with state actors and public service providers.[42] Social accountability mechanisms, such as social audits, prioritise increasing citizen participation by involving citizens in the design of community-driven development programmes.[43] Hence, citizens play a major role in holding governments accountable. Various factors facilitate effective citizen participation in social accountability programmes.

The literature emphasises that social accountability programmes work better when citizens are empowered to participate, provided they have access to accurate information about the public sector performance. This also includes citizens being more knowledgeable about their rights, entitlements, responsibilities and resources. A culture of 'active participation in civic life' can turn individuals into more responsible citizens as they become empowered with 'civic education' to understand their entitlements and

[42] Anil B. Deolalikar Shikha Jha and Pilipinas F. Quising, 'Governance in Developing Asia: Public Service Delivery and Empowerment' (The Asian Development Bank And Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015) p 232.
[43] Ibid 231.

duties.[44] Many social accountability programmes promote awareness campaigns to inform citizens about their rights regarding public sector performance standards. Hence, these initiatives are often paired with information campaigns to increase citizen knowledge and 'establish the basis for citizen action'.[45] Information campaigns facilitate the success of social accountability initiatives due to their ability to disseminate actionable and relatable public information, which increases citizens' empowerment and participation.[46]

Informed citizens tend to be more impactful in social accountability programmes, especially when monitoring the performance of public providers, as they can use this information to develop ideas that benefit their communities. This can also raise their awareness of services they may not have been able to access. Information campaigns in social accountability programmes have had some positive results in different contexts, such as the 'increased immunisation of children under five years, increased utilisation of services such as general outpatient care, antenatal care, and family planning, reduced waiting time and providers' absenteeism, improved management of facilities, increased use of medical equipment (thermometer), [and] increased child weight for age and reduced under-5 mortality rate'.[47]

Citizens play a crucial role as direct beneficiaries of social accountability programmes. They are at the forefront of monitoring public sector performance, ensuring that the government utilises public resources according to their needs. This enables citizens and civil society organisations to engage directly in public decision-making. To facilitate this direct engagement, social accountability programmes create formal public spaces that democratically facilitate discussions between citizens and public officials.[48] Furthermore, in social accountability programmes, local governments are viewed as an extension of citizens' collective interests, thus the importance of empowering citizens to hold their local government accountable beyond 'conventional mechanisms'.[49] The scope of citizen

[44] Jason Nkyabonaki, 'Youths' Engagement in Social Accountability: A Case of Toangoma Ward in Temeke Municipal Council, Dar es Salaam' 2019 00(0) Journal of Asian and African Studies 1, 11.
[45] Doreen Nico Kyando, 'Social accountability initiatives in the Delivery of public services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic literature review' (Institute of Development Policy, June 2022) < https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/ad52f6/195405.pdf > p 10 accessed 26/06/2025.
[46] Ibid 18.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Jose Dias and Tassiana Tomé, 'Inverted State and Citizens' Roles in the Mozambican Health Sector' in Erica Nelson, Gerald Bloom and Alex Shankland (eds) *Accountability for Health Equity: Galvanising a Movement for Universal Health Coverage* (2018) 49(2) IDS Bulletin 35, 36.
[49] Martin Ugbudu, 'Citizen Initiatives and Social Accountability in the Nigerian Local Government System: A Study of Benue State' (2013) 8(1) Socialscientia Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities 85, 89.

action is determined by existing power dynamics and contextual factors related to the economy, the culture and the social structures in each community.[50] Citizen action is embedded within the environment's economic, cultural, and social realities, highlighting the importance of citizens having a good understanding of their roles for their actions to be impactful.[51] Knowledgeable citizens have a greater impact on public authorities during social accountability programmes as they familiarise themselves with the experience of 'getting answers' and 'being' answered.'[52]

Inclusiveness in citizen participation is essential for successful social accountability programmes. Regularly monitoring the inclusiveness of local marginalised groups, ensuring the civil side had no 'connections with local authorities', and promoting the representation of people from all political parties, including those opposing the current government, proved effective in certain settings.[53] This is because social accountability programmes are more effective when they include citizens from diverse backgrounds, amplifying the voices of marginalised groups whose interests are often overlooked.[54] This provides underrepresented community groups with easier access to information and creates platforms for them to give feedback on public service delivery, empowering them to express their needs and participate actively.[55] Many empirical studies on social accountability practices have demonstrated positive outcomes, including increased citizen participation from low-income backgrounds, which has led to improved access to information.[56] The evidence highlighted that informed citizens, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, demonstrate higher levels of political and civic engagement during participatory initiatives.[57] For instance, a social accountability initiative in Delhi led to higher voter turnout and more informed candidate choices when citizens were 'equipped with pre-election report cards on incumbent performance and candidates qualifications'.[58] Other programmes, such as the Newspaper campaign in Uganda,

[50] Jean-Benoit Falisse and Hugues Nkengurutse, 'Citizens Committees and Local Elites: Elite Capture, Captured Elites, and Absent Elites in Health Facility Committees' (2022) 34 The European Journal of Development Research 1662, 1664.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Colin Anderson, 'Understanding accountability in practice: Obligations, scrutiny, and consequences' in the author (ed) Development Policy Review (2023, John Wiley & Sons Ltd) p 15.
[53] Dr Eng Netra, 'Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia' (2015) 19 Cambodia Development Review 1, 4.
[54] Abu Elias Sarker and Mostafa Kamal Hassan, 'Civic Engagement and Public Accountability: An Analysis with articular reference to Developing Countries' (2010) 15(2) Public Administration & Management 381, 388.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Evan S. Lieberman, Daniel N. Posner, and Lily L. Tsai,' Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya' (2013) 60 World Development 69,70.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

showed that providing information about local public service providers' allocation of public funds substantially impacted citizen participation and engagement.[59]

The quality of information published has to be understandable, actionable, and relatable to citizens to ensure active participation and engagement in decision-making. The success of social accountability programmes relies on citizens' capacity to hold public service providers to account, which requires them to be informed and responsible. However, the literature agrees with the fact that providing greater access to information in social accountability programmes is tied to its integration into intricate processes of 'comprehension, action, and response.'[60] This means that citizens must be able to convert data into meaningful information, comprehend that information, articulate their demands, and convey them to the relevant authorities in public institutions.[61] Once released, the information held by citizens will only lead to a 'meaningful participation' if they are aware of the importance of their role in governance and if they and the civil society can organise themselves. Oduor stressed the importance of the media in social accountability programmes, as they play a crucial role in relaying information related to the public sector in a way that can empower citizens at various levels.[62]

The literature also noted that a success factor in social accountability initiatives is the capacity of civil society to mobilise citizens effectively. Civil society organisations are crucial in amplifying citizen voices and empowering them through inclusive, participatory, and people-centred approaches in social accountability programmes. They are also a significant 'organised force' that can confront local governments in participatory initiatives to increase citizen participation, identify issues, prioritise and find effective solutions, and provide 'labour and financial contributions'.[63]

In addition, another success factor relates to citizens' ability to scale up the results of the local interventions. The ability of civil actors to scale up local successes to 'respective institutional hierarchies' can lead them to gain more support, because micro-level advances are 'easily undone' without backing from the supply side actors at the national

[59] Evan S. Lieberman, Daniel N. Posner, and Lily L. Tsai,' Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya' (2013) 60 World Development 69, 71.
[60] Désirée Ruppen and Fritz Brugger, '"I will sample until things get better – or until I die." Potential and limits of citizen science to promote social accountability for environmental pollution' (2022) 157World Development 1, 2.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Chrispine Oduor, Institutionalising Social Accountability in Devolved Governance (Institute of Economic Affairs,2015) p 24.
[63] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4) Public Administration And Development 307, 309.

level.[64] Civil society organisations play a vital role in facilitating this support, as they can reinforce the 'connections and commitment between citizens and officials' by increasing 'reciprocal trust' and actors' proximity and problem-solving ability.[65] The flexible nature of social accountability enables civil actors to frequently adjust their demands based on emerging challenges.[66] This makes programmes more attuned to contextual realities, leading citizens to actively monitor public officials, while simultaneously improving their trust and relationship with the state based on its responsiveness.[67]

The use of both cooperation and confrontation techniques to encourage collaboration among actors has been shown to enhance success in social accountability programmes.[68] Cooperation techniques enable citizens and civil society organisations to train public service providers on how to serve them effectively, while allowing public officials to predefine and anticipate obstacles to the implementation of the solutions negotiated.[69] In contrast, confrontation techniques involve publicly exposing controversial behaviours by local officials or organising protests to demand accountability and drive change.[70] Arguments supporting confrontational techniques suggest that there must be some level of sanctions for the poor performance of public service providers following bottom-up scrutiny and pressure, as demonstrated in specific contexts, such as Mozambique or Pakistan.[71] In these regions, citizens' complaints about staff misconduct in health centres and schools led to 'some degree of punishment', either making individuals take responsibility for their shortcomings or prosecuting them.[72]

Combining cooperation and confrontation approaches in social accountability also includes using the media and the private sector to support and scale up the programmes' agenda. Both methods can effectively mobilise actors by facilitating direct interactions between citizens and those in power, while also using the media to put more pressure on these power holders.[73] A partnership between the public and the private sector can help

[64] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 181 accessed 26/06/2025.
[65] Ibid 179.
[66] Ibid 184.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid 181.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Colin Anderson, 'Understanding accountability in practice: Obligations, scrutiny, and consequences' in the author (ed) Development Policy Review (John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2023) p 13.
[72] Ibid 14.
[73] Malkia M. Abuga, Wanja Tenambergen and Kezia Njoroge, 'Strengthening Social Accountability Process in Community Health Systems: Exploring the Role of Community Actors in Africa and South Asia: Systematic review' (2022) 12(4) International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 409, 415.

to increase the 'strength of coalitions that promote social accountability activities'.[74] Only using cooperation tactics could lead to 'co-optation', as civil actors may become more exposed to manipulations or threats from public officials, while prioritising confrontation tactics could lead to citizens being repressed and sidelined.[75] Cooperation tactics can lead to more success by combining bottom-up participation with top-down responsiveness. For instance, in some contexts, creating legitimate local community teams, such as Local council leaders or a Village Health Team, helped widen the scope of social accountability activities, especially when local governments supported them.[76] In India, social accountability mechanisms, such as public hearings, which require responsiveness from public service providers and local governments, have increased the scope of collective action in local communities.[77]

The literature emphasised the importance of localised development initiatives, instead of wide-scale or national initiatives. Localised development programmes are presented as more beneficial than 'universal programmes' because targeted interventions make more effective use of limited resources.[78] By focusing on smaller groups of the population that need assistance the most, these programmes can address specific needs more effectively, whereas universal programmes distribute resources more broadly, which may include individuals who may not require them.[79] In targeted or localised interventions, more emphasis is given to observable factors influencing 'potential beneficiaries' and alleviating barriers to effectiveness and transparency, such as budget constraints, limited resources, poverty and the crowding-out effects of private actors.[80] Moreover, localised interventions tend to be more effective, as it is easier to persuade local authorities than those at larger scales. However, the practice of social accountability stressed that authorities were more responsive in contexts where citizen engagement could lead to high-scale protests.[81] This highlights the significance of localised interventions that can

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 March 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 175 accessed 26/06/2025.
[76] Malkia M. Abuga, Wanja Tenambergen and Kezia Njoroge, 'Strengthening Social Accountability Process in Community Health Systems: Exploring the Role of Community Actors in Africa and South Asia: Systematic review' (2022) 12(4) International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 409, 415.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Nazaire Houssou et al. 'How Can African Governments Reach Poor Farmers with Fertiliser Subsidies? Exploring a Targeting Approach in Ghana' (2018) 55(9) The Journal of Development Studies 1983, 1983.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 March 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 177 accessed 26/06/2025.

be expanded through different channels like social media or larger traditional media coverage to generate valuable impact.[82] Scaling up social accountability programmes was also supported by some authors, arguing that social accountability programmes were hindered by 'small-scale and focus on implementing a single project with tangible results', which do not enhance advocacy efforts or promote collective action.[83] This thesis argues that improving sustainability in social accountability programmes is essential for increasing their impact and ensuring long-term effectiveness in public service delivery. Concentrating solely on localised or targeted interventions without considering how to extend their effects to other sectors or geographic areas, may diminish the significance of the improvements made by these programmes over time. This could result in the reemergence of old patterns, ultimately wasting the resources and efforts invested in mobilising citizens and civil society organisations.

The next section introduces political and economic factors that facilitate success in social accountability programmes.

2.2.2. Political and Economic Factors Facilitating Successful Programmes

In 2011, the World Bank recommended implementing social accountability in environments with a 'favourable socio-political' and legal context, a willing government with the required capacity to support the initiatives, and a robust civil society and opportunities to institutionalise social accountability.[84] This was explained by the fact that a state's institutional capacity impacts the success of social accountability. This is especially important when implementing social accountability mechanisms, such as 'social audits or public expenditure tracking', that require financial and technical resources.[85] Therefore, an open and responsive government is essential for achieving greater success. Evidence indicates that while it is important for people to be aware of their rights and entitlements and to participate actively, this alone is insufficient if government institutions do not facilitate the realisation of these rights.[86] This thesis

[82] Ibid.
[83] Jason Nkyabonaki, 'Youths' Engagement in Social Accountability: A Case of Toangoma Ward in Temeke Municipal Council, Dar es Salaam' 2019 00(0) Journal of Asian and African Studies 1, 10.
[84] Elvin Shava and Betty C Mubangizi, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms in a Decentralised State: Exploring Implementation Challenges' (2019) 8(2) African Journal of Governance and Development 74, 75.
[85] Ibid 80.
[86] Esbern Friis-Hansen and Signe Marie Cold Ravnkilde, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms and Access to Public Service Delivery in Rural Africa' (Danish Institute For International Studies December 2013) <

contends that this perspective excludes many developing countries that could benefit from social accountability programmes but lack the institutional and financial capacity to implement them effectively. At the same time, these countries are a key factor in the Bank's adoption of social accountability.

Good governance is essential in determining the success of social accountability initiatives. States' capacity and willingness to enforce sanctions and reinforce the rule of law have been identified as necessary to the successful implementation of social accountability.[87] This is because of the need for government transparency. Central governments must be transparent to encourage citizen engagement, as transparency is a prerequisite to public monitoring of the public sector's performance.[88] In addition, the degree of citizens' empowerment is shaped by how governments rule the country, which influences citizens' day-to-day experiences with their state and citizens' ability to react to the state's misconduct.[89] Hickey and King emphasised the importance of assessing the level of commitment, capacity, and democratic values within the political society, as these factors significantly impact the outcomes of social accountability implementation.[90] The political society is an umbrella term that includes individual political actors, government employees, official political parties, public institutions, and the legal frameworks regulating the relationship between governments and populations.[91] The literature stresses the importance of implementing social accountability programmes in democratic settings, where governments rule in a way that facilitates citizens' engagement.

The level of responsiveness of public institutions, meaning whether they demonstrate more or less passivity when faced with active citizen participation, can significantly impact the effectiveness of social accountability in improving governance and empowering citizens.[92] When governments respond and show accountability, it sends a positive message to citizens, indicating that there's hope for some form of accountability

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265300089_Social_Accountability_Mechanisms_and_Access_to_Public_Service_Delivery_in_Rural_Africa > p 83 accessed 26/06/2025.

[87] Babken Babajanian, 'Promoting empowerment? The World Bank's Village Investment Project in Kyrgyzstan' (2015) 34(4) Central Asian Survey 499, 510.

[88] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4) Public Administration And Development 307, 310.

[89] Sam Hickey & Sophie King, 'Understanding Social Accountability: Politics, Power, and Building New Social Contracts' (2016) 52(8) The Journal of Development 1225, 1231.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Derrick W. Brinkerhoff and Anna Wetterberg, ,Gauging the Effects of Social Accountability on Services, Governance and Citizen Empowerment' (2015) 76(2) Public Administration Review 274, 276.

and that their demands are being acknowledged 'reasonable'.[93] This promotes 'positive progress in itself' because accountable governments enable public mismanagement to face consequences and encourage greater citizen participation time.[94] Public information campaigns supported by governments can enhance citizen participation by ensuring access to information about the management and availability of public resources. In 1996, a social accountability initiative was launched in Uganda following the mismanagement of resources dedicated to schools in disadvantaged communities. This led the government to organise a 'newspaper campaign' to disseminate public information related to the monthly funds transferred to districts.[95] The government's transparency encouraged citizen participation in the monitoring of public funds.[96] The 2002 follow-up survey demonstrated the benefits of this initiative, as it showed a reduction in public resource capture and an increase in student enrolment in schools. This campaign sparked a 'bottom-up route of citizen enforcement' complemented by reforms in the educational system.[97]

The evidence of the practice of social accountability shows that active citizenship must be paired with the government's willingness to implement social accountability programmes effectively. Public service providers must acknowledge citizen requests and have the competence, resources and willingness to respond positively.[98] Only then can an effective collaboration between governments and citizens lead to positive outcomes for social accountability.[99] The effectiveness of voice lies in the collective character of the initiatives, for instance, through lobbying or protesting.[100] The evidence indicates that the World Bank's short path to demand accountability relies on the responsiveness of long-route actors, thus the importance of adopting a sandwich strategy in the programmes. This necessitates enhancing the short route to accountability while encouraging state actors and public service providers to be more responsive.[101] Providing a space for citizens and

[93] Colin Anderson, 'Understanding accountability in practice: Obligations, scrutiny, and consequences' in the author (ed) Development Policy Review (2023, John Wiley & Sons Ltd) 1, 11.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Frida Boräng and Marcia Grimes, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects,' in Andreas Bågenholm, Monika Bauhr, Marcia Grimes, and Bo Rothstein (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government* (Oxford University Press, 2021) p 7.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Désirée Ruppen and Fritz Brugger, '"I will sample until things get better – or until I die." Potential and limits of citizen science to promote social accountability for environmental pollution' (2022) 157 World Development 1, 2.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Muhammad Hamza Abbas and Vaqar Ahmed, 'Challenges to Social Accountability and Service Delivery in Pakistan' (2016) 46(4) Social Change 560, 561.
[101] Doreen Nico Kyando, 'Social accountability initiatives in the Delivery of public services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic literature review' (Institute of Development Policy, June 2022) < https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/ad52f6/195405.pdf > p 6 accessed 26/06/2025.

public officials to discuss issues in public service delivery in formal spaces also allows democracy to be expanded while encouraging citizens to be more involved in 'the debate regarding their city and their rights.'[102] In Mutoko, a Zimbabwean district, participatory initiatives improved the state-citizen relationship as interactions were based on 'mutual understanding', and the local government was responsive enough to create the space for an open dialogue with citizens and civil society organisations.[103]

The collaboration and cooperation between actors in leadership positions, citizens and civil society organisations lead to more success in social accountability programmes. Actors in leadership positions are important in providing citizens and civil society organisations the opportunity to be involved and influential in governance processes. This role is tied to their ability to release accurate information on the public sector performance to enable a 'meaningful participation'.[104] This collaborative approach promotes a reduction in corruption, improved governance, citizen empowerment, and the higher representation of marginalised groups, while making public service providers and policymakers more responsive to citizens' requests.[105] This can be observed in programmes aimed at specific policy reforms following malpractices in the public sector. The example of the social accountability initiative in Bangladesh, which led to the Union Parishad Act of 2009, illustrates this point. This reform aimed to enhance citizen participation and engagement in decision-making within their rural local government by promoting their involvement in designing, implementing, and monitoring local projects. Citizens were mobilised within diverse committees to hold public service providers accountable.[106] This led to the Union Parishad Act, an example of the institutionalisation of social accountability through political reform that engages citizens. This programme enabled the reformulation of local governments' budgets based on citizens' priorities while involving citizens at every step of the project's formulation, implementation and monitoring.[107]

---

[102] Mário Aquino Alves, 'Social Accountability as an Innovative Frame in Civic Action: The Case of Rede Nossa Sao Paulo' (2014) 25(3) Voluntas 818, 836.
[103] Esbern Friis-Hansen and Signe Marie Cold Ravnkilde, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms and Access to Public Service Delivery in Rural Africa' (Danish Institute For International Studies December 2013) < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265300089_Social_Accountability_Mechanisms_and_Access_to_Public_Service_Delivery_in_Rural_Africa > p 46 accessed 26/06/2025.
[104] Chrispine Oduor, Institutionalising Social Accountability in Devolved Governance (Institute of Economic Affairs,2015) p 24.
[105] Frida Boräng and Marcia Grimes, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects,' in Andreas Bågenholm, Monika Bauhr, Marcia Grimes, and Bo Rothstein (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government* (Oxford University Press, 2021) p 3.
[106] Miskat Jahan, 'Understanding Social Accountability at Rural Local Governance in Bangladesh and the Way Forward: In the Case of Union Parishad' (2023) 17(4) South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics 36, 40.
[107] Ibid.

Collaboration in social accountability programmes is essential to ensure participants' cooperation and 'prosocial' behaviour. Citizens are more inclined to engage in politics when governments provide the optimal institutional environment. Corrupt institutions diminish citizens' willingness to engage politically, while an open government that includes citizens in the decision-making process encourages collective action at the local level.[108] The example of a social accountability initiative in Andhra Pradesh, India, showed the importance of governments being open enough to allow citizens to monitor public services effectively. This initiative proved successful in detecting corruption in the local government following citizens' mobilisation and collaboration with public authorities.[109] Hence, a collaborative approach can lead to greater success in social accountability initiatives by facilitating negotiations when contexts require the participation of multiple groups of actors with varying levels of hierarchy.

Therefore, successful social accountability programmes create a platform for citizens and local governments to openly discuss and address the needs of their communities, thereby helping to alleviate issues related to the conduct of public service providers. Abuga et al. explained that some social accountability initiatives successfully reduced absenteeism and improved public service providers' performance in the healthcare system.[110] Social accountability programmes promote the collaboration of citizens, public service providers, and policymakers to improve the 'quality of services' or the overall performance of the public sector.[111] Successful initiatives involved citizens and providers in addressing public service delivery issues and monitoring the implementation of solutions.[112] Thus, service providers must be responsive to citizens' expectations, and citizens must be 'actively involved in changing the conditions that affect […]' them.[113]

The practice of social accountability highlighted the importance of promoting 'effective reforms of existing services' to make governments and public service providers more transparent about their actions. [114] Citizens and civil society organisations can only

[108] Frida Boräng and Marcia Grimes, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects,' in Andreas Bågenholm, Monika Bauhr, Marcia Grimes, and Bo Rothstein (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government* (Oxford University Press, 2021) p 5.
[109] Ibid 9.
[110] Malkia M. Abuga, Wanja Tenambergen and Kezia Njoroge, 'Strengthening Social Accountability Process in Community Health Systems: Exploring the Role of Community Actors in Africa and South Asia: Systematic review' (2022) 12(4) International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 409, 410.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Giri Prasad Panthi, 'Social Accountability for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health' (2016) 7 Himalayan Journal of Sociology & Anthropology 13, 16.

effectively participate in public decision-making with access to information.[115] Hence, social accountability programmes gained more success in some contexts when governments progressively adapted their approach to policymaking towards greater transparency and the inclusion of civil actors. The example of Indonesia, where the government progressively incorporated different aspects of social accountability in its 'policy and regulatory frameworks', has been used to illustrate this argument.[116] For instance, the 2008 Public Information Law No.14 reinforced citizen access to public information, promoted the dissemination of this information by the government and state-owned enterprises, and specified 'the types of information that should be published publicly and the procedures to obtain such information.'[117] This helped citizens become more aware of public sector information channels, illustrating the positive effects of government transparency in making information accessible.

The discussion surrounding the role of external actors highlights their positive impact on enhancing collaboration between states and civil society, while also exerting pressure on states to increase their accountability. Intermediaries, such as international donors and local civil societies, can enhance state-society relations by building trust between citizens and the state, using persuasion and subtle coercion to ensure accountability. This is because international donors may have more 'resources and legitimacy' to support the sustainable implementation of the programmes. Because of their greater capacity, these actors can help define long-term goals beyond short-term programmes. This can help to strengthen the relationships between actors and ensure their objectives are aligned beyond temporary initiatives.[118]

On the other hand, social accountability programmes influence government responsiveness, as they would likely not have demonstrated this level of responsiveness, particularly in contexts of low institutional capacity.[119] Thus, an iterative, cause-and-effect relationship exists between governments' responsiveness and increased public scrutiny. It is essential to verify the government's approval of social accountability

[115] Ibid 18.
[116] Santi Kusumaningrum et al., 'Social Accountability in Health in Indonesia: an Overview of Legislation' (The World Bank, May 2018) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/789741538765771215/pdf/Social-Accountability-in-Health-in-Indonesia-An-Overview-of-Legislation.pdf > p 2 accessed 26/06/2025.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 186 accessed 26/06/2025.
[119] Colin Anderson, 'Understanding accountability in practice: Obligations, scrutiny, and consequences' in the author (ed) *Development Policy Review* (John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2023) p 11.

principles by analysing various sectors before implementing a program, to enhance the likelihood of success.[120] A willing government allows local citizens and civil society organisations to engage freely and mobilise themselves.[121] Therefore, the success of social accountability initiatives relies on governments' facilitating citizen participation by ensuring a 'careful design and effective outreach, and support broader policies to allow citizen participation, enforce the rule of law and ensure inclusive access to services'.[122] This opened the discussion around implementing social accountability initiatives before elections, as governments might be more open to 'listen and be responsive to local demands.'[123] This thesis recognises the positive impact of social accountability initiatives when implemented in favourable contexts. However, it argues that conducting programmes only in such environments may not yield valuable lessons regarding their sustainability and robustness.

This introduces the discussion around factors facilitating success in contexts where governments might not be willing to be held accountable. Social accountability programmes had some positive results in holding public service providers accountable in cases where formal mechanisms to demand accountability from governments were 'generally weak or non-existent.'[124] This evidence shows that participatory democracy, supported by social accountability programmes, was more effective in amplifying citizens' voices in socially divided contexts. In these contexts, traditional representative democracy was often politically manipulated, and election outcomes did not accurately reflect the needs of local communities.[125] Therefore, social accountability programmes have proven effective in reinforcing the social contract between states and societies, particularly where traditional horizontal mechanisms fail to enhance public sector performance.[126]

However, breaking the 'low accountability traps' by using 'virtuous cycles' to foster citizen empowerment and create an enabling environment for citizen participation is also necessary for social accountability programmes to be effective.[127] Low accountability

[120] Dr Eng Netra, 'Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia' (2015) 19 Cambodia Development Review 1, 4.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Anil B. Deolalikar Shikha Jha and Pilipinas F. Quising, 'Governance in Developing Asia: Public Service Delivery and Empowerment' (The Asian Development Bank And Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015) p 231.
[123] Dr Eng Netra, 'Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia' (2015) 19 Cambodia Development Review 1, 4.
[124] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4) Public Administration And Development 307, 308.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Abu Elias Sarker and Mostafa Kamal Hassan, 'Civic Engagement and Public Accountability: An Analysis with articular reference to Developing Countries' (2010) 15(2) Public Administration & Management 381, 388.
[127] Jonathan A. Fox, 'Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?' 2015(72) World Development 346, 353.

traps refer to situations where horizontal oversight agencies and people participating in social accountability programmes are politically manipulated, creating vicious cycles in which no one is indeed held accountable.[128] These vicious cycles can spread from local spheres to the entire political system, negatively affecting the possibility of free and fair elections.[129] The example of some social accountability programmes in Asia shows that increasing decentralisation, having better leadership, and sensitising communities and public service providers have proved effective in increasing actors' capacity and organisation.[130] Combatting low accountability traps requires citizen capacity building, which should be encouraged by governments to make it inclusive and democratic.[131] This can be achieved by encouraging citizen engagement that goes beyond limited consultation or temporary programmes, to create a sustainable, people-centred impact on public services.[132]

The literature also stressed the importance of sanctions in increasing the success of social accountability interventions. Social and formal sanctions can act as a motivating tool in specific circumstances to improve public service delivery. They can improve the conduct of public service providers in social accountability programmes because transparency and accountability mechanisms are more effective and sustainable when backed by formal, strong sanctions. A combination of social and formal sanctions, employed through confrontational tactics, coerced the government into collaboration in certain contexts. Some authors recommended 'harder forms of accountability' such as sanctions, compensation or remediation, as opposed to 'softer forms of accountability' to improve the public service delivery.[133] This argument warrants further exploration in the literature. Still, it could be highly relevant in contexts where governments are unwilling to participate in softer forms of accountability, only using cooperation.

Some economic factors also made it possible for social accountability programmes to gain more success. State capacity is essential to the success of social accountability programmes. Implementing social accountability programmes requires various resources in terms of 'time, money, expertise, patience and commitment' that facilitate the

[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Giri Prasad Panthi, 'Social Accountability for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health' (2016) 7 Himalayan Journal of Sociology & Anthropology 13, 17.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Tom Aston and Grazielli Faria Zimmer Santos, 'Social Accountability and Service Delivery Effectiveness: What is the Evidence for the Role of Sanctions?'(2022) GPSA Working paper 4 p 8.

enforcement of the rule of law and determine 'clear rules for civil society participation'.[134] For states to create an environment that encourages citizen mobilisation and establishes effective legal and institutional frameworks for social accountability programmes, sufficient resources are essential.

Social accountability has proven effective in some cases, particularly when combined with information campaigns, in enhancing citizens' knowledge of managing public financial resources, even in situations with low institutional capacity. In Uganda, for instance, a social accountability initiative enabled the creation of a public expenditure tracking survey in 250 public primary schools in 1996.[135] This survey enabled the collection of 'data on grants received by individual schools', which was then compared with the data published by the central government.[136] Having access to this information, citizens found that '72 per cent of the grants did not reach the schools for the period of 1993-1995', which helped to establish the amount of 'capture by local authorities'.[137] After publishing this information, citizen mobilisation led to a 20 per cent reduction in grant capture and overall corruption.[138]

Social accountability programmes have proved successful when supported by specific social, economic and political circumstances. However, the literature highlighted that some social, political and economic factors hinder the effectiveness of the programmes. The next section will analyse those factors.

2.3. Analysing Factors Limiting the Programmes' Effectiveness

2.3.1. Social Limitations

Various social factors hindered the success of social accountability programmes, such as cultural challenges, the lack of inclusiveness of marginalised groups, power asymmetries within communities and illiteracy.

[134] Anil B. Deolalikar Shikha Jha and Pilipinas F. Quising, 'Governance in Developing Asia: Public Service Delivery and Empowerment' (The Asian Development Bank and Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015) p 244.
[135] Florian Schatz, 'Fighting Corruption with Social Accountability: A Comparative Analysis of Social Accountability Mechanisms' Potential To Reduce Corruption in Public Administration' (2013) 33(3) Public Administration and Development 161, 166.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.

Due to cultural challenges in some contexts, social accountability programmes showcased little to no improvements in increasing citizen participation. Cultural heterogeneity can limit citizen participation when specific cultural beliefs prevent access to certain public services, resulting in no improvement.[139] In certain contexts, cultural beliefs limited citizens' access to healthcare facilities. This restriction impeded citizen participation and collective action, making it challenging to amplify local populations' voices and develop appropriate solutions to community issues.[140] Hence, 'social-cultural heterogeneity' prevented civil actors' mobilisation and limited their influence on public service providers.[141] In fact, social accountability initiatives were less successful in contexts where cultural beliefs negatively impacted citizens' motivation to participate, due to the 'fear of reprisal for speaking out'.[142] Netra explained that improving social accountability in certain contexts necessitates addressing these cultural obstacles. These include citizens' reluctance to make demands and their fear of reprisals, which are exacerbated by excessive public sector involvement and the insensitivity of service providers to significant social issues.[143] This thesis argues that improving the effectiveness of the programmes when facing cultural challenges may be achieved through a long-term implementation strategy. However, this will require additional time and resources to analyse the populations involved, understand their concerns, and empower them to recognise the importance of their participation in addressing their challenges and holding local service providers accountable. This may not be feasible within the time constraints of social accountability programmes.

Inclusiveness alone does not always ensure success in specific contexts. Engaging civil society organisations in mobilising, empowering, and supporting citizens is vital for many social accountability initiatives. However, evidence indicates that the mere presence of these organisations does not consistently guarantee the proper representation of disadvantaged groups communities.[144] Local civil society organisations play a crucial role in counterbalancing the shortcomings of representative democracy.[145] However, they can

[139] Doreen Nico Kyando, 'Social accountability initiatives in the Delivery of public services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic literature review' (Institute of Development Policy, June 2022) < https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/ad52f6/195405.pdf > p 24 accessed 26/06/2025.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Georges Danhoundo, Khalidha Nasiri and Mary E. Wiktorowicz, 'Improving social accountability processes in the health sector in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review' (2018) 18 BMC Public Health 1, 6.
[143] Dr Eng Netra, 'Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia' (2015) 19 Cambodia Development Review 1, 4.
[144] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4)Public Administration And Development 307, 310.
[145] Ibid.

reinforce 'patterns of inequality and social exclusion'.[146] This happens when public institutions collaborate mainly with the 'more visible community elites', often overlooking disadvantaged groups.[147] Incorporating civil society organisations into social accountability programmes necessitates recognising the diversity of civil society within each context and effectively selecting organisations that address various issues and populations.

The lack of inclusiveness in social accountability programmes limited their positive impacts in specific contexts. Focusing on countries experiencing endemic poverty, Saker and Rahman explained that social accountability still needs to improve to raise the participation of marginalised populations.[148] They highlighted high levels of social inequality, political instability and general poverty as critical factors hindering citizen participation.[149] Inequality and exclusion can represent barriers to active citizen participation.[150] Marginalised and vulnerable groups are limited by their circumstances, which impacts their ability to partake in civic activities.[151] For instance, in the Tanzanian municipality of Ilala, participatory budgeting increased citizens' understanding of the management of local resources and their limited availability, which led them to become 'less critical of local government officials'.[152] Participatory budgeting led to more equity and transparency in managing the public budget, primarily benefiting poorer communities. They also facilitated citizen access to updated information. However, the initiative failed to include other social groups, such as the elderly, youth, or people with disabilities, which did not align with the pro-poor empowerment objectives of the programmes.[153]

Power asymmetries within communities can impact their ability to participate effectively in social accountability programmes. Power asymmetries in this context, refer to class relations or cultural or religious contexts that confer more power to some groups or

[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Abu Elias Sarker & Mohammad Habibur Rahman, 'The Role of Social Accountability in Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Developing Countries: An Analysis with Reference to Bangladesh' (2014) 15 Public Organization Review: A Global Journal 317, 330.
[149] Abu Elias Sarker and Mostafa Kamal Hassan, 'Civic Engagement and Public Accountability: An Analysis with articular reference to Developing Countries' (2010) 15(2) Public Administration & Management 381, 390.
[150] Sam Hickey & Sophie King ,'Understanding Social Accountability: Politics, Power, and Building New Social Contracts' (2016) 52(8) The Journal of Development 1225, 1232.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Esbern Friis-Hansen and Signe Marie Cold Ravnkilde, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms and Access to Public Service Delivery in Rural Africa' (Danish Institute For International Studies December 2013) < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265300089_Social_Accountability_Mechanisms_and_Access_to_Public_Service_Delivery_in_Rural_Africa > p 46 accessed 26/06/2025.
[153] Ibid.

individuals. Traditional structures of authority in certain contexts can hinder the 'free exchange of ideas' within communities, ultimately diminishing citizens' willingness and capacity to demand accountability from public officials.[154] Hence, citizen participation can be 'manipulated from the top' by power holders within a community, making demanding accountability less fair and inclusive.[155] Osaghae explained that in some African contexts, for instance, the civic public participates more actively in formal spaces during participatory initiatives, while what he called the 'primordial public' confines its role within the context of 'family and community life and solidarity networks'.[156] Hence, power asymmetries within communities are accentuated by contextual factors, which affect the mobilisation of human agency, especially among those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Additionally, power asymmetries affect citizens' choices and incentives for participation, but also incentives for power holders to listen to citizens' requests. This is due to the long 'implementation chains' and the various 'individual, interpersonal, institutional, social, cultural, economic' contextual layers that affect dynamics and interconnections among actors.[157] In these contexts, outcomes can follow multiple trajectories, whether intended or not, leading to inconsistencies in social accountability programmes across different settings.[158] This is an analysis of citizen mobilisation in social accountability programmes through the lens of realism.[159] This perspective is significant as it aims to define 'pathways for change' that can arise in different contexts and to clarify the reasons behind some outcomes of social accountability interventions.[160] It also states that interventions should use multiple pathways to get 'desired outcomes' by using 'triggering appropriate mechanisms' matching specific contexts.[161] This aligns with the need to contextualise social accountability initiatives while maintaining flexibility to effectively address local challenges.

[154] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4) Public Administration And Development 307, 309.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Jose Dias and Tassiana Tomé, 'Inverted State and Citizens' Roles in the Mozambican Health Sector' in Erica Nelson, Gerald Bloom and Alex Shankland (eds) Accountability for Health Equity: Galvanising a Movement for Universal Health Coverage (2018) 49(2) IDS Bulletin 35, 38.
[157] Precious Tirivanhu, 'A realist assessment of the facilitation process for improving social accountability by community based organizations' (2020) 37(6) Development Southern Africa 953, 956.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Precious Tirivanhu, 'A realist assessment of the facilitation process for improving social accountability by community based organizations' (2020) 37(6) Development Southern Africa 953, 956.
[161] Ibid.

Other social contextual limitations affect the effectiveness of social accountability programmes, such as asymmetric social stratification. An 'asymmetric social stratification' refers to social divisions based on factors including religious, economic, and political backgrounds.[162] It also involves socio-demographic conditions, including sex or caste, and other social conditions, that can prevent citizens from voicing their concerns about the local public service delivery within their community.[163] Therefore, asymmetric social stratification impacts citizen participation and ability to make demands and hold governments accountable, based on different factors, such as 'age, income, religion, caste, ethnicity and gender'.[164] In some contexts, for instance, the population did not feel confident enough to express their needs and concerns, make collective decisions, or even speak freely against 'conservative norms'.[165] Moreover, illiteracy is a contextual factor that can negatively impact the success of social accountability initiatives. This is because citizen illiteracy can hinder their understanding of rights.[166]

This highlights a crucial point in the literature: informed citizens might not engage actively or take significant steps to improve public service delivery. An initiative in Uttar Pradesh aiming to enhance local citizens' access to information by forming a village committee to discuss the quality of education in nearby schools, illustrates this point. This case showed 'no impact on parental involvement in the school system'.[167] A social accountability initiative in Benin demonstrated that increasing the dissemination of information via radio to promote citizen participation and share details about the quality of local public service delivery was insufficient to enhance 'community-level participation'.[168] Therefore, even with improved access to information, citizens do not engage more or utilise this information to hold public officials accountable.

Citizen capacity building plays a vital role in determining the success or failure of social accountability programmes. The evidence shows that social accountability programmes help empower citizens to be involved in the policy-making process, as well as in the

[162] Vong Mun, 'What Makes Local Authorities Responsive? Lessons from Two Social Accountability Projects in Cambodia' (2017) 21(3) Cambodia Development Review 8, 10.
[163] Giri Prasad Panthi, 'Social Accountability for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health' (2016) 7 Himalayan Journal of Sociology & Anthropology 13, 36.
[164] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4)Public Administration And Development 307, 309.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Vong Mun, 'What Makes Local Authorities Responsive? Lessons from Two Social Accountability Projects in Cambodia' (2017) 21(3) Cambodia Development Review 8, 10.
[167] Evan S. Lieberman, Daniel N. Posner, and Lily L. Tsai,' Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya' (2013) 60 World Development 69,70.
[168] Ibid.

monitoring of public service facilities.[169] However, their ability to reach this result relies on both citizens' will and ability to engage in the process and 'institutional capacity to respond to citizen's voice'.[170] Increasing citizen engagement only sometimes enhances the quality of service delivery. This is particularly true when social accountability programmes do not focus on services through which citizens and local public service providers can directly interact.[171] Additionally, effective engagement requires 'support and buy-in from both citizens and 'front-line' public service workers.'[172] Citizen engagement initiatives also proved ineffective when citizens were not collectively involved in the implementation.[173] Hence, citizens' capacity to engage in collective action and a supportive political environment are necessary for more success. Due to the programmes' highly variable results, many authors advocate for a sandwich strategy that includes bottom-up active participation and top-down responsiveness.[174]

Focusing on citizens as the main actors in social accountability programmes can only be beneficial with the support of governments. The evidence shows that social accountability initiatives are valuable in facilitating negotiations between public service providers and citizens to improve the quality of public services. However, the interventions were limited due to insufficient support from the public services supply side and inconclusive interactions between citizens and providers, which hindered positive, citizen-centred outcomes and weakened the social contract.[175] Therefore, the literature argues that citizen participation in social accountability programmes is limited when states are unwilling to accommodate their requests or are too weak to respond. Fox stressed the issue of relying on citizen empowerment without the support of horizontal institutional accountability. This is because only an enabling environment and 'coordinated efforts to bolster the state's capacity to respond' can effectively increase the impact of citizen participation.[176]

---

[169] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) paper number 671 https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > p 34 accessed 26/06/2025.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Hugh Waddington et al. 'Citizen engagement in public services in low-and middle-income countries: A mixed-methods systematic review of participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability (PITA) initiatives' (2019) 15(1-2) Campbell Systematic Reviews 1, 1.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Intissar Kherigi and Tasnim Chirchi, 'Social Accountability in Tunisia: Processes of Learning in Civic Innovation Between 2011 and 2021' in Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh (eds.) Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, *and Lebanon* (2024, Palgrave Macmillan Cham) p 85.
[175] Hugh Waddington et al. 'Citizen engagement in public services in low-and middle-income countries: A mixed-methods systematic review of participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability (PITA) initiatives' (2019) 15(1-2) Campbell Systematic Reviews 1, 1.
[176] Joseph Yaw Asomah et al. 'What Influences the Propensity to Report Corruption to Relevant State Authorities? Evidence From Ghana' 00(2024) Journal of Asian and African Studies 1, 5.

To achieve high levels of citizen participation, it is essential to create an enabling environment that includes effective 'structures and laws' defining citizens' rights and outlining the scope of their engagement.[177] This will allow citizens to hold officeholders accountable, as citizen participation is deeply rooted in the 'institutional and political context.'[178]

It is believed that increasing citizen participation and mobilising them for collective action can prompt a response from the state; however, evidence indicates that this is not always the case. In some instances, social accountability programmes were successful in raising citizens' voices and enabling them to give feedback on the efficiency of public service performance across various sectors. They, however, failed to exert a real influence on the behaviour of public service providers. This was demonstrated in the Village Investment Project in Kyrgyzstan. This project was a community-driven initiative aimed at empowering local communities to demand greater accountability from their local governments. It sought to establish a 'bottom-up development model' as an alternative to ineffective horizontal accountability, thereby increasing the influence of residents over local public institutions.[179] The results showed that the project did not increase the local government's accountability.[180] It neither empowered the most vulnerable communities nor effectively addressed elite capture and corruption, which hindered effective resource management and tracking.[181] This indicates that a collaborative approach is often more effective, as social accountability initiatives can fail without institutional arrangements or commitment through comprehensive reforms to combat corruption and clientelism.[182]

Social accountability assumes that increasing citizen access to information related to the public sector's performance will increase citizen participation. It also assumes that the fear of being publicly exposed for public resource mismanagement and corruption will make governments more accountable and responsive to social pressure. The evidence suggests that these assumptions are not necessarily accurate, as some contexts have shown no improvement in states' responsiveness or citizen participation despite increased access to public information. This could be explained by social factors such as power

[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Babken Babajanian, 'Promoting empowerment? The World Bank's Village Investment Project in Kyrgyzstan' (2015) 34 Central Asian Survey 499, 499.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid 510.
[182] Ibid 511.

asymmetries, the exclusion of vulnerable communities, illiteracy, and other factors related to asymmetric social stratification. Exposing the public sector's issues through increased citizen mobilisation is not enough to trigger accountability from public sector providers. Various examples, such as social accountability initiatives in Latin America, demonstrated that citizen empowerment to demand accountability requires increased capacity, tackling socio-cultural challenges, and government responsiveness.[183] With more capacity and an enabling environment, citizens can mobilise more effectively, thus putting more pressure on governments to 'take such initiatives seriously.'[184] The discussions about creating a supportive environment for effective social accountability programmes lead to considerations of political and economic factors that influence their implementation.

2.3.2. Political and Economic Limitations

Contextual political factors, such as a governmental lack of capacity and will, power dynamics, performative accountability, and political manipulation, limit the effectiveness of social accountability programmes.

Governments' lack of capacity can negatively impact social accountability programmes. Capacity should be understood in terms of resources, competence, and ability to establish and preserve harmonious relationships with other stakeholders.[185] The evidence shows that the government's lack of resources and competence limits the effectiveness of the programmes.[186] Considering the state's role in promoting or obstructing the implementation of social accountability programmes, it is crucial to evaluate the strength of public institutions. This includes assessing the state's ability to delegate power to local governments and establish reliable legislative and judicial processes to oversee public affairs.[187] However, in some cases, strongly institutionalised contexts were not as conducive to successful interventions compared to more fragile political settings, as

[183] Eng Netra, Vong Mun and Hort Navy, 'Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia' (Cambodia Development Resource Institute, June 2015) < https://cdri.org.kh/storage/pdf/wp102e_1617792667.pdf > p 2 accessed 26/06/2025.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Sam Hickey & Sophie King ,'Understanding Social Accountability: Politics, Power, and Building New Social Contracts' (2016) 52(8) The Journal of Development 1225, 1231.
[186] Ibid 1532.
[187] Babken Babajanian, 'Promoting empowerment? The World Bank's Village Investment Project in Kyrgyzstan' (2015) 34(4) Central Asian Survey 499, 511.

power holders in the first type of settings could have viewed the interventions as a threat to a set decision-making process. Meanwhile, weak states could perceive social accountability interventions as complementary to public service delivery, using participatory activities to reinforce states' legitimacy without contesting the 'established hierarchy'.[188] This creates a challenge in implementing social accountability programmes in contexts where states are not receptive to external intervention, due to the perceived robustness of their institutions.

Both citizens and public service providers play an important role in successfully implementing social accountability programmes.[189] However, facilitating access to public information without ensuring the state's capacity to undertake effective action after being confronted by citizens has been counterproductive.[190] When public service providers lack the understanding and training required to implement social accountability programmes, the 'knowledge and information asymmetry' increases.[191] This asymmetry, in turn, negatively influences citizens' ability to hold public service providers accountable.[192] It can also make governments less open to informed citizenship. In some contexts, studies of social accountability initiatives have shown that governments' responses to the increased dissemination of information about the public sector were very aggressive.[193]

Conversely, evidence indicates that social accountability initiatives with significant government involvement were not more effective. Horizontal mechanisms are often recommended to support social accountability programmes, especially when governments are open to citizens' participation.[194] This is because, in some cases, public service providers ignored citizen feedback on public services, believing that this feedback did not provide a comprehensive assessment of the services.[195] However, this argument is not necessarily backed by the evidence. Despite providing various opportunities for

[188] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Conclusion: Social Accountability Initiatives as Sites of Relational Power' in the authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon*, (EADI Global Development Series, 2024) p 177.
[189] Malkia M. Abuga, Wanja Tenambergen and Kezia Njoroge, 'Strengthening Social Accountability Process in Community Health Systems: Exploring the Role of Community Actors in Africa and South Asia: Systematic review (2022)12(4) International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 409, 416.
[190] Anuradha Joshi, 'Reading the Local Context: A Causal Chain Approach to Social Accountability' (2014) 45(5) IDS 23, 24.
[191] Malkia M. Abuga, Wanja Tenambergen and Kezia Njoroge, 'Strengthening Social Accountability Process in Community Health Systems: Exploring the Role of Community Actors in Africa and South Asia: Systematic review (2022)12(4) International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 409, 416.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Evan S. Lieberman, Daniel N. Posner, and Lily L. Tsai,' Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya' (2013) 60 World Development 69, 71.
[194] Abu Elias Sarker and Mostafa Kamal Hassan, 'Civic Engagement and Public Accountability: An Analysis with articular reference to Developing Countries' (2010) 15(2) Public Administration & Management 381, 389.
[195] Jana C. Hertz, 'Social Accountability in Cross-Sectoral Service Delivery: the Kinerja Public Service Delivery Program in Indonesia' in Anna Wetterberg, Derick W. Brinkerhoff, Jana C. Hertz *Governance and Service Delivery: Practical Applications of Social Accountability* (RTI Press, 2016) p 94.

collaboration between service users and service providers, some social accountability programmes have not been effective in making service providers more responsive and accountable, nor in empowering citizens to voice their needs.[196] In Kinerja, for instance, an analysis of some social accountability initiatives showed an asymmetry in perceptions between service users and service providers, as 'only 5 out of 15 public delivery sites' agreed with citizens' right to hold public service providers accountable.[197] Whereas in '12 out of 15 sites', citizens acknowledged their rights to hold public service providers accountable, which shows a gap between citizen engagement and the responsiveness of public service providers.[198]

The government must provide an enabling environment for successful programmes, especially facilitating citizen participation. Advocacy initiatives, or initiatives reinforcing citizen participation, are based on the mobilisation of citizens to demand more accountability in the public sector through 'informal pressures'.[199] This can include confronting public institutions or individual public officeholders about their performance. Civil protests and civil disobedience are examples of these initiatives. They depend on various factors, including the ability of civil organisations to mobilise citizens and engage with the political society, the willingness of political actors to concede to citizens' demands, the state of the relationship between citizens and local governments, and the degree of power asymmetries among actors. An ideal environment for civic engagement features a government that is open to sharing public information and has established a legal framework that supports citizen involvement in monitoring the state's performance and the collaboration between the government and its citizens.[200] In contrast, an unfavourable environment lacks such support from the government, making it difficult for civil actors to mobilise and engage with government officials.[201]

Power asymmetries limit citizens' ability to effectively influence public service providers. The effectiveness of social accountability initiatives lies in states' collaboration through 'institutional arrangements', which would create the environment

[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Social Accountability in Review: From Conceptual Models to Grounded Practices of Civic Innovation' in the authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (EADI Global Development Series, 2024) p 33.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.

to encourage citizen participation to hold their local service providers accountable.[202] In some contexts, existing power asymmetries negatively impacted the effectiveness of citizen committees' monitoring, due to the power gap between them and public service providers.[203] In Burundi, for instance, citizen committees required the support of local public officeholders to 'narrow' this power gap.[204] 'Underlying social and power dynamics' can encourage the lack of accountability of power holders, especially in formal spaces.[205] In contrast, less formal spaces facilitated negotiations between civic actors and service providers and were more 'promising' as they were not crafted and more organic.[206] This is because informal spaces allowed citizens to express their needs more freely through 'scrutinising questions,' which was not the case in formal spaces where power dynamics created distance between citizens and public officials.[207] The example of a social accountability intervention in Myanmar serves to illustrate this point. This initiative aimed to create a formal platform for citizens to question public service providers while enabling the providers to explain their performance during designated sessions. One issue with the sessions is that questions were 'carefully worded' and screened before the discussion by the non-governmental organisation regulating the process, and they were submitted to the providers to prepare their answers.[208]

In discussions about power asymmetries, the issue of reversed roles emerged, highlighting instances where citizens assume the roles typically held by governments. Social accountability programmes have been criticised for promoting an inversion or a transfer of 'functions and responsibilities from the state to civil society'.[209] In some cases, the responsibility to implement and execute local government plans was delegated to the civil society and citizens, who eventually started to 'provide services or perform responsibilities previously considered as duties of the state'.[210] Dagnino called this phenomenon a 'perverse confluence' and explained that the inversion of roles and the

[202] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Social Accountability in Review: From Conceptual Models to Grounded Practices of Civic Innovation' in the authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (EADI Global Development Series, 2024) p 33.
[203] Jean-Benoit Falisse and Hugues Nkengurutse, 'Citizens Committees and Local Elites: Elite Capture, Captured Elites, and Absent Elites in Health Facility Committees' (2022) 34 The European Journal of Development Research 1662, 1665.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Colin Anderson, 'Understanding accountability in practice: Obligations, scrutiny, and consequences' in the author (ed) *Development Policy Review* (2023, John Wiley & Sons Ltd) p 14.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid 10.
[209] Jose Dias and Tassiana Tomé, 'Inverted State and Citizens' Roles in the Mozambican Health Sector' in Erica Nelson, Gerald Bloom and Alex Shankland (eds) Accountability for Health Equity: Galvanising a Movement for Universal Health Coverage (2018) 49(2) IDS Bulletin 35, 37.
[210] Ibid.

exploitation of citizen participation can make public institutions and public service providers even less accountable to citizens.[211]

Some social accountability mechanisms have been associated with the emergence of inverted accountability relations. The evidence indicates that some community members took on the responsibility of providing public services. This included building infrastructure and supplying resources, occasionally 'replacing' the local government.[212] This happened after citizens completed community scorecards and provided feedback about their disappointment with the local public health service delivery, but did not see any improvement.[213] This opened discussions around clarifying citizens' and states' roles to create a favourable environment where a 'sense of accountability can flourish.'[214]. This conversation is crucial as this thesis considers social accountability a diagonal approach to demand accountability, necessitating collaboration among all supply and demand actors. This highlights the importance of evaluating the state-citizen relationship, as a dismissive government can cause citizens to take on roles that should not be theirs.

In addition, vulnerable populations are more prone to take up state responsibilities. The rise of 'individualistic and managerial' solutions happens within a 'neoliberal context of a minimalist state.'[215] This means that local citizens with low incomes and disadvantaged backgrounds are more susceptible to assume governmental responsibilities, as they already face challenges in accessing quality services.[216] Therefore, the inconsistencies in the public service provision lead to the implementation of 'depoliticised micro-interventions', which do not accommodate 'deeper structural power asymmetries', social inequalities and injustices.[217] This limits the democratising potential of social accountability initiatives, as the power imbalances and issues of reciprocity in the state-citizen relationship remain unaddressed.[218]

Social accountability initiatives can successfully expose the public sector's malpractices, but don't always reduce them. Hence, the practice of social accountability shows mixed results after revealing public service providers' mismanagement, as making information accessible does not always ensure citizen mobilisation or lead to changes in the behaviour

[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid 44.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid 46.
[215] Ibid 38.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.

of public officials.[219] The example of the 1994 Bangalore Citizen Report Card shows that despite the positive impact of information campaigns, the outcomes are not always favourable depending on 'agency leadership'.[220] Unsuccessful outcomes occur more frequently in social accountability programmes that use confrontational tactics to demand accountability, as these do not enhance communication between local governments and communities.[221]

Performative accountability is a political factor hindering the success of social accountability programmes. The literature distinguishes between 'effective scrutiny' and 'felt accountability obligations,' highlighting the resources needed for each in terms of space, capacity, and opportunity.[222] Public scrutiny can be categorised into three main areas: when citizen monitoring occurs within a formal space defined by power holders, when it takes place within a space that encourages local citizen-state interactions, and when citizens mobilise themselves to monitor the performance of public officials.[223] Social accountability initiatives aim to promote effective public scrutiny by allowing citizens to mobilise themselves and assess states' performance. It is believed that states understanding the consequences of citizen participation can make them more accountable, thereby increasing the effectiveness of social accountability programmes.[224] However, there is a distinction between responsiveness and true accountability; the responsiveness of authorities may result in them becoming more discreet in mismanagement, rather than prioritising the needs of citizens.[225] This indicates that the government's apparent responsiveness during social accountability interventions may stem from factors beyond bottom-up pressure or accountability; therefore, it is essential to distinguish between responsiveness and accountability.[226]

Political manipulation in social accountability programmes is a significant factor that hinders their success. The adaptive nature of social accountability allows for this approach to be sometimes 'bent' to suit various political interests, leaving space for

[219] Frida Boräng and Marcia Grimes, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects,' in Andreas Bågenholm, Monika Bauhr, Marcia Grimes, and Bo Rothstein (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government* (Oxford University Press, 2021) p 7.
[220] Ibid 6.
[221] Elvin Shava and Betty C Mubangizi, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms in a Decentralised State: Exploring Implementation Challenges' (2019) 8(2) African Journal of Governance and Development 74, 85.
[222] Colin Anderson, 'Understanding accountability in practice: Obligations, scrutiny, and consequences' in the author (ed) *Development Policy Review* (2023, John Wiley & Sons Ltd) p 1.
[223] Ibid 7.
[224] Ibid 1.
[225] Ibid 11.
[226] Ibid.

'obstruction and open washing' to rise.[227] In multiple contexts, civil actors were concerned with authorities' ability to tokenise social accountability interventions or manipulate them to serve their political interests.[228] Fox referred to this behaviour as 'open washing', which entails actors appearing transparent while concealing their abuse of power without accountability.[229] Vloeberghs and Bergh described this behaviour as 'isomorphic activism', which refers to authorities welcoming participatory initiatives while undermining the democratic process of these initiatives due to a clientelist context.[230] This means corrupt public officials can use social accountability programmes to pursue political interests or as a 'public relations strategy' to avoid losing their 'ill-gained privileges'.[231] Therefore, social accountability can be manipulated to suit political interests in a way that attracts public sympathy. This highlights the ethical issues in implementing social accountability programmes, as the interests of local political elites can impede citizen engagement in public affairs.[232] Some public officials, for instance, reinforce 'intentional opacity in hierarchies of decision-making', challenging opportunities for productive negotiations between power holders and civil actors.[233]

Political challenges in states can impact their economic conditions, potentially hindering social accountability initiatives. Political willingness is also essential to citizen engagement because demanding accountability is more likely to be successful if the central government is committed and has the political will to be accountable.[234] Transparency and willingness promote 'good leadership and effective supervisory mechanisms' that facilitate citizen participation in public affairs.[235] Variables such as clientelism, corruption or ineffective decentralisation can limit the effectiveness of social accountability, as they make deliberative spaces inactive.[236] This can be explained by the fact that, despite opportunities to combat corruption and enhance public scrutiny at the

[227] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Conclusion: Social Accountability Initiatives as Sites of Relational Power' in the authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (EADI Global Development Series, 2024) p184.
[228] Ibid 178.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid 185.
[232] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4) Public Administration And Development 307, 315.
[233] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Conclusion: Social Accountability Initiatives as Sites of Relational Power' in the authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (EADI Global Development Series, 2024) 169, 185.
[234] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4) Public Administration And Development 307, 310.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Miskat Jahan, 'Understanding Social Accountability at Rural Local Governance in Bangladesh and the Way Forward: In the Case of Union Parishad' (2023) 17(4) South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics 36, 39.

local level, a lack of political will from central governments can undermine the effectiveness of bottom-up approaches to demand accountability.[237]

Weaker states with lower institutional capacity to enforce social accountability programmes represent significant challenges, as the effectiveness of the programmes depends on the 'very government institutions that are failing as accountability actors in the first place'.[238] Hence, the ecosystem in which social accountability programmes are implemented has to be considered, as it impacts the implementation outcomes. Developing states often lack the institutional context to cater to citizens' needs effectively. This is because new democracies are sometimes developed in fragile contexts with 'interdependent legal and political systems' where citizens individually struggle to demand governments' compliance with the rule of law.[239] Environments where corruption is thriving tend to increase public distrust and protests due to local governments' lack of 'transparency and accountability'.[240] This hampers the effective implementation of social accountability mechanisms, as citizens are not encouraged to mobilise, monitor public service performance, and hold providers accountable.[241] Hence, weaker states tend to lack or mismanage the resources required to respond effectively to citizens' public sector monitoring.[242] Taking the example of three studies in India, Nepal, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda, Abuga highlighted that public providers' unresponsiveness to citizen engagement was linked to a 'lack of financial resources'.[243]

The lack of financial resources can also impact the sustainability of social accountability programmes. Some initiatives created spaces for effective engagement and collaboration between citizens and local governments. However, they failed to make their collaboration's positive outcomes sustainable in the long term due to 'limited funding and

[237] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4) Public Administration And Development 307, 310.
[238] Frida Boräng and Marcia Grimes, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects' in Andreas Bågenholm, Monika Bauhr, Marcia Grimes, and Bo Rothstein (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government* (OUP, 2021) p 13.
[239] Mário Aquino Alves, 'Social Accountability as an Innovative Frame in Civic Action: The Case of Rede Nossa Sao Paulo' (2014) 25(3) Voluntas 818, 833.
[240] Elvin Shava and Betty C Mubangizi, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms in a Decentralised State: Exploring Implementation Challenges' (2019) 8(2) African Journal of Governance and Development 74, 81.
[241] Ibid 81.
[242] Frida Boräng and Marcia Grimes, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects' in Andreas Bågenholm, Monika Bauhr, Marcia Grimes, and Bo Rothstein (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government* (OUP, 2021) p 13.
[243] Malkia M. Abuga, Wanja Tenambergen and Kezia Njoroge, 'Strengthening Social Accountability Process in Community Health Systems: Exploring the Role of Community Actors in Africa and South Asia: Systematic review (2022) 12(4) International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 409, 416.

inadequate logistics'.[244] Hence, in contexts where social accountability initiatives are highly dependent on governments with low financial capacity, their ability to improve the quality of local public services was limited.[245]

Corruption significantly hinders the success of social accountability programmes. This is because it allows powerholders to mismanage economic resources that could be used towards citizen mobilisation or to serve citizens' interests generally. Corrupt contexts exacerbate power asymmetries, hindering programmes' effectiveness and increasing powerlessness in local communities.[246] This occurs because corruption exacerbates social inequalities by creating 'informal relations' between certain citizens and powerholders, which prevents communities from freely monitoring the allocation of public resources. Informal 'patronage networks' within political systems limit individuals' access to the resources they need to assert their rights.[247] These political inequalities are echoed at both the community and individual levels, leading people to fear retaliation for opposing the established system.[248] An example of a social accountability programme in Cambodia illustrates this point. The implementation outcomes demonstrated that civil society organisations' range of influence is limited regarding resource mobilisation and overall funding.[249] Due to their reliance on government financing, some civil society organisations often feel powerless in the face of government unresponsiveness or malpractice.[250] This limits their ability to effectively pressure government institutions or create deeper change in the local political context, thereby restricting their capacity to implement social accountability mechanisms.[251] Therefore, in specific contexts, civil society organisations lack the capacity to combat corruption or effectively oversee public resource management, largely due to politically influenced funding sources.[252]

The civil society's financial capacity can also impact the success of the initiatives. This is explained by the fact that working with disadvantaged groups often requires more

[244] Osei-Kufuor et al., 'Assessing the effectiveness of social accountability interventions in selected district assemblies in Ghana' (2024) 10(1) Cogent Social Sciences 1, 10.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Anil B. Deolalikar Shikha Jha and Pilipinas F. Quising, 'Governance in Developing Asia: Public Service Delivery and Empowerment' (The Asian Development Bank And Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015) p 244.
[247] Ibid 250.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Marija Babovic and Danilo Vukovic, 'Social Accountability in Cambodia' (JSRP, August 2014) < https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a089e0ed915d622c00043d/JSRP19-BabovicVukovic.pdf > p 24 accessed 26/06/2025.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.

'resources, time and effort' in participatory initiatives.[253] Hence, the ability of civil society organisations to demand accountability from public officials is frequently limited by the short-term characteristics of the interventions, as civil society organisations depend on funding from international donors who may require building projects to yield instant, observable results. This was demonstrated in various social accountability programmes where an alliance was formed between international donors, central government representatives, and specifically selected non-governmental organisations.[254] They determined how the programmes would be implemented without considering domestic social movements and marginalised populations.[255] This phenomenon, known as 'donor politics', occurs when international donors exploit countries' institutional weaknesses to advance their interests and policy agendas.[256] This approach reinforces high poverty levels, as it does not effectively address the 'persistent neo-patrimonial behaviour' in governments, meaning political systems characterised by clientelism and the mismanagement of public resources to suit political interests.[257]

Additionally, despite efforts to make social accountability programmes socially inclusive, the evidence shows that it is not always evident that they are 'pro-poor'.[258] In various contexts, the programmes mainly mobilised participants from wealthier backgrounds, who were also 'more educated' and from 'more politically connected households'.[259] A meta-analysis of the World Bank's social accountability practice highlighted that participants usually 'belong to ethnic or tribal groups that enjoy higher status' in society, making 'initial conditions such as inequality matter' regarding effective participation and effective outcomes.[260] The lack of inclusion of poorer populations can also be explained by the fact that their mobilisation might take 'more time than existing planning cycles allow' in some cases, thus requiring more resources that local civil society or government might not have.[261] This is even more difficult to achieve for 'grassroots organisations in

[253] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4) Public Administration And Development 307, 310.
[254] Walter Eberlei, 'Accountability in Poverty Reduction Strategies: The Role of Empowerment and Participation' (World Bank, May 1 2007) < https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/965221468778785322/accountability-in-poverty-reduction-strategies-the-role-of-empowerment-and-participation > p 8 accessed 10/03/2022.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Frida Boräng and Marcia Grimes, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects' in Andreas Bågenholm, Monika Bauhr, Marcia Grimes, and Bo Rothstein (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government* (OUP, 2021) 3, 12.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Walter Eberlei, 'Accountability in Poverty Reduction Strategies: The Role of Empowerment and Participation' (World Bank, May 1 2007) < https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-

remote areas' or smaller social movements, which may require more 'time, patience and resources' than national or international non-governmental organisations.[262]

This introduces the discussion around time and its impact on social accountability programmes. Some programmes failed due to limited time and 'strategic expertise'.[263] The time issue concerns the sustainability of social accountability programmes due to their short follow-up period, which prevents them from achieving long-term, traceable impacts.[264] The impact of social accountability programmes is difficult to trace because they are often conducted as scattered pilot studies in various countries.[265] This makes it challenging to comprehensively understand their effects on citizen participation, public sector performance, and the state's legitimacy.[266] The example of the 2011 Deepening Local Democratic Governance Project (DLDGP) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia illustrates this point. Inspired by a successful social accountability initiative in India, this project aimed to enhance citizen access to safe drinking water while advocating for improved solid waste collection in impoverished urban areas and overall basic sanitation. Various social accountability mechanisms were combined in multiple municipalities in the area, such as report cards and low-scale citizen protests, to raise awareness on citizens' rights to 'water and sanitation'.[267] The results of citizen report cards were relayed to public service providers and local governments during a 'public meeting'.[268] No change in local government or public service performance was observed one year after the project ended.[269] One factor explaining the failure of this programme was the lack of responsiveness and formal commitment of national power holders at the end of the programme.[270]

The literature review on the practice of social accountability explained the context-dependence of those programmes, meaning that their success heavily depends on local

reports/documentdetail/965221468778785322/accountability-in-poverty-reduction-strategies-the-role-of-empowerment-and-participation > p 16 accessed 26/06/2025.
[262] Ibid 21.
[263] Georges Danhoundo, Khalidha Nasiri and Mary E. Wiktorowicz, 'Improving social accountability processes in the health sector in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review' (2018) 18BMC Public Health 1, 6.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Esbern Friis-Hansen and Signe Marie Cold Ravnkilde, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms and Access to Public Service Delivery in Rural Africa' (Danish Institute For International Studies December 2013) < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265300089_Social_Accountability_Mechanisms_and_Access_to_Public_Service_Delivery_in_Rural_Africa > p 34 accessed 10/07/2021.
[267] Vong Mun, 'What Makes Local Authorities Responsive? Lessons from Two Social Accountability Projects in Cambodia' (2017) 21(3) Cambodia Development Review 8, 10.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid.

circumstances. This section highlighted the success and limiting factors of social accountability programmes, categorising them into social, political, and economic factors. Key lessons from the literature can be drawn to better understand what is needed for success beyond these identified factors. This thesis argues that, despite the relevance of local factors, the World Bank can, through a better understanding of the domestic political system, define a template for successful programmes. The next section will summarise the major lessons from the literature review on social accountability practice, emphasising the gaps identified in the literature and why social accountability programmes are not a 'lost cause' because of their sensitivity to contextual factors.

2.4. Lessons from the Literature

The evidence on the practice of social accountability remains inconclusive.[271] The literature highlights that various factors in every political context can lead programmes to different trajectories, which do not always reflect the initial objectives. The main lesson from the literature is that social accountability is highly context-dependent; thus, its success is conditioned by 'local factors'.[272] This makes it difficult to establish a clear definition of success.

Factors influencing the sustainability of programmes can be categorised into social, political, and economic aspects. Citizen participation was negatively influenced by factors such as the lack of inclusion of the most vulnerable groups, illiteracy, cultural diversity, gender inequalities, religious beliefs, and power imbalances, which may lead individuals to fear reprisals for engaging in programmes. The failure of states to create an environment that encourages citizen involvement has affected the success of various programmes. This includes a lack of open access to information, insufficient collection of citizen feedback, and inadequate responses to improve the public sector's performance at the local level. Additionally, power asymmetries related to information gaps, the inversion of roles to the detriment of the most marginalised populations, and an overall

[271] Osei-Kufuor et al., 'Assessing the effectiveness of social accountability interventions in selected district assemblies in Ghana' (2024) 10(1) Cogent Social Sciences 1,3.
[272] Malkia M. Abuga, Wanja Tenambergen and Kezia Njoroge, 'Strengthening Social Accountability Process in Community Health Systems: Exploring the Role of Community Actors in Africa and South Asia: Systematic review' (2022) 12(4) International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 409, 410.

weak social contract between states and citizens negatively impacted social accountability initiatives. Economic factors significantly impacted the success of programmes, particularly in poor contexts where governments lacked the financial resources to support implementation. Additionally, civil society organisations often struggled to effectively mobilise citizens, as their activities were influenced by the political implications of their funding sources. The limitations of civil society organisations affected citizen participation; without strong leadership or an active civil society coalition, citizens often lacked the necessary leverage to create real change. Other economic factors, such as poor populations' inability to fully participate and the lack of funding to track the programmes' outcomes in the long term, limited the effectiveness of the programmes. Hence, for programmes to be more successful, they require favourable social, political and economic contexts.

The effectiveness of social accountability initiatives hinges on strong top-down support of bottom-up participation, which enhances local impact and scales up positive outcomes within political systems. This collaboration entails that vertical mechanisms to demand accountability must be integrated with horizontal accountability mechanisms to increase effectiveness. While improvements in citizen empowerment, the state-citizen relationship, government responsiveness, and local public service were noted, the results could have been more significant in some contexts. The evidence indicated that programmes could positively impact citizen awareness of their rights and enhance engagement with public officials; however, they did not always make governments more responsive.

It is essential to emphasise the adaptive nature of social accountability programmes. These programmes adopt a 'learn from failure' approach, continually reassessing and adjusting their interventions based on the specific context. This ongoing process helps prevent the same issues from recurring in future interventions.[273] This thesis argues that, although social accountability programmes aim to learn from mistakes, the new insights are applied in different communities with varying contextual realities. Therefore, the recurrence of the same issues across different case studies highlights the limitations of this approach, as the context-specific nature of the programmes can lead to new paths that diverge from the original objectives. Additionally, the short-term nature of the

[273] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Conclusion: Social Accountability Initiatives as Sites of Relational Power' in the authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (EADI Global Development Series, 2024) p 181.

programmes does not allow for accurate tracking of potential long-term impacts on communities, which can make the process of learning from failure inefficient, as different contexts will present new challenges to adapt to. To be more effective, social accountability programmes require a 'long-term, iterative' approach, encouraging constant experimentation with multiple mechanisms.[274] This is because short-term or 'project-based' approaches are more common and tend to lead actors to focus on 'short-term aims and demonstrate measurable short-term results'.[275]

This literature review raised a major challenge: contextualising social accountability programmes in the political system. The literature highlights the need for programmes to be more adaptive and flexible in various environments and to better anticipate local challenges, ensuring they meet the realities and needs of each context in which they are implemented. Contextualising social accountability indicates that there is no straightforward solution to empower citizens and hold governments accountable, due to the unique political, economic, and social factors present within each political system. Many authors have had a negative view of social accountability programmes, arguing that they have not demonstrated tangible outcomes. The proposed solutions lacked a unified perspective on what makes these programmes effective within the political system, complicating the World Bank's efforts to establish a template for successful programmes. This thesis disagrees with the prevailing negative view in the literature that the present analysis overlooks the complexity of domestic political systems in all countries. With this understanding, this thesis seeks to ascertain whether it is possible to identify successful patterns in social accountability programmes, thereby bridging the gap in the literature. The next section will explore how the literature on development aid and complexity theory informs social accountability. It will begin by addressing the shortcomings of traditional development aid models, which often fail to account for the complexities of the political systems in which they are applied. Additionally, this section will extend beyond the context dependency of development programmes to highlight the significance of complexity theory in this thesis and for aid organisations.

[274] Intissar Kherigi and Tasnim Chirchi, 'Social Accountability in Tunisia: Processes of Learning in Civic Innovation Between 2011 and 2021' in Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh (eds.) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2024) p 85.
[275] Ibid.

2.5. Complexity Theory and Development Aid

The literature review on social accountability programmes' implementation highlights various reasons behind the failure of some initiatives compared to others. Factors such as social, political, and economic conditions are identified as major limitations to their effectiveness in different settings. However, this thesis presents an alternative perspective, aiming to identify patterns of success or failure in development efforts like social accountability. This section provides a comprehensive analysis of how complexity theory is relevant to this study, explaining why development programmes often struggle to create a significant impact within domestic political systems across diverse contexts.

As discussed in Chapter 3, complexity theory has helped scholars in related fields like development theory, understand the limits of traditional models when identifying interconnections among social variables for sustainable change. Grasping complex systems, such as political systems, involves shifting away from predictability and simple solutions towards adopting a more realistic, holistic, and adaptable development approach. The development aid literature often reflects a linear thinking style typical among international organisations. This perspective shapes their traditional methods of addressing challenges in supporting developing countries or tackling global issues. Yet, linear thinking follows patterns that have generally proven ineffective over time. This section begins by outlining what the literature states about linear thinking in the development aid sector. It then examines the difficulties international organisations face in adopting this linear mindset and investigates why development programmes have stagnated, despite years of various strategies. The third part briefly introduces complexity theory as it relates to development aid, with Chapter 3 offering more detailed insights. The fourth part highlights the advantages of viewing development aid initiatives as complex systems with distinctive features, which will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 3. This perspective will help clarify important insights for social accountability programmes, illustrating why complexity theory provides a more accurate and nuanced explanation for programme failures beyond just contextual differences.

2.5.1. Traditional Mental Models of Development Aid Organisations

In its most optimistic and ambitious form, aid seeks to fundamentally transform the global framework of social, economic, and political relationships, shifting the balance in favour of the poor and vulnerable.[276] The Bretton Woods conference established the basis for the linear model that has influenced perspectives on development ever since. It characterised the development process as a 'deterministic, orderly, and predictable process' designed for exporting to 'less fortunate nations'.[277] This was to be achieved through a universal application of principles primarily outlined by international experts, supported by financial aid and free trade.[278] This perspective views development as a process subject to universally applicable deterministic laws. Ramalingam explained that development aid actors are influenced by specific mental models, which shape their worldview and inform their decisions, knowledge-sharing abilities, and goals.[279] These mental models evolve to drive systemic institutional changes in global institutions or foster rigid processes based on specific knowledge and skills.[280]

Throughout history, the mental frameworks of development aid actors have been steeped in a linear perspective of the development process. This approach assumes a high level of order and predictability in outcomes, often overlooking the complexities and unpredictability of real-world scenarios.[281] Linearity refers to the idea that obtaining desirable results is achievable by applying appropriate inputs to a system, thereby illustrating a consistent cause-and-effect relationship.[282] Linear problems can be divided into smaller parts, each of which can be analysed independently. The solutions to these parts can then be combined to find the overall answer to the initial problem.[283] Linear thinking supports the possibility of determining the 'mode of behaviour of the whole system' by studying or isolating the component parts.[284] International organisations, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, continued

[276] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 7.
[277] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 108.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 16.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 2.
[282] Ibid 3.
[283] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) p 24 <<https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf>> accessed 26/06/2025.
[284] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 3.

to rely on this top-down, linear management approach, even as the literature recognised the evolving views on aid's multidimensionality during the 1980s and 1990s.[285]

Linear thinking materialises itself by following simplicity. Following simplicity entails using stories with a greater, more compelling impact to force action, providing a straightforward causal chain of responsibility, a simple solution and a clear connection to existing narratives.[286] This allows actors to feel as if they understand the key challenges of the situation, rather than acknowledging their limitations and seeking more relevant solutions. Simplicity emerges through brief stories that can be conveyed in just a few pages, featuring key themes shared across media platforms in minutes, enabling audiences to comprehend and retain the information effortlessly.[287] The actions taken with this model intend to facilitate the approval of 'clear policy recommendations' that could mobilise more followers to raise funds for programmes.[288]

To illustrate linear thinking in development and aid organisations, we can take the example of the World Bank. In the 1990s, a movement led by the World Bank focused on using existing 'knowledge for development', encouraging aid agencies to prioritise collecting and sharing information that could be more useful to poor and developing countries, rather than simply providing loans and financial support advice.[289] This initiative focused on what Ramalingam calls a 'single loop learning', meaning that there was more time spent trying 'to do things right rather than doing the right things', with an emphasis on: finding 'the single right answer rather than diverse solutions'; more focus on knowledge transfer rather than 'knowledge creation'; only finding evidence that fit the existing models; seeking certainty for bureaucratic convenience; and looking for cheaper ways to do things.[290] This resulted in an epidemic of best practices within aid agencies, where it was assumed that the current paradigm was correct. This assumption simultaneously hindered efforts to 'change the existing culture' or foster 'interaction and dialogue'.[291] It also led to overly simplistic and generalised analyses that failed to consider contextual factors and were rapidly supplanted by other approaches deemed

[285] Ibid 4.
[286] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 34.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid 24.
[290] Ibid 26.
[291] Ibid.

more ideal solutions.[292] In addition, the World Bank's operations relied on 'small groups of interlocutors […] to design and implement one-size-fits-all civil reform blueprints' in diverse developing countries.[293] This linear model made the Bank's development projects rigid, as there was little flexibility due to initiatives being 'over-defined, over-specified, and over-controlled.'[294]

Linear thinking in aid organisations has proven disconnected from clients' needs. Local people have insufficiently participated due to limited knowledge about local dynamics and expectations.[295] Efforts to alter the top-down approach in aid programmes have shown positive results. However, the absence of 'feedback between beneficiaries and donors' and aid agencies' insensitivity to local and national stakeholders' needs undermines the 'relevance and effectiveness of aid activities'.[296] In addition, aid agencies typically place their goals within a broader normative framework aligned with their organisational interests and funding imperatives, emphasising, for example, poverty reduction, human rights, and political reforms.[297] This means that funding may excessively influence agendas to please donors and 'aid organisations […] continue to try to do a lot of the thinking for their staff'.[298] In doing this, international organisations aim to substitute judgement and initiative with set decision formulas and trigger points; inspiration with bureaucratic procedures; trust with contracts; and human relationships with matrices, prioritising monetary value over moral values.'[299]

Challenges within the development aid sector have been addressed from various perspectives in the literature.[300] The phenomenon of globalisation has emphasised these challenges. As a dynamic social process, globalisation promotes high interconnectivity among people and organisations through 'complex international financial and investment institutions, extensive trade and production networks, sophisticated modes of communication, all within changing global cultural and ethical parameters'.[301] Once used to address challenges within the international system, traditional mental models in

[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid 83.
[294] Ibid 85.
[295] Ibid 27.
[296] Ibid 91.
[297] Ibid 87.
[298] Ibid 99.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' 2022 (27) Perceptions 177, 178.
[301] Ken Cole, 'Globalization: understanding complexity' 2003 (3) Progress in Development Studies 323,323.

development aid proved ineffective in explaining the complexity of 'social realities' deepened by globalisation.[302] Those perspectives reflected the traditional ideal of an existing 'visible order', with key actors whose interactions were assumed to be regulated by 'law-like regularities'.[303] This means that traditional theories explaining the dynamics within the international system viewed this system as being organised, explainable and predictable.[304]

Thus, traditional views of development aid consider social systems and their issues as 'closed', linear, and reductionist.[305] This perspective suggests that isolating specific parts of a problem can provide insights into the entire issue. Furthermore, it assumes that individuals can independently apply rational reasoning, possessing 'perfect knowledge of future outcomes', and utilise top-down relationship models to instigate positive changes within the systems, proportionally and predictably.[306] However, the literature shows that top-down management structures, which match linear systems, are not as effective in complex systems that involve multiple 'actors and influences', which complicates predictions or modelling.[307] Ramalingam explained that reductionist approaches to problems […] are no longer sufficient to tackle many real-world problems.[31] This is because real-world problems are 'interconnected and interdependent, characterised by processes of feedback that shape how the system in question behaves'.[308] The next part will elaborate further on the challenges faced by development aid organisations when adhering to linear thinking.

2.5.2. Challenges of adopting linear thinking in development aid

Traditional mental models in development aid have proven ineffective at addressing emerging challenges exacerbated by globalisation. The concept of sustainable development has evolved into a worldwide endeavour, directing billions of dollars in

[302] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' 2022 (27) Perceptions 177, 178.
[303] Ibid 181.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 126.
[306] Ibid 126.
[307] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 4.
[308] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 141.

resources and involving a large workforce from various governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental organisations.[309] Nevertheless, development aid is increasingly contentious, with a growing amount of literature questioning the underlying concepts, practices, and frameworks surrounding it. Aid organisations have struggled to achieve lasting progress, despite decades of experimenting with new strategies and assessing the outcomes of their initiatives. Despite increased funding to understand development and disasters, the ongoing criticism about the lack of progress is growing louder.[310] For instance, Rihani explained that a third of the funding provided is 'lost in administration and straightforward corruption'.[311] Hence, money is available but not used to cater to the 'most pressing needs'.[312]

Many authors have criticised the linear approaches in development aid strategies, which often result in limited progress and even failures across different contexts. Ramalingam stated that there are three approaches to discussing aid communications: saying that it works occasionally, acknowledging that efforts are underway to enhance it and minimise failures, or recognising that aid is a complicated undertaking where some level of failure is unavoidable.[313] Hence, the three arguments about aid favour expansion, reduction or transformation.[314] Rihani explained that aid limits the use of local resources, as local initiatives that can provide affordable and adaptable solutions for water supply and sanitation issues for instance, are frequently overlooked in favour of large-scale projects with significant upfront costs and ongoing maintenance obligations.[315]

While conversations about aid frequently centre on its expansion, reduction, or transformation, most authors concur that linear thinking patterns adversely affect development aid. Ramalingam notes that a significant problem with linear thinking in aid is neglecting contextual relevance.[316] This also concurs with insights from the literature review on social accountability. The oversight of contextual circumstances

[309] Andrew Jones, 'Aid on the edge of chaos: rethinking international cooperation in a complex world' (2015) 68(4) The Economic History Review 1487,1487.
[310] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 10.
[311] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 245.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 8.
[314] Ibid 360.
[315] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 253.
[316] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 360.

occurs despite the significance of local institutions and political and economic systems, which play a crucial role in the success of development programmes.[317] Such neglect complicates the understanding of 'systems and problems, behaviours, relationships and organisations, and dynamics of change in highly abstract, idealised, and simplified ways'.[318] This supports the understanding that aid can only be effective to the extent that the political situation allows it.[319] Moreover, Ramalingam noted that development aid organisations often adopt top-down leadership structures, where the 'controlling head' or manager 'does the thinking' and assigns tasks or directives to their team's subordinates.[320] This constrains organisations 'innovative potential' since attention is directed towards 'internal legitimacy and control' instead of adapting to 'external challenges', based on the belief that positive outcomes and sustainable change can be attained predictably.[321] In such a context, the lack of flexibility and adaptation is further supported by an 'overt bureaucratisation' or 'formalised procedures both within and between aid agencies and donors'.[322] Rihani also supported the argument that development aid agencies typically follow strict plans, which allow them to adjust their direction only minimally in response to evolving situations.[323] He explained that linear beliefs regarding development practices have influenced local and international activities in the aid sector for over fifty years.[324]

Whereas, today, we are dealing with what Ramalingam called a 'many-to-many' world of aid.[325] This means that more agencies are directing increased financial resources and utilising a broader range of frameworks to implement a greater number of initiatives across various countries, collaborating with a diverse array of partners.[326] Hence, the complexity of relationships and interdependencies between established and emerging organisations and institutions has escalated, as have the various pathways and channels through which aid resources can be disseminated.[327] This demands a fundamental shift in

[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Ibid 10.
[320] Ibid 82.
[321] Ibid 85.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 253.
[324] Ibid 104.
[325] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 5.
[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid

organisations' views on development aid to help countries make more substantial progress.[328]

This challenges certain arguments found in the literature. Some scholars highlight the ineffectiveness of aid, arguing that foreign aid often has the opposite effect of its intended purpose in developing countries, and they point out that aid is a 'fundamental cause of deepening poverty'.[329] Moyo clarified that long-term assessments of aid reveal its shortcomings, whereas short-term views tend to create the false impression of success.[330] In fact, when evaluated by its contribution to sustainable growth over time, aid has been ineffective in addressing deeply-rooted governance problems in developing nations, particularly across Africa.[331] Furthermore, aid can unintentionally weaken the potential of countries that rely heavily on aid to thrive.[332] Although this thesis does not focus on this particular argument, it recognises the limitations of aid. While acknowledging the dependence of various countries on aid, the thesis aims to identify more sustainable ways for aid to effectively contribute to local development by gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics within complex social systems.

The literature on complexity and development aid emphasises the need for significant reform in how aid is approached, criticising the current simplistic view that considers the world as a manageable system where development aid can be effortlessly delivered to achieve results.[333] Instead, a more adaptable and gradual approach, positioning aid at the 'edge of chaos,' would be more effective in addressing the complex nature of real-world systems.[334] This would mean making aid more resilient and robust through a combination of flexibility and subtle control rather than relying on a dogmatic ideational set of beliefs.[335] Similarly to Rihani, Ramalingam supports transforming the development aid sector. He believes there is a 'mismatch between aid and the problems it seeks to address'.[336] Complexity theory has gained traction as a valid method for better

[328] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 104.
[329] Jonathan Glennie, The Trouble with Aid: Why Less Could Mean More for Africa (1st Edition Zed Books, 2008) p4.
[330] Dambisa Moyo, Dead Aid: Why Aid is not working and how there is a Better Way for Africa (1st Edition Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009) p 44.
[331] Ibid.
[332] Ibid.
[333] Andrew Jones, 'Aid on the edge of chaos: rethinking international cooperation in a complex world' (2015) 68(4) The Economic History Review 1487, 1488.
[334] Ibid.
[335] Adam Day and Charles T., 'A Perturbed Peace: Applying Complexity Theory to UN Peacekeeping' (2022) 29 (1) International Peacekeeping 1, 4.
[336] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 360.

understanding complex social systems, such as political or development aid systems. Rihani explained that the need for complexity in the development aid sector can be explained by the 'policy failures' deriving from traditional linear development perspectives.[337] Failures that can be explained by various factors, for which complexity theory may offer a credible scientific rationale for the reasons and mechanisms involved.[338] Understanding that development is essentially a 'messy and uncertain affair, driven in the main by millions of local actors' means that 'development cannot be imported from abroad'.[339] Ramalingam also explained that complexity theory offers significant insights that can enhance our understanding of aid's limitations.[340]

The next part will explain why complexity can serve as a practical foundation for conceptualising and planning new change initiatives in the development aid sector.

2.5.3. Complexity Theory in Development Aid

Before delving into the insights from the literature on complexity in development aid, it is essential to briefly introduce the theory of Complexity. Complexity research views systems as 'open, dynamic, nonlinear' with 'macro patterns emerging from micro behaviours and interactions'.[341] In complex social systems, human actors are defined by their diversity, capacity to learn, adaptability, self-organisation, and coevolution over time.[342] They also utilise both inductive and deductive reasoning for decision-making, which can be prone to 'errors and biases'.[343] Moreover, enacting change in complex systems is not straightforward because of the system's unpredictability as it undergoes constant transitions, as well as the interconnected nature of social events. This necessitates a more thorough examination of 'underlying causes and interactions' rather than relying on 'surface level assumptions'.[344] Understanding complexity theory means acknowledging the limitations of reductionism, which considers social systems can be

[337] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 13.
[338] Ibid 12.
[339] Ibid 13.
[340] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) p 62 accessed 26/06/2025.
[341] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 232.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 233.

understood in a very simplistic way, by breaking down their component parts and analysing isolated events to understand the system as a whole. Reductionism follows a linear thinking pattern, emphasising a 'simple and proportional' cause and effect relationship to explain changes and dynamics in a system.[345]

However, the previous section detailed several criticisms related to the prevailing belief in international organisations that progress would follow a straightforward and predictable path. The literature emphasises that linear thinking in aid and development has rendered international organisations unprepared and lacking the tools necessary to understand emerging challenges, such as climate change and the global financial crisis, and to clarify why some countries have achieved remarkable growth.[346] As the global landscape becomes increasingly interconnected, understanding the dynamics of complex economic and social systems is crucial, alongside finding methods to positively influence these systems.[347] Understanding the complexity and unpredictability of social systems at the local and global levels does not imply that international organisations should passively accept whatever comes their way. However, it does suggest that they cannot simply engineer success; they must take gradual steps, experimenting, learning, and adapting along with the various components of the system they are part of.[348]

The literature highlights the limitations of reductionism and the need to view social systems as complex systems. In recent decades, the drawbacks of reductionism have become increasingly apparent, particularly due to the complexities and interconnectedness of today's world, driven by globalisation.[349] Complexity science goes beyond reductionism by not just analysing individual components of a biological or social system, but also by exploring the interactions among these components, leading to a deeper understanding of the system as a whole.[350] Complexity theory views the international system as a complex adaptive system with multiple interdependent actors interacting in a 'nonlinear trend'.[351] The interactions between the diverse actors in the

[345] David Kernick, 'Can Complexity Theory Provide Better Understanding of Integrated Care?' (2003) 11 (5) Journal of Integrated Care 22,22.
[346] Owen Barder, 'The implications of complexity for development' (Center for Global Development in Europe, 2012) https://www.cgdev.org/media/implications-comlexity-development-owen-barder p 47 accessed 26/06/2025.
[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Andrea Minto and Edoardo Trincanato, 'The Policy and Regulatory Engagement with Corruption: Insights from Complexity Theory' (2022) 13 European Journal of Risk Regulation 28, 44.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' 2022 (27) Perceptions 177, 185.

system are the product of a 'social construction by the system itself', which shapes actors' interests in a circular process.[352] Additionally, interactions between actors have an unpredictable impact on the entire system, as each individual's actions influence those of others.[353]

In the complex adaptive international system, no fixed 'long-term equilibrium' exists as order can be disrupted at any time.[354] In fact, complexity theorists view stability within complex systems through an 'order-disorder' perspective which entails that systems are constantly self-adapting in response to random fluctuations, demonstrating the inability of continuous progress toward a fixed goal.[355] Hence, the insights of complexity theory explain that 'change is the nature of the system itself'.[356] Therefore, it is impossible to predict outcomes due to the absence of cause-and-effect relationships between actions and their impact on the whole system.[357] However, change within complex social systems is not entirely unstructured, as various factors such as the outcomes of reinforced behaviours through feedback mechanisms or environmental circumstances can lead to these changes over time, in a nonlinear manner, as explained by the notion of path dependency.[358]

Traditional international relations' perspectives proved to be ineffective in explaining the complexity of 'social realities' deepened by globalisation, which affect the international system as well as its actors.[359] This is because the complexity added by globalisation complicates policy predictions in terms of outcomes and overall efficiency in local and global governance, due to the higher connectivity and interdependence of actors on various levels.[360] Development seen through complexity theory, can be viewed as a 'lengthy and open-ended evolutionary process' with multiple paths, which necessitates upholding 'local diversity and freedom of choice' along with enhancing standards of

[352] Ibid.
[353] Ibid.
[354] Ibid 193.
[355] Renée Houston, 'Participation as chaos: Lessons from the principles of complexity theory for democracy' (2001) 57 (4) World Futures Journal of General Evolution 315, 320.
[356] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' 2022 (27) Perceptions 177, 193.
[357] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 105.
[358] Christopher Koliba et al. 'Complexity theory and systems analysis in Christopher Ansell and Jacob Torfing (eds) *Handbook on Theories of Governance* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016) p 366.
[359] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' 2022 (27) Perceptions 177, 181.
[360] Adomas Vincas Rakšnys and Andrius Valickas, 'The Application of Complexity theory in the Context of Public Governance Challenges' (2022) 21 (4) Public Policy and Administration 526, 529.

'health, nutrition, literacy, security, human and property rights, and good governance.'[361] Considering the development aid sector as a complex system suggests that aid organisations should operate using adaptive strategies to achieve their development objectives, by creating and following flexible plans that can be constantly adjusted when necessary.[362] This would also mean that development aid actors and organisations increasingly receive feedback from their surroundings, providing them with a way to constantly evaluate their development initiatives' effectiveness.[363] However, the literature highlighted that this is not always the case for international organisations in the development aid sector. Rakšnys and Valickas emphasised that policymakers in the aid sector do not optimally reach their desired goals due to their 'rational thinking'.[364] This rational thinking leads to the incapacity to effectively address uncertainties that characterise policy processes, using reductionist methods to make attempts at futile predictions or illusory control.[365] The Oxford Handbook on Strategy supported this point, stating that aid strategists should abandon outdated practices and acknowledge that strict linear thinking and conventional planning are inadequate for addressing complex situations.[366]

In complex systems, long-term predictions are hindered by nonlinear patterns, which require 'better knowledge, better anticipation and adaptation, and better response' instead of responding to systemic changes using a 'linear, largely self-limiting trajectory' favouring predefined actions, i.e., single-loop thinking.[367] As changes can occur at any moment in complex systems, idealistic 'long-term visions' of the future might not be as effective in 'implementing change in any sphere of the public sector.'[368] Long term visions can be beneficial as a guiding hand in a complex system with uncertainty and nonlinear dynamics, however, this thesis contends that they must be flexible enough to adapt to internal and external feedback mechanisms, and allow actors to constantly self-

[361] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p14.
[362] Ibid 105.
[363] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 16.
[364] Adomas Vincas Rakšnys and Andrius Valickas, 'The Application of Complexity Theory in the Context of Public Governance Challenges' (2022) 21(4) Public Policy and Administration 526, 527.
[365] Andrew Macintosh and Debra Wilkinson, 'Complexity Theory and the Constraints on Environmental Policymaking' (2016) 28 (1) Journal of Environmental Law 65, 66.
[366] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 298.
[367] Ibid 345.
[368] Adomas Vincas Rakšnys and Andrius Valickas, 'The Application of Complexity Theory in the Context of Public Governance Challenges' (2022) 21(4) Public Policy and Administration 526,533.

organise and experiment based on emerging knowledge. This can be challenging for aid organisations that aim to showcase their values and principles in a fixed strategic agenda.

Various authors have provided recommendations on how to increase organisational flexibility and efficiency in complex systems. Facilitating self-organisation involves 'shared principles' or core values, connectivity, and feedback arising from local nonlinear processes.[369] This requires understanding others' perspectives and a willingness to change 'our mental models and paradigms', along with recognising memory, including both competition and cooperation among interdependent system elements.[370] Whereas Ramalingam stated that 'strategic agnosticism' was the 'best way forward for the aid sector', meaning that strategic balancing acts must become more prominent in aid through flexible analytical perspectives, unconventional methods and adaptive strategies.[371] Houston supported this argument by stating that in complex systems, 'the creation of values emerges through the dissemination of ideas', meaning that each individual plays a key role in co-creating a democratic vision that would fit their specific organisation.[372] This also involves the engagement of all organisation members in developing 'new ways of doing things' suitable for the organisation as a whole.[373] Consequently, it is important to clarify 'organisational values and vision' at all levels.[374] This thesis aligns with the fact that values can act as strange attractors in the aid sector, establishing a 'self-reinforcing network of concepts, values, methods, and behaviours' that actors should be able to engage with to generate innovative and locally relevant ideas.[375]

The insights of complexity theory highlight that development constitutes a complex, adaptive process, greatly influenced by local conditions, including contextual factors, timing, and historical paths.[376] Similarly, the immediate responses to humanitarian emergencies should be local, nuanced, and adaptable.[377] Rihani also supported this argument by stating that development potential is influenced by both local and internal

[369] David Kernick, 'Can Complexity Theory Provide Better Understanding of Integrated Care?' (2003) 11 (5) Journal of Integrated Care 22,25.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 298.
[372] Renée Houston, 'Participation as chaos: Lessons from the principles of complexity theory for democracy' (2000) 57 (4) World Futures Journal of General Evolution 315,331.
[373] Ibid.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) p 65 <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> accessed 26/06/2025.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Ibid.

dynamics, as well as the behaviour of other nations, i.e., the external environment.[378] Hence, development can be seen as the actions of nations viewed as complex adaptive systems, and these actions can be characterised as an unpredictable evolution that lacks a distinct starting or ending point.[379] In fact, developed countries' evolution showcases that development is a never-ending evolutionary path, that is gradual and 'open-ended', characterised by the 'steady accumulation of modest growth over very long periods.[380] For instance, in developed nations, progress mainly arose from the independent actions of individuals and organisations focused solely on their unique businesses, intellectual interests, and hobbies.[381] A prime example of this is the Industrial Revolution in Britain, which was driven by the innovations of individual inventors.[382]

The literature on complexity theory and development aid emphasises the importance of collective participation for effective and sustainable development. In many developing countries, the developmental patterns seen in developed nations do not emerge, primarily due to restricted individual freedoms and insufficient citizen participation.[383] This is because of the absence of rules and regulations supporting collective action, due to state repression against citizens and patterns of 'control by a small and ruthless elite that sets out to stifle diversity of independent action.'[384] Paired with other factors such as illiteracy, war, and diseases, this prevents 'healthy interactions between individuals and, therefore, impedes development.'[385] Although this argument examines patterns in complex systems by comparing developed and underdeveloped countries, this thesis would argue that a more effective comparison should be made between more democratic and authoritarian governments for greater clarity. This is because both developed and developing nations can exhibit patterns of poor governance, which can restrict individual freedoms and hinder sustainable development.

Creating change in a complex adaptive system can be challenging. The non-linear dynamics imply that it is typically unfeasible to foresee the long-term consequences of any specific alteration.[97] Consequently, rather than attempting to supplant evolutionary

[378] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 235.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Ibid 10.
[381] Ibid.
[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid 11.
[384] Ibid 12.
[385] Ibid 11.

processes, as development aid organisations continue to do today, we should focus on leveraging them.[386] A complex system exhibits various patterns and characteristics resulting from the interactions and relationships among its internal components.[387] Understanding or predicting these traits can be difficult when one examines the causes and effects in isolation or looks only at the components' behaviours.[388] These traits are known as emergent properties, which are fundamental to the principles of complex systems.[389] For instance, traditional perspectives often see disasters as separate entities that impact social or environmental systems in a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship.[390] In reality, factors like population growth, urban migration, technological interdependence, and ecological decline interact dynamically, highlighting the interconnected nature of disasters rather than their isolation.[391]

Therefore, rigid plans and policies are unsuitable for complex systems' dynamics. Owen highlighted a scenario where a group of well-meaning aid donors arrives and asserts that substantial reform of a public institution is necessary.[392] The conventional process would be for donors to create a detailed plan for everything required, labelling it with the term 'international best practice.'[393] This would entail presenting a budget, an organisational chart, and a mission statement. Unfortunately, the outcome of such an approach often leads to an organisation that appears to have all the elements for success but ultimately fails to perform effectively.[394] The outcome may demonstrate the traits of a properly functioning institution, but it might lack the capacity to connect with or adapt to its context effectively.[395] However, this thesis would also suggest that this outcome can be explained by the lack of connectivity throughout the system, which encourages the use of the same rigid practices across different contexts. With this in mind, we can consider the most efficient practices to adopt in a complex system, especially in the development aid sector, to maximise positive outcomes. The next part will highlight the literature's

[386] Owen Barder, 'The implications of complexity for development' (Center for Global Development in Europe, 2012) <https://www.cgdev.org/media/implications-comlexity-development-owen-barder> p 38 accessed 26/06/2025.
[387] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) p 20 <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> accessed 26/06/2025.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Ibid 19.
[391] Ibid.
[392] Owen Barder, 'The implications of complexity for development' (Center for Global Development in Europe, 2012) <https://www.cgdev.org/media/implications-comlexity-development-owen-barder> p 39 accessed 26/06/2025.
[393] Ibid.
[394] Ibid.
[395] Ibid.

recommendations based on insights from complexity theory in the development aid sector.

2.5.4. Insights of the literature for social accountability programmes

Based on the literature review of development aid and complexity, this thesis argues that understanding the complex nature of social systems entails comprehending their interconnections, such as those between education and the economy, and health and poverty. The literature on social accountability emphasises the context-dependence of the programmes, highlighting the role of local economic, social, and political factors in the success or failure of the initiatives. However, the literature on development aid highlights a deeper issue regarding how social accountability programmes have been developed and what makes some programmes more effective than others within the complex political system: the oversimplification of complex systems and their dynamics, using linear approaches to development. This section evaluates the insights from the literature review on development aid and complexity theory, and situates them within the context of this thesis. The key recommendations of the literature that will be discussed are: prioritising self-organisation, understanding the multifaceted nature of the notion of accountability, promoting experimentation, adopting resilience thinking, promoting innovation, understanding the system's sensitivity to initial conditions and optimising local performance.

The literature on complexity theory and development aid acknowledges that, just like the political and economic systems, the development process functions as a complex adaptive system influenced internally by self-interested individuals.[396] International aid operates within a dense network of relationships among individuals, communities, and nations, reflecting the intricate interplay between actors at various levels. Consequently, the dynamics of complex systems and country-specific circumstances can significantly impact the effectiveness of development aid programmes.[397] One major implication of

[396] Samir Rihani, Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice (Zed Books, 2002) p 9.
[397] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) p 12 <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> accessed 26/06/2025.

viewing international aid through a complexity perspective is that aid organisations must exercise caution to avoid oversimplifying the systems they engage with.[398]

Acknowledging the importance of collective participation entails prioritising self-organisation in complex systems. Self-organisation is an essential characteristic of complex systems. It can be described as the emergence of macro-scale behavioural patterns that arise from the interactions of individuals pursuing their own goals and objectives, while also relying on their limited knowledge and viewpoints regarding local circumstances.[399] In addition, self-organisation refers to how individual agents adapt within certain environments, resulting in various new phenomena.[400] However, the development aid system often concentrates power, control, and legitimacy among wealthier countries and their representatives.[401] As a result, some groups may struggle to organise themselves or collaborate effectively with others.[402] Ramalingam explained that a controlling strategy of international organisations involves limiting the number of interconnected actors to avoid unintended outcomes.[403] However, censoring information about one's actions and intentions can be inappropriate, impractical, or even unfeasible in specific contexts.[404]

Furthermore, the interconnectedness of actors makes the notion of accountability multifaceted, calling for the participation of all actors to enhance accountability at all levels. The complex dynamics of social systems render the concept of accountability 'complex, dynamic, and systemic'.[405] This suggests that the interdependent aspects of various accountability levels and forms, including public, political, parliamentary, and financial, along with the increasing involvement of non-state actors, significantly impact how each accountability relationship operates.[406] Consequently, the effectiveness of a development initiative aimed at enhancing the accountability of a specific actor will likely be influenced by other accountability connections within the system.[407] For instance, understanding how economic systems operate as complex dynamic systems requires comprehending the impact of interactions among micro-level or local agents, which

[398] Ibid 13.
[399] Ibid 49.
[400] Ibid 57.
[401] Ibid.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid.
[405] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 352.
[406] Ibid.
[407] Ibid.

influence systemic patterns such as employment levels, growth rates, the distribution of income, market structures, and societal norms.[408] These systemic patterns then shape the dynamics of local interactions, creating a complex web of interconnected feedback loops that relate micro behaviours, systemic interaction dynamics, and larger global trends.[409]

Hence, for development programmes to be more effective in a complex political system, they also need to avoid rigid guidelines and opt for more experimental strategies. To better understand how to create sustainable change in complex systems, the literature stressed that international aid organisations should focus more on what they can control, such as initiating reforms.[410] These reforms could highlight internal transparency and the rule of law, ensuring that partner companies are held accountable for their financial transactions in developing nations.[411] Additionally, according to various complexity theorists, experimentation is the best approach for enhancing complex systems and creating sustainable change. It consists of implementing minor adjustments, observing the outcomes, and then adapting accordingly.[412] Owen explained that while it is essential to acknowledge the roles of individual countries in their local institutional reforms, international organisations still have a measure of control over these collective changes.[413] Hence, international aid organisations will only see tangible progress if they intentionally adopt the concept of increased experimentation within the development process.[414] This focus on experimentation is particularly logical in the development aid sector, where the multitude of actors and factors involved leads to increased uncertainty and unpredictability.

Following the traditional approach to development, many initiatives often fall short because they overlook the interconnections among numerous variables in a complex system, focusing instead on just one variable and one solution.[415] As noted earlier, this conventional method is inflexible in the face of the unpredictability of complex systems, thereby limiting agents' innovative and experimental potential. Complexity is not a one-

[408] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) p 5 <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> accessed 26/06/2025.
[409] Owen Barder, 'The implications of complexity for development' (Center for Global Development in Europe, 2012) <https://www.cgdev.org/media/implications-comlexity-development-owen-barder> p 45 accessed 26/06/2025.
[410] Ibid.
[411] Ibid.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid 44.
[415] Scott Wisor, 'Reviewed Work: Aid on the Edge of Chaos: Rethinking International Cooperation in a Complex World' (2014) 20(3) Global Governance 487,488.

size-fits-all solution to addressing development challenges; it is a means to better understand the world and identify areas where our actions can be improved.[416] It offers a deeper comprehension of the world with significantly enhanced realism and accuracy compared to the tools inherited from reductionist, linear perspectives.[417] The insights of complexity for development aid require organisations such as the World Bank to develop more effective development projects by going from 'external push' – filling gaps predictably and linearly – to 'internal catalyst', meaning using adaptive experimental strategies instead of building on 'the existing model with slight tweaks and additional technical solutions.'[418]

Moreover, development programmes should not focus on identifying missing elements or attempting to engineer poverty alleviation directly.[419] Instead, development aid organisations should foster experimentation and seek strategies that encourage constant adaptation to drive change in ways that speed up evolution and align it with local social values.[420] Rihani explained that true economic advancement is achievable only when most individuals are liberated and equipped to engage with one another, which can occur only after their fundamental needs are satisfied.[421] Although this thesis emphasises the importance of capacity building for social actors in social accountability programmes, we will later see successful social accountability programmes where local citizens could self-organise and initiate change in the political system despite limited resources. Essentially, this thesis asserts that individuals should be, or indeed are, active contributors to the political system rather than mere bystanders in their countries' development journey.[422] Hence, developing nations will stagnate unless they successfully engage their populations as active participants in social, political, and economic processes.[423]

On the other hand, resilience thinking plays a major role in facilitating experimentation in the development sector. To explain this point, it is essential to note that complexity theory fundamentally contrasts with conventional scientific methods of induction and

[416] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 361.
[417] Ibid 362.
[418] Ibid 361.
[419] Owen Barder, 'The implications of complexity for development' (Center for Global Development in Europe, 2012) <https://www.cgdev.org/media/implications-comlexity-development-owen-barder> accessed 26/06/2025 p 46.
[420] Ibid.
[421] Samir Rihani, Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice (Zed Books, 2002) p 159.
[422] Ibid 164.
[423] Ibid.

deduction.[424] Deduction begins with a broad theory and works towards specific, testable hypotheses supported by data collection, aiming to validate the original theories.[425] Nonetheless, applying deduction to development aid is challenging due to the intricate interconnections within and among systems, which complicate outcome prediction.[426] The intricacies of human systems and the limited knowledge of each actor prevent the system from being effectively deconstructed into simple components, which limits the effectiveness of the deductive approach as new variables continually arise.[427] In contrast, inductive approaches begin with specific observations and move toward generalisations by examining the world to identify patterns and trends, leading to tentative hypotheses that may develop into overarching theories.[428] These methods provide broad guidelines for effective interventions, offering a model that can be expanded and replicated; however, they often overlook the complex and multifaceted nature of systems, including contextual factors.[429] Ramalingam clarified that assuming successful intervention strategies in one setting will be effective in different contexts is erroneous, since effective practices can produce markedly different results in diverse environments.[430]

Resilience thinking entails avoiding a fatalistic attitude in development aid. Complexity theory offers valuable insights into the limitations and intricate realities surrounding aid. It offers a fresh perspective on traditional concepts, introduces new insights into specific phenomena, and presents innovative ideas.[431] Recognising that uncertainty is inherent in complex systems should not mean accepting everything that arises; instead, it presents a valuable opportunity to explore innovative solutions. For instance, contextual factors regarding economic limitations in developing countries can be curbed by encouraging a better allocation of financial resources, as developing nations tend to have 'vast amounts of capital' that are not efficiently used towards development.[432] Moreover, instead of viewing aid as an external influence on developing nations, aid agencies should be open

[424] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> p 60 accessed 26/06/2025.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Ibid.
[427] Ibid.
[428] Ibid 61.
[429] Ibid.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Ibid ix.
[432] Samir Rihani, 'Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice' (Zed Books, 2002) p 244.

to being influenced by local stakeholders and actively assess the relationships and networks they support.[433]

Complexity theory also highlights that accurate predictions are possible when key facts are collected and analysed, and issues are clearly identified.[434] From this viewpoint, development initiatives frequently lack contextual relevance, featuring inflexible timelines and objectives, which accounts for aid organisations' inability to make substantial progress despite various strategies tested for improved outcomes.[435] The insights of complexity theory reveal that the current aid system's linear frame of reference, which guides its ideas and models, is bound to fail in a complex system.[436] Hence, the literature on complexity theory encourages development aid actors, to pause and rethink their approaches to solving aid-related issues. Complexity theory prompts us to question whether we rely on inadequate mental models and rigid methods and whether our expectations are overly simplistic for the sake of convenience.[437] In development aid, adopting resilience thinking can help manage uncertainty and nonlinearity effectively and flexibly by remaining open to learning and accepting that change is inevitable.[438] Ramalingam noted that adapting to the uncertainty of complex systems depends on experimentation, flexibility, and creativity for ongoing innovation.[439] This approach fosters active learning from past successes and failures, enabling the gradual discovery of improved solutions at the local level over time.[440]

Innovation is a key factor in developing organisations' resilience and effectiveness in the aid sector. Desirable mechanisms for innovation in complex systems include effective feedback and selection processes to accelerate actors' adaptation.[441] This is because innovation, paired with strong institutional mechanisms, is more effective in shaping development in favour of local expectations. In addition, innovation is pointless without

[433] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> p 49 accessed 26/06/2025.
[434] Samir Rihani, Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice (Zed Books, 2002) p 118.
[435] Ibid 121.
[436] Ibid 123.
[437] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> p 65 accessed 26/06/2025.
[438] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 346.
[439] Ibid 347.
[440] Ibid.
[441] Owen Barder, 'The implications of complexity for development' (Center for Global Development in Europe, 2012) <https://www.cgdev.org/media/implications-comlexity-development-owen-barder> p 43 accessed 26/06/2025.

including feedback loops that support a conducive environment.[442] For example, a free press, accessible information, transparency from the government and service providers, and a strong, defined civil society are more likely to foster sustainable political change.[443] Ramalingam reinforced this point by stating that actors in complex systems require the freedom to send and obtain feedback for effective self-organisation.[444] Development agencies can incorporate this freedom through an 'earned autonomy' model, allowing competent units to determine their own paths.[445] This is because central policies in complex systems should guide change, set boundaries, allocate resources, and enable units to innovate rather than act as rigid practices that prevent organisations and individual actors from adapting.[446] Moreover, despite local communities' inability to address emerging systemic challenges due to their limited information about their environment, individual actors can develop effective self-organising strategies by reinforcing local feedback mechanisms.[447]

This also entails considering the system's sensitivity to initial conditions. The sensitivity of complex systems to initial conditions renders uncertainty inevitable, necessitating flexibility to adapt to contextual gaps. This means that successful social accountability programmes in one context cannot be identically replicated in another context without a thorough understanding of local circumstances. The insights from the complexity literature reveal that development projects often prioritise achieving clear, measurable outcomes, which can be unrealistic and counterproductive.[448] In fact, the effectiveness of planning valuable social outcomes through specific outputs is uncertain, as inflexible plans can hinder the achievement of authentic results over time.[449] The concept of sensitive dependence on initial conditions shows that no single perspective can capture all knowledge about a system.[450] This necessitates carefully evaluating whether our solutions to problems are suitable, implying that accepting unavoidable uncertainty may be more advantageous than creating plans based on overly optimistic beliefs.[451] In addition, sensitivity to initial conditions suggests that the transferability of effective

[442] Ibid 42.
[443] Ibid.
[444] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> p 53 accessed 26/06/2025.
[445] Ibid.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Ibid.
[448] Ibid 30.
[449] Ibid.
[450] Ibid 28.
[451] Ibid.

practices across different contexts is unreliable, since initial conditions are never identical, and the nonlinear nature of behaviours complicates the isolation of individual factors to understand systemic behaviour.[452] Therefore, any concept of 'good practice' requires a thorough local understanding of the reasons behind the specific practice being examined.[453]

Additionally, the literature emphasises optimising local performance and monitoring it annually, without placing undue emphasis on international comparisons.[454] Rihani suggested that development aid organisations focus on regularly evaluating the enhancements of local standards, implementing incremental changes, and fostering local interactions.[455] This can be explained by the fact that positive transformations in social, political, and economic spheres occur at the community level, driven by local individuals.[456] Also, it is essential to remember that change and resilience cannot be forced from above; they emerge from the adaptive behaviours of individuals within a system.[457] Ramalingam emphasised that aid organisations must first develop a shared readiness to tackle new, difficult questions regarding their goals and operations for effective change.[458] They should also strive to establish a mutual understanding of the potential limitations of these emerging ideas to prevent misinterpretation or misapplication.[459] Furthermore, humility and transparency are essential when addressing the challenges of 'outsider' interventions, as well as recognising past mistakes and their underlying causes.[460] In fact, the insights of complexity theory reveal that excessive top-down control from government or organisations is inappropriate and ineffective.[461] This is because optimal performance requires individuals' freedom to interact based on 'sensible rules' most people will comply with.[462]

---

[452] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> p 28 accessed 26/06/2025.
[453] Ibid.
[454] Samir Rihani, Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice (Zed Books, 2002) p 236.
[455] Ibid.
[456] Ibid.
[457] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> p 52 accessed 26/06/2025.
[458] Ibid 67.
[459] Ibid.
[460] Ibid.
[461] Samir Rihani, Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice (Zed Books, 2002) p 236.
[462] Ibid 239.

Hence, the literature review on development aid and complexity highlighted the limitations of traditional approaches used by development organisations, which are no longer effective in a complex, interconnected world. Connecting these lessons to social accountability programmes provides greater insight into their varied outcomes, extending beyond their contextual reliance. The upcoming chapter will delve into complex systems, highlighting the essential mechanisms that allow them to adapt and evolve despite their inherent uncertainty.

Conclusion

The World Bank promotes social accountability as a short route and more effective approach to holding governments accountable. The first chapter highlighted the purpose of social accountability programmes in reinforcing citizens' active participation, citizen involvement in decision making and citizen access to information. This chapter provided a comprehensive understanding of social accountability programmes, expanding beyond the World Bank's perspective to analyse their implementation and effectiveness. The literature review on the implementation of social accountability has highlighted both its positive impacts and limitations. However, the evidence on the practice of social accountability remains inconclusive. The chapter emphasises that the outcomes of these programmes are context-dependent, as they can be influenced or restricted by social, political, and economic factors. The literature also emphasises that the context dependency of programmes makes it difficult to effectively track their results and to have a general understanding of what success means for social accountability initiatives. This entails that it would be impossible for the World Bank to establish a template of successful programmes to improve the results.

Therefore, this chapter addressed essential questions that this thesis aims to explore: what factors contribute to the success of certain programmes within the domestic political system, and how were these successful programmes able to navigate the uncertainties posed by contextual limitations effectively? To answer these questions, it is crucial to understand the domestic political system and its dynamics comprehensively, rather than analysing isolated cases as typically done in the literature. Complexity theory will be used in the third chapter to better understand the political system, as it emphasises how complex systems effectively adapt to uncertainty. This was demonstrated in the literature related to complexity and development aid, which addressed the limitations of the traditional mental models of international organisations. These mental models tend to be overly simplistic and view political systems as predictable, assuming development programmes can easily reach their goals. Complexity theory challenges this view by redefining our understanding of aid, highlighting its operation within complex and dynamic systems with unique characteristics. Applying complexity theory can help address gaps in social accountability literature by moving beyond the context-specific nature of programmes and identifying why some initiatives are less successful within

domestic political systems. The World Bank might leverage these insights to enhance programme implementation, possibly by creating a template for successful projects.

CHAPTER 3: COMPLEXITY THEORY

Introduction

How can complexity theory help us better understand the political system? The preceding chapter shed light on how contextual factors, i.e. local social, economic and political circumstances can influence the effectiveness of social accountability programmes. The literature underscored the impact of local factors within the domestic political system, which led to inconsistencies in the programmes' outcomes. This hindered the establishment of a definitive template for successful programmes. This thesis challenges the negative narrative and suggests delving deeper into the domestic political system to identify mechanisms for enhancing the effectiveness of social accountability programmes. This chapter introduces complexity theory as an approach to better understanding the dynamics of the domestic political system, as supported by the literature on complexity and development aid. This theory explains the complexity of the political system and the features that help stabilise this system, making it more adaptable and resilient to internal and external challenges. Utilising complexity theory enables us to move past the conventional understanding of the political system, which relies on the traditional linear, cause-and-effect reasoning. The traditional approach often overlooks contextual factors, hindering accurate predictions and making it difficult to effectively navigate the uncertainties of complex systems. This will, then, help us to determine the circumstances under which social accountability programmes can go beyond local limitations in the domestic political system to achieve more success.

Chapter 3 introduces complexity theory, its evolution in the literature, and its fundamental features that are applied to biological, social, and political systems. Complexity theory is an approach within systems theory that aims to understand the behaviour of systems from a holistic, non-reductionist perspective. This means that it recognises the impossibility of fully understanding a system's dynamics by isolating its individual parts. Its relevance in understanding the political system more effectively lies

in its goal to part from the narrative that modern challenges, such as climate change, the instability of the financial system or terrorism, hinder our ability to adapt and find sustainable solutions. While defining the political system as a complex system, complexity theory does not agree with the fact that we are doomed to reside in an anarchic world that we cannot control, and neither does it agree with attempts to perfectly predict behaviours in a political system whose internal dynamics and interdependence to other systems, make it volatile. Rather, complexity theory acknowledges the interdependence of systems that increases the complexity of their behaviour and challenges traditional cause-and-effect thinking in politics, seeking perfect solutions to unpredictable issues.

The first part of this chapter introduces the theory of autopoiesis, which is a significant theory opposing complexity theory in the social sciences, and especially in law. This part also explains the researcher's choice of the complexity angle. The second section gives an overview of the background of complexity theory and its evolution from natural sciences to social sciences. Then, the chapter highlights the features of complex systems, focusing on three critical features: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness. These features are crucial in making complex systems resilient and adaptable to uncertainty. They were specifically chosen as there is no unified definition of a complex system and its features within the literature. Therefore, these three features represent the standard characteristics of complex natural, social and political systems within the literature, providing greater clarity. With these insights, the thesis will analyse whether successful social accountability programmes effectively align with the mentioned features, despite their context dependence.

3.1. Autopoiesis

This section focuses on autopoiesis, a theory developed by Maturana and Varela to analyse self-referential or self-reproducing systems and their implications. This theory is not helpful for this thesis, as it regards natural, social (including political), and psychic (i.e. people's minds) systems as closed, which does not align with the argumentation. Viewing the political system as closed would contradict the World Bank's influence on both international and domestic political systems, along with the objectives of its programmes aimed at affecting economic, educational, health, and other societal systems, as well as the multiple factors influencing the implementation of social accountability programmes. Still, autopoiesis is a well-established theory in the social sciences that requires a brief explanation to understand why it has been disregarded in this thesis. This section clarifies the specificities of autopoietic systems.

In the early 1970s, the idea of 'order through fluctuation' was increasingly discussed in biology as authors started to address the gaps in society's evolution. Developed by Maturana and Varela, autopoiesis referred to the idea of 'self-referentiality' as a critical factor in understanding the 'human brain' and consciousness.[1] Used for the first time in 1972, the theory of autopoiesis comes from 'αυτό (auto – self), and ποίησις (poiesis – creation, production or forming)'.[2] This theory aimed to develop a unifying concept for biology to define what distinguishes living systems. It explains how elements within a living system interact to produce and reproduce themselves, demonstrating how the 'system reproduces itself'.[3] Autopoietic systems are described as self-referential or 'self-producing' systems, with the main focus of observation being on living biological systems.[4]

An autopoietic system is a unit organised as a 'network of processes of production', which means that the unit produces, transforms and destroys its components as they interact.[5] The system is constantly regenerated and reproduces the same network of processes, sustaining the system. The autopoietic system is, therefore, a 'concrete unity' constituted

[1] Sandra Braman, 'The Autopoietic State: Communication and Democratic Potential in the Net' (1994) 45(6) Journal of the American Society for Information Science 358, 359.
[2] Mihai-Cristian Trandafir, 'A critical review of autopoietic systems in economic discipline' (2017) 36(2) EuroEconomica 91, 91.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Milan Zeleny and Kevin D. Hufford, 'The Application of Autopoiesis in Systems Analysis: Are Autopoietic systems also social systems?' (1992) 21(2) International Journal of General Systems 145,145.
[5] Mihai-Cristian Trandafir, 'A critical review of autopoietic systems in economic discipline' (2017) 36(2) EuroEconomica 91, 92.

by these components.[6] This means that autopoietic systems are limited by their own boundary and their own internal structures and processes, which characterises their 'self-producing' ability. It is an independent system which is not affected by external dynamics.[7] In addition, autopoietic systems exhibit three main features: the temporary character of elements, which disappear from the system when they are 'realised'; the perpetual reproduction of elements by the system to sustain itself; and the circular process of redefining the system's boundary, which is set by elements within the system.[8] This entails that the system constitutes its own elements, and that these elements only function within the defined system.[9]

In biology, autopoietic systems experience a perpetual 'recursive loop' in their organisation due to the system's ways of producing its components, which in turn make the system that reproduces them.[10] The closed organisation and defined boundary of autopoietic systems result from the self-production of its components and how they interact to form the system's boundary. Thus, autopoietic organisation leads the system to be the product of its own internal processes.[11] A cell provides a clear demonstration of biological autopoiesis, as it constitutes a unity that 'renews its macromolecular components thousands of times during its lifetime, maintains its identity, its cohesiveness, relative autonomy and distinctiveness […]'.[12] In this organisation, components are interdependent, and the system has a fixed identity whose properties and transformations are transmitted to new generations of components in the reproductive process. Thus, the system's self-producing nature leads to the preservation of its internal structure, and 'multiple patterns of self-production compensate perturbations'.[13]

Nikolas Luhman extended the understanding of autopoiesis to the social sciences, making it a transdisciplinary concept.[14] In social sciences, autopoietic systems play the role of self-production and structure preservation.[15] This means that social autopoietic systems

[6] Ibid.
[7] Milan Zeleny and Kevin D. Hufford, 'The Application of Autopoiesis in Systems Analysis: Are Autopoietic systems also social systems?' (1992) 21(2) International Journal of General Systems 145, 146.
[8] Mihai-Cristian Trandafir, 'A critical review of autopoietic systems in economic discipline' (2017) 36(2) EuroEconomica 91, 92.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Fulvio Mazzocchi, 'Complexity and the reductionism–holism debate in systems biology' (2012) 4(5) WIREs System Biology and Medicine 413, 422.
[11] Milan Zeleny and Kevin D. Hufford, 'The Application of Autopoiesis in Systems Analysis: Are Autopoietic systems also social systems?' (1992) 21(2) International Journal of General Systems 145, 146.
[12] Fulvio Mazzocchi, 'Complexity and the reductionism–holism debate in systems biology' (2012) 4(5) WIREs System Biology and Medicine 413, 423.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Mihai-Cristian Trandafir, 'A critical review of autopoietic systems in economic discipline' (2017) 36(2) EuroEconomica 91, 91.
[15] Ibid 92.

are viewed as a 'network of interactions and processes' that produces its own 'rules and regulations'.[16] We can take the example of welcoming new agents through events such as births or acceptance into society. An autopoietic social system regulates its institutions and associations by assigning functions and positions to its members within the system, and it renews these parts through various pathways such as death, expulsion, or separation. Hence, human social autopoietic systems are constituted by human actors that constantly produce and reproduce humans through biological processes. Human actors coordinate social communications, and it is these communications which form a society. Thus, 'society and humans produce each other mutually'.[17]

In addition, autopoietic social systems can be understood as systems where individuals behave in a manner that ensures the spontaneous preservation of society while following their personal goals. This is explained by the fact that both the society and the individuals within that society would not 'exist' without them spontaneously following the society's rules.[18] Taking the example of a family unit, Zeleny and Hufford explained how an autopoietic social system is 'produced and maintained through organisational rules' defined by the system itself.[19] Despite the diversity of people involved in a family, it operates in a 'self-perpetuating' way to coordinate interactions among its components and form its structure, while on the other hand, adapting to 'external challenges and interferences […]'.[20] Thus, in the autopoietic sense, a family can be seen as a defined system with clearly identifiable components that derive from the system and form the system itself as a whole. Various factors, such as preferences or goals, influence the members' interactions. The family boundary is biologically and socially defined and preserved by its members, and every member assumes a specific role as the system evolves and self-reproduces. For instance, 'sons are transformed into fathers, fathers into grandfathers, mothers and fathers produce sons and daughters (brothers and sisters) […]'.[21] External components are viewed as temporary actors in the family system'.[22]

A criticism of considering social systems as autopoietic is that they may not have clear boundaries, making it difficult to distinguish between members and non-members. For

[16] Ibid 93.
[17] Mihai-Cristian Trandafir, 'A critical review of autopoietic systems in economic discipline' (2017) 36(2) EuroEconomica 91, 93.
[18] Milan Zeleny and Kevin D. Hufford, 'The Application of Autopoiesis in Systems Analysis: Are Autopoietic systems also social systems?' (1992) 21(2) International Journal of General Systems 145, 154.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid 155.
[21] Ibid 156.
[22] Ibid.

instance, in some cases, such as divorce or members living abroad, new boundaries and the possibility for new dynamics arise within the family.[23] In addition, other cultures can influence families and develop new norms that could redefine how members interact with each other.[24] Secondly, in autopoietic social systems, members have clear and specialised roles produced through their interactions. This can lead to confusion as to whether the roles are supposed to be biological roles or socially constructed roles developed in specific cultural contexts. This confusion is also demonstrated in the self-production process of autopoietic social systems.[25] Some authors limited this process to the production of biological members, such as sons turning into fathers and fathers producing sons and daughters. In contrast, some equated the production of biological components to the social roles these components play in the family.[26] For instance, fathers turning into heads of the family or wage earners can be seen as a social construct, whereas 'the actual production of biological organisms is a biological process quite independent of whether such organisms then participate in a social family.'[27]

On the other hand, some believe that autopoiesis can be used to explain how systems can stabilise themselves in 'chaotic' periods. For instance, an autopoietic political system defines a state as a 'process of a social system' that governs itself and defines its relations with other systems at various levels.[28] An autopoietic state undergoes continuous transformations to adapt to multilevel disruptions within and outside the system. The autopoietic system only interacts with external changes or perturbations if it has an 'interest' in doing so and if interacting with those perturbations is relevant to its preservation.[29] These disruptions are effectively dodged by the state as long as their duration does not threaten the state's stability, and they also encourage actors to coevolve in a mutually beneficial way in their interactions. Moreover, in autopoietic states, the independence of individuals and civil society from the state and the multiple 'organised interests' stemming from social classes is preserved.[30] This entails that autopoietic social

[23] John Mingers, 'The problem of social autopoiesis' (1992) 21(2) International Journal of General Systems 229, 231.
[24] Ibid 232.
[25] Ibid.
[26] John Mingers, 'The problem of social autopoiesis' (1992) 21(2) International Journal of General Systems 229, 233.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Sandra Braman, 'The Autopoietic State: Communication and Democratic Potential in the Net' (1994) 45(6) Journal of the American Society for Information Science 358, 364.
[29] John Protevi, 'Beyond Autopoeisis: Inflections of Emergence and Politics in the Work of Francisco Varela' in Bruno Clarke and Mark Hansen, eds., *Emergence and Embodiment: Essays in Neocybernetics* (Duke University Press, 2008) 94, 98.
[30] Sandra Braman, 'The Autopoietic State: Communication and Democratic Potential in the Net' (1994) 45(6) Journal of the American Society for Information Science 358, 366.

and political systems are 'organisationally closed' but open in their choice of when to interact with their environment, depending on their unique identity.[31]

Autopoiesis shares similarities with complexity in terms of self-regulation and emergence. First, autopoietic systems self-regulate as their components continuously organise themselves to regenerate the system and maintain its integrity.[32] Thus, similarly to complex systems, which will be explained in later sections of this chapter, autopoietic systems do not require a central controller as their organisation is spontaneous and regulated by their members' interactions. Secondly, regarding emergence, the autopoietic cycle creates emergent properties or new components within the system. These emergent properties are only displayed when the system is whole.[33] For instance, Varela and Maturana used the example of life as a 'special novel emergent property' deriving from the process of units becoming 'biologically autonomous systems' with their own rules and behaviour.[34] The unit then becomes a living organism. In social autopoietic systems, family, for instance, is an 'emergent property arising from the organisation of individuals […]'.[35]

Autopoiesis differs from complexity theory in various ways, especially regarding how systems are organised and relate to other systems. From an autopoietic perspective, for instance, a legal system constantly generates and improves legal materials based on preexisting legal materials, thus continually defining and altering the 'conditions of its own validity'.[36] Critics of this perspective explained that the legal system cannot be self-produced without the participation of human actors' cognition. Thus, the legal system could hardly be seen as closed in the autopoietic sense, as it involves actors that belong to other social systems, such as the political system. For instance, legal systems like the common law allow individuals to define the content of legal rules, not just state the content of legal material that regulates individuals' behaviours. This demonstrates that the 'legal norm does not stand apart from its maker', mainly because it constantly evolves following lessons from its application.[37] It also entails that social systems are not 'free'

[31] Angelique Chettiparamb, 'Autopoietic interaction systems: micro-dynamics of participation and its limits' (2020) 25(4) International Planning Studies 427, 429.
[32] Pier Luigi Luisi, 'Autopoiesis: a review and a reappraisal' (2003) 90(2) Naturwissenschaften 49, 51.
[33] Ibid 52.
[34] Pier Luigi Luisi, 'Autopoiesis: a review and a reappraisal' (2003) 90(2) Naturwissenschaften 49, 52.
[35] Ibid 57.
[36] Arthur J. Jacobson, 'Review: Autopoietic Law: The New Science of Niklas Luhmann' (1989) 87(6) The Michigan Law Review Association 1647, 1648.
[37] Ibid 1652.

from the influence of other systems.[38] Webb highlighted the fragility of autopoietic systems, which can't conceptualise 'fundamental shifts' caused by environmental changes, information exchange between the system and its environment, or internal disruptions.[39]

The inconsistencies in the literature on autopoiesis, particularly regarding social and political systems, and the difficulty in viewing the political system as autopoietic, when this thesis addresses the influence of the World Bank on domestic political systems, make complexity theory a more relevant choice for a better understanding of the political system. Having explained autopoiesis and the characteristics of autopoietic systems, the next section will introduce complexity theory as the approach chosen in this thesis to provide a holistic understanding of the domestic political system.

3.2. The Evolution of Complexity Theory

Before delving into complexity theory, it is essential to distinguish between simple, complicated and complex systems. First, a system can have a variety of definitions depending on its characteristics, meaning whether it is a biological system, a physical system, a social system or any other system 'described by an observer'.[40] Thus, as defined by Gaines, a system is 'what is distinguished as a system' and can have various associated adjectives and characteristics.[41] Simple systems are well-defined systems encompassing a 'small number of elements' whose interactions follow clearly defined laws.[42] A pendulum embodies such a system through its 'well-described' behaviour, which follows clear patterns. [43] Simple systems have mechanical behaviours that follow Newtonian 'one-to-one cause and effect thinking', like clockwork.[44] Apart from being simple, systems can be complicated or complex. Complicated and complex systems share the

[38] Michael King, 'The 'Truth' about Autopoiesis' (1993) 20(2) Journal of Law and Society 218, 219.
[39] Thomas E. Webb, 'Asylum and Complexity: The Vulnerable Identity of Law as a Complex System' in Jamie Murray, Thomas E. Webb and Steven Wheatley (eds) *Complexity Theory and Law* (1st Edition Routledge, 2018) p 8.
[40] Milan Zeleny and Kevin D. Hufford, 'The Application of Autopoiesis in Systems Analysis: Are Autopoietic systems also social systems?' (1992) 21(2) International Journal of General Systems 145, 145.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Franciszek Grabowski and Dominik Strzałka, 'Simple, Complicated and Complex Systems - The Brief Introduction' (IEEE Explore, July 2008) < https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/4581503 > p 571 accessed 26/06/2025.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Joachim P. Sturmberg et al. 'It is complicated!–misunderstanding the complexities of 'complex'' (2017) 23(2) Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice 426, 427.

same Proto-Indo-European etymological prefix: 'com', which means 'together'.[45] The word 'complicated' derives from the verb 'plicare' in Latin, which means 'many', while 'complex' comes from the Latin root 'plectere', which can mean interlace, linking or intertwine.[46]

A complicated model has a high number of actors interacting in a way that can be represented through 'logical rules' or mathematical equations.[47] Thus, complicated systems have a high number of elements interacting in a well-defined setting, with set functions and 'understandable laws' like simple systems.[48] Such systems are made of multiple parts that do not adapt to their environment.[49] They are organised in a clearly defined and relatively predictable way, though this is not necessarily 'obvious'.[50] Planes can illustrate these systems, functioning as machines with identifiable yet not immediately visible components that work together to operate effectively.[51] Hence, with all the right pieces, you could build a plane again in a predictable way. The word 'complicated' refers to something that can be separated into pieces and rebuilt from those same pieces.[52] Linear equations also effectively represent complicated systems, using abstract concepts that can be clarified or resolved through appropriate methods.[53]

A complex system refers to a system's behaviour characterised by individual agents interacting in an undetermined manner without the intervention of a controller, and this unpredictability spreads across the system.[54] Complex systems' behaviour is not easily predictable. This can be explained by the fact that these systems demonstrate a high diversity of 'networks and dynamics' among their agents, making them unpredictable and difficult to understand without a holistic perspective.[55] For instance, the 'social world' can be called complex because it possesses a multitude of agents that interact at multiple

[45] Zhanli Sun et al., 'Simple or complicated agent-based models? A complicated issue' (2016) 86 Environmental Modelling & Software 56, 58.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Franciszek Grabowski and Dominik Strzałka, 'Simple, Complicated and Complex Systems - The Brief Introduction' (IEEE Explore, July 2008) < https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/4581503 > p 571 accessed 26/06/2025.
[49] Şuay Nilhan Açıkalın and Erbil Can Artun, 'Chapter 7 The Concept of Self-Organized Criticality: The Case Study of the Arab Uprising' in Şefika Ş. Erçetin and Nihan Potas (eds) , *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2017, Springer Proceedings in Complexity* (Springer International Publishing, 2019) 73, 76.
[50] Joachim P. Sturmberg et al. 'It is complicated!–misunderstanding the complexities of 'complex'' (2017) 23(2) Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice 426, 427.
[51] Ibid.
[52]David Byrne and Gill Callaghan, 'Complexity Theory and the Social Sciences The state of the art' (1st edition Routledge, 2013) p 4.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Zhanli Sun et al., 'Simple or complicated agent-based models? A complicated issue' (2016) 86 Environmental Modelling & Software 56, 58.
[55] David Byrne and Gill Callaghan, 'Complexity Theory and the Social Sciences The state of the art' (1st edition Routledge, 2013) p 4.

levels among each other; but machinery, like a jet liner, is rather 'complicated.'[56] In addition, accurately modelling the internal dynamics and methods of interactions in a complex system is impossible, which is the opposite of a complicated system, where it is often essential that the interactions be highly predictable.[57]

Complex systems are often referred to as being adaptive. Complex adaptive systems have various processes that can be observed in natural systems, such as natural selection or an 'evolving biosphere'.[58] These systems do not rely on a central controller and behave nonlinearly and adaptively. Holland explained four critical characteristics of complex adaptive systems: 'aggregation, nonlinearity, diversity and flows'.[59] Aggregation refers to how individual agents are put into specific categories, such as 'individuals into populations' or 'populations into species'.[60] The components or agents of complex adaptive systems and their organisation are not homogenous, so it is only possible to notice agents' clusters or networks depending on their resemblance.[61] The formation of networks and hierarchies in complex adaptive systems emerges from actors' interactions at the lower levels of their organisation. The newly formed networks, in turn, create patterns that restrict individual agents' interactions, thus impacting the overall system's evolution.[62] Nonlinearity in complex adaptive systems is explained by the sudden mutations or perturbations that may occur in their external environment, which leads those systems to evolve by adapting to unpredictable circumstances.[63] As those systems adapt, diversity is simultaneously created and maintained via 'natural selection' or the system's equivalent process.[64] In addition, flows of nutrients, energy, material and information enable complex systems to fuel agents' interactions and 'transform the community from a random collection of species into an integrated whole' in which all parts are interconnected.[65]

Having made the distinction between simple, complicated, and complex systems, we can now delve into the historical background of complexity theory.

---

[56] Ibid.
[57]Colin Wight, 'Theorizing International Relations Emergence, Organized Complexity, and Integrative Pluralism' in Emilian Kavalski (ed) *World Politics at the Edge of Chaos*, (State University of New York Press, 2015) p 53, 58.
[58] Simon A. Levin, 'Ecosystems and the Biosphere as Complex Adaptive Systems' (1998) 1 Ecosystems 431, 432.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid 433.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid 432.
[63] Ibid 433.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

3.2.1. Historical Background

While complexity theory developed to be a coherent body of research, it is considered a 'melting pot' of preceding theories, which could be traced back to WWI.[66] Simon Herbert identified three waves of research related to complexity, with the first wave led by the increased interest in notions such as holism and gestalt.[67] Holism comes from the understanding that it is only possible to describe detailed parts of a system by understanding their 'meaning and position' in the entire system. This concept is the foundation of complexity theory. It opposes the reductionist view of systems that equate the whole as a 'simple sum of its parts'.[68] Gestalt theory explains that it is impossible to understand the behaviour of a system as a whole by observing the characteristics of its individual components in specific contexts, and that the laws defined by the system determine the future of its components.[69] This perspective views the whole as being 'greater than the sum of its parts', just like complexity and holism theories, which are all part of the body of research on systems thinking.[70]

Since Aristotle's holism theory claimed that 'knowledge is derived from the understanding of the whole and not that of the single parts', research related to systems, their component and the dynamics between them became a topic of interest.[71] This body of research evolved into what was later called 'systems theory'.[72] Systems thinking is a discipline that understands systems as composed of interconnected and mutually dependent parts that interact to form 'collective entities'.[73] This theory views systems as open when they are complex adaptive systems interacting with their external environment to evolve over time, or closed when they are independent of their environment and constantly reproduce the same outcomes.[74] Systems thinking defines complex systems as

[66] Philip Anderson, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' (1999) 10(3) Organization Science 216, 218.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Franciszek Grabowski and Dominik Strzałka, 'Simple, Complicated and Complex Systems - The Brief Introduction' (IEEE Explore, July 2008) < https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/4581503 > p 570 accessed 26/06/2025.
[69] Max Wertheimer and Kurt Riezler, 'Gestalt theory' (1944) 11 Social Research 78, 84.
[70] Malcolm MacLachlan et al., ' Intersections Between Systems Thinking and Market Shaping for Assistive Technology: The SMART(Systems-Market for Assistive and Related Technologies) Thinking Matrix' (2018) 15(12) International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 1, 3.
[71] Cristina Mele, Jacqueline Pels and Francesco Polese, 'A Brief Review of Systems Theories and Their Managerial Applications' (2010) 2(1-2) Service Science 126, 126.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Malcolm MacLachlan et al., ' Intersections Between Systems Thinking and Market Shaping for Assistive Technology: The SMART(Systems-Market for Assistive and Related Technologies) Thinking Matrix' (2018) 15(12) International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 1, 2.
[74] Ibid.

systems resulting from the interactions of a high amount of agents.[75] The complexity of such systems thus lies in the high number of agents and interactions among these agents within the system, which create complex dynamics.[76]

With the explosion of 'feedback-control devices' and computers, the second wave in complexity research occurred with cybernetics and general systems theory, which emphasised replacing reductionism by modelling interactions instead of 'simplifying them away'.[77] Cybernetics focus on agents' ability to use knowledge within the system as an 'imperfect tool' to achieve their objectives without needing a clear perspective of reality outside the system.[78] This means that agents 'sense' the system's inputs and outputs and use this limited knowledge to interact and create patterns within the system.[79] As various agents participate in this process, they all develop diverse patterns from their partial knowledge of the external environment.[80] On the other hand, general systems theory views systems as a generic network of interdependent individual parts that interact with one another and lead to the emergence of 'properties and behaviour' in the system, not 'possessed by the individual parts'.[81] This theory also addresses the similarities between natural living systems and engineered systems that are artificially controlled.[82] Both theories oppose the theory of reductionism.

Reductionism describes the ability to understand a complex system by simply 'breaking it down' to analyse its parts.[83] It assumes that the sum of a system's parts can help understand the system as a whole.[84] Reductionism focuses on understanding mechanisms in modern science. Scientists such as Descartes played a significant role in using this theory to understand the construction and the 'disassembling and reassembling' of mechanistic systems, such as clockworks. The reductionist perspective suggests that we can easily understand and solve nature's complexity by breaking it down into simpler structures or components. This means we can break systems down into their smaller parts,

[75] Steven E. Phelan, 'A Note on the Correspondence Between Complexity and Systems Theory' (1999) 12 Systemic Practice and Action Research 237, 239.
[76] Ibid 240.
[77] Philip Anderson, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' (1999) 10(3) Organization Science 216, 219.
[78] Sidney Dekker et al., 'The complexity of failure: Implications of complexity theory for safety investigations' (2011) 49(6) Safety Science 939, 943.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Fulvio Mazzocchi, 'Complexity and the reductionism–holism debate in systems biology' (2012) 4(5) WIREs System Biology and Medicine 413, 418.
[82] Ibid.
[83] David Kernick, 'Can Complexity Theory Provide Better Understanding of Integrated Care?' (2003) 11(5) Journal of Integrated Care 22, 22.
[84] Ibid.

examine these parts to isolate their structures and functions, and then reassemble them to understand how the entire system works. Reductionism has been associated with a 'linear and simplistic idea of causality' or cause-and-effect thinking, as well as determinism or predictability.[85] Reductionism is based on the idea that there are underlying causes that can explain all phenomena that occur in nature. It also suggests that once we understand the chain of events for a phenomenon, we can predict only one possible future. By examining the initial conditions of a phenomenon and the mechanical laws that govern its behaviour, we can predict how a system will evolve over time.[86]

On the other hand, Simon Herbert explained that a greater scientific interest led to the third wave of research on complex systems: the notion of equilibrium in deterministic systems in the late 1960s.[87] Two theories played a significant role in driving this third wave: catastrophe theory, which explains how small shifts in a system's parameters can alter the deterministic or predictable character of a system's equilibrium, and chaos theory, which focuses on the deterministic or predictable nature of dynamical systems despite their apparent random behaviour.[88] The importance of those theories lies in scientific advancements, such as Lorenz's experiments on weather predictions, which helped to illustrate chaotic systems as dynamic systems that appear unpredictable but are 'determined by precise laws'.[89] Chaos theory addresses the behaviour of systems that are 'highly dependent on initial conditions' and, thus, do not leave room for accurate predictions due to their unpredictable, random and unstable nature.[90] This perspective also analyses the internal constraints of an organisational or social system that determine the changes in its dynamics and structure.[91]

Various approaches in systems theory influenced complexity theory. As previously stated, Complexity theory is a product of previous research; however, some authors have found a significant influence stemming from research on general systems theory.[92] General systems theory has been highly influential in complexity research, emphasising 'anti-reductionism' and systems' interconnectedness, represented by the holistic

[85] Fulvio Mazzocchi, 'Complexity and the reductionism–holism debate in systems biology' (2012) 4(5) WIREs System Biology and Medicine 413, 414.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Philip Anderson, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' (1999) 10(3) Organization Science 216, 219.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Bernard Burnes, 'Complexity theories and organizational change' (2005) 7(2) International Journal of Management Reviews 73, 78.
[90] Papa Mbengue et al. ' Management and Chaos Theory, Complexity Theory, and Self-Organizing Systems Theory' (2018) 9 Asia Pacific Journal of Research in Business Management 1, 2.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Steven M. Manson, 'Simplifying complexity: A review of complexity theory' (2001)32 Geoforum 405, 406.

approach.[93] It focuses on interactions within systems, meaning that it analyses how an individual component's behaviour can change during its interactions with other elements of a system.[94] Furthermore, general systems theory differentiates systems depending on their open, closed or isolated state.[95] From the perspective of general systems theory, systems are either closed when they are mechanical or open when they exchange 'information, energy or material with their environments'.[96] Some authors, however, explained that systems are not absolutely open or absolutely closed, but rather 'relatively open or relatively closed'.[97]

Another systems theory approach is the research on complex dynamic systems, which examines how learning generates information feedback that influences our decisions and 'mental models'.[98] Learning feeds a 'feedback process' that is often hindered by various obstacles, such as internal systems' complexity, which prevents its effectiveness and allows 'erroneous and harmful behaviours and beliefs to persist'.[99] Moreover, dynamical systems theory describes and predicts the patterns that lead complex systems to exhibit a 'complex changing behaviour at the macroscopic level', which emerges from the local interactions among components.[100]

3.2.2. From Natural Sciences to the Human World

3.2.2.1. Complexity Theory in Natural Sciences

In the natural sciences, a complex system exhibits 'large networks of components' with no internal control regulating those networks.[101] Thus, operations are regulated by simple rules that generate a 'complex collective behaviour', with a sophisticated way of processing information and an adaptive capacity that develops through learning and

[93] Ibid.
[94] Cristina Mele, Jacqueline Pels and Francesco Polese, 'A Brief Review of Systems Theories and Their Managerial Applications' (2010) 2(1-2) Service Science 126, 127.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Fremont E. Kast and James E. Rosenzweig, ' General Systems Theory: Applications for Organization and Management' (1972) 15(4) The Academy of Management Journal 447, 450.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Cristina Mele, Jacqueline Pels and Francesco Polese, 'A Brief Review of Systems Theories and Their Managerial Applications' (2010) 2(1-2) Service Science 126, 129.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Melanie Mitchell, Complexity: A Guided Tour (Oxford University Press, 2009) p 15.
[101] Ibid.

evolution.[102] In addition, a complex system is hard to predict due to the constant changes in its behavioural patterns.[103]

Darwin's theory of evolution is a significant event that preceded the shift towards analysing complex systems in the natural sciences. This theory attempted to explain the evolution of organisms and humans by tracing all species back to a common ancestor.[104] It assumed that natural selection occurred when the birth rate was higher than available resources, thus leading to competition between species in which organisms' traits were passed on with variations.[105] The inheritance of various traits was justified by the capacity for adaptation of those traits, enabling them to be selected and passed on.[106] Darwin also described this process as continuous and progressive due to the build-up of minor advantageous variations.[107] However, other theorists questioned how specific traits are transmitted from 'parents to offspring' and how variations arise.[108] This increased interest in researching patterns in living systems that lead to particular results from one point to another, which might differ from initial conditions.

Following Darwin's theory of 'evolution by natural selection', scientists have been progressively interested in how order can emerge out of 'apparent spontaneous change', which has particularly interested complexity theorists.[109] This came from the realisation that 'emergent properties', which are unpredictable and result from a system's adaptive processes, create order in complex systems.[110] In the 1960s, scientists started questioning the Darwinian natural selection theory as the sole explanation for the 'patterns of order we see in the living world.'[111] The observation of other spontaneous orders in nature, which exhibited patterns of self-organisation, led scientists such as Kauffman to use computer simulations to understand this specific phenomenon.[112]

Complexity in natural sciences was first addressed when studying the '[…] ancient idea that within life, and the cosmos there might be fundamental ordering processes […]'.[113] Complexity theory, as applied to the natural sciences, argues that the absence of

[102] Ibid 13.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Melanie Mitchell, Complexity: A Guided Tour (Oxford University Press, 2009) p 78.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid 79.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ken Cole, 'Globalization: understanding complexity' (2003) 3(4) Progress in Development Studies 323, 324.
[110] Ibid.
[111] J. Stephen Lansing, 'Complex Adaptive System' (2003) 32(1) Annual Review of Anthropology 183, 192.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ken Cole, 'Globalization: understanding complexity' (2003) 3(4) Progress in Development Studies 323, 324.

equilibrium explains the evolution of dynamic systems.[114] However, the presence of simple rules generated by a particular order prevents those systems from self-destruction.[115] In this case, complexity theory aims to describe how we can observe patterns leading to the establishment of order and how these patterns emerge without the intervention of a 'guiding hand'.[116] Complexity, as understood by the natural sciences, therefore, focuses on analysing the establishment of order in collaborative and dynamic systems composed of interconnected and interdependent elements.[117]

3.2.2.2. Complexity Theory in Social Sciences

Previously focusing on natural systems, the scope of complexity theory expanded to encompass 'social processes', addressing changes in human systems or subsystems.[118] Based on general observations of complexity in social systems, complexity theorists have progressively addressed patterns in complex systems across specific areas, including politics and economics.[119]

Previous theories influencing the development of complexity theory, especially those from the natural sciences, which utilised the concepts of nonlinearity and 'complex and chaotic systems,' opposed the Newtonian perspective.[120] The Newtonian view of the world explained that the universe is made of particles of similar material that 'move in absolute space and time' with the help of external forces governed by fixed universal rules.[121] Mathematical equations could precisely explain this paradigm due to their predictable character responding to an 'absolute order'.[122] Newton viewed the world as a space where 'everything that happens has a definitive, identifiable cause and a definitive effect'.[123] This reductionist, cause-and-effect thinking entails the existence of symmetry in the explanation and consequences of events and the understanding that it is possible to

[114] Bernard Burnes, 'Complexity theories and organizational change' (2005) 7(2) International Journal of Management Reviews 73, 74.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Steven Wheatley, 'The Emergence of New States in International Law: The Insights from Complexity Theory' (2016) 15(3) Chinese journal of international law 579, 580.
[117] Ken Cole, 'Globalization: understanding complexity' (2003) 3(4) Progress in Development Studies 323, 324.
[118] Ibid 326.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' (2022) 27(2) Perceptions 177, 183.
[121] Ibid 182.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Sidney Dekker et al., 'The complexity of failure: Implications of complexity theory for safety investigations' (2011) 49(6) Safety Science 939, 940.

'trace back' a chain of events to define a logical cause.[124] As explained by Hugh and Dekker: 'The worse the consequences, the more any preceding acts are seen as blameworthy'.[125] Moreover, Newtonian philosophy is rooted in simplicity and does not acknowledge the world's complexity, as it assumes the possibility of analysing anything by examining its 'basic components'.[126] It also entails 'absolute certainty' in every aspect of the world, which means that the future can be predicted if there is enough information about the 'initial conditions' and the rules that influenced them.[127] Moving away from Newton's perspective, scientists in various fields sought alternative ways to explain individuals' behaviour in social systems by paying closer attention to observable societal patterns.[128] This led to a scientific shift exhibiting the limits of the Newtonian perspective of a 'linear universe that moves following an absolute order and a predetermined path.[129]

On the other hand, complexity views the world as a system that is not understandable by simply analysing individual interactions and the dynamics and processes at the lower or local levels. Thus, the behaviour of a complex system emerges from local interactions among agents that create specific properties in the system, which cannot be found in individual agents. This enables the emergence of new structures within the system that a central controller does not regulate. Moreover, the system is constantly exposed to external changes. Actors interact without knowing the entire system's dynamics, as their local context confines their knowledge.[130] In addition, viewing the social system as a complex system for decision-makers means being able to assess probabilities but not have set expectations about outcomes because decisions, although intended to have specific outcomes, are not guaranteed to have these outcomes due to the lack of knowledge about all the 'laws governing a system', despite some 'knowledge of initial conditions'.[131] It is, therefore, impossible to accurately reconstruct events in such systems, as: 'The system that is subjected to scrutiny after the fact is never the same system that produced the

[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Sidney Dekker et al., 'The complexity of failure: Implications of complexity theory for safety investigations' (2011) 49(6) Safety Science 939, 940.
[128] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' (2022) 27(2) Perceptions 177, 182.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Sidney Dekker et al., 'The complexity of failure: Implications of complexity theory for safety investigations' (2011) 49(6) Safety Science 939, 941.
[131] Ibid 943.

outcome'.[132] The system constantly changes due to the diverse outcomes emerging from actors' interactions.[133]

As complexity evolved across various disciplines, its perception in each discipline changed in response to multiple factors.[134] As a multidisciplinary approach, complexity theory has been used across various disciplines to help explain the dynamics of complex systems. While deriving from the natural sciences, it was progressively used to analyse dynamics in real-world complex systems and spread across various areas of the social sciences, such as international relations or political science.[135] The past two decades have seen a growing scientific interest in complexity theory as a tool for better understanding politics, society, and the economy.[136] It has been particularly used to understand the changes resulting from observable but unpredictable interactions between entities within a social system.[137] This section will focus on key disciplines within the social sciences and their application of insights from complexity theory.

The application of complexity theory in economics resulted from a shift from previous models seeking an equilibrium to the recognition that economies 'may never settle down into an equilibrium', after understanding the complexity principle of nonlinear dynamics.[138] Moreover, some authors highlighted the challenges faced by conventional economists in grasping the complexity of social issues[139], and addressing complex events within the economic system, such as 'market failures, path dependence and multiple equilibria.'[140] Although frameworks such as cost-benefit analysis have been established to reduce complex challenges and make them 'more manageable', this approach is still limited.[141] This can be explained by its understanding that 'problems are well defined […] one equilibrium exists […], policy alternatives are clear and easy to distinguish […], and analysts can easily measure all benefits and costs in terms of money […].'[142] Complexity

[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Charles T. Hunt, 'Complexity theory' in Professor Sir Cary L Cooper (ed) *Wiley Encyclopaedia of Management* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015) p 198.
[135] Adam Day & Charles T. Hunt, 'A Perturbed Peace: Applying Complexity Theory to UN Peacekeeping' (2022) 29(1) International Peacekeeping 1, 7.
[136] Charles T. Hunt, 'Complexity theory' in Professor Sir Cary L Cooper (ed) *Wiley Encyclopaedia of Management* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015) p 198.
[137] Ibid.
[138] J. Stephen Lansing, 'Complex Adaptive System' (2003) 32(1) Annual Review of Anthropology 183, 193.
[139] Dan Melton, 'A Public Policymaker's Dilemma: Economic Development Meets Complexity Theory' (2003) 6 Oeconomicus 86, 89.
[140] Ibid 96.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

theory emphasises the limitations of such assumptions, as they do not hold in the real world.[143]

In management, complexity theory has been used following the failure of change projects based on the planned change approach.[144] Planned change emphasises a reductionist perspective based on the use of 'participative, group- and team-based programmes of change', to make the 'human side of the organisation' more effective and operational at predicting events.[145] Authors have increasingly criticised it after various economic crises, such as the oil shocks of the 1970s, which demonstrated the need for organisations to adapt to fast and unpredictable changes to survive.[146] The Planned change approach competed with the emergent approach, highlighting constant organisational changes in the form of 'accommodations, adaptations and alterations'.[147] The insights of complexity theory led to the realisation that the 'best-run companies' often survive due to their constant adaptation and novel choices, which enables them to 'operate at the edge of chaos' despite the continuous changes introduced into their 'normal operations'.[148]

The insights of complexity theory for organisational research show the importance of considering the dynamic, nonlinear characteristics of systems which exhibit unpredictable behaviour and a structure governed by 'simple order-generating rules'.[149] The failure of change projects in organisations has been explained by their top-down approach to transforming organisations, instead of a self-organisation approach. Creating conditions for individual components of the organisation to innovate and respond to environmental changes constantly requires promoting democratic practices and 'power equalisation' in organisations' 'structures, policies and practices'.[150] This highlights the importance of moving away from 'organization-wide transformation' and focusing on local, progressive transformation instead.[151]

[143] Ibid.
[144] Bernard Burnes, 'Complexity theories and organizational change' (2005) 7(2) International Journal of Management Reviews 73, 85.
[145] Ibid 74.
[146] Ibid 75.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid 81.
[149] Ibid 85.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

Some authors have used complexity to explain the emergence of various complex evolutionary trends and scenarios in other fields, such as sociology.[152] The expansion of sociological theory towards a more cosmopolitan vision, explaining the importance of complexity, stems from five observations. First, communities are interdependent and thus can be affected by global conflicts and crises which overcome national boundaries.[153] Secondly, it is essential to recognise cosmopolitan differences, such as culture and identity, which influence the nature of conflicts.[154] Thirdly, any situation can be viewed as an opportunity and a threat.[155] This is explained by the fact that the diversity of perspectives can interchangeably affect the outcomes of decisions. Fourthly, living in a world without borders is impossible due to the compulsive tendency to 'redraw old boundaries and rebuild old walls.'[156] Then, the fifth observation comes from the realisation that provincialism is an important feature influencing the interconnection of 'local, national, ethnic, religious and cosmopolitan cultures and traditions.'[157] This means that all social factors are interrelated, making it challenging to isolate any one factor to understand the dynamics of the political system.

Complexity theory has also been used in various ways in governance. For instance, organisation theorists used complexity theory's insights to analyse the process of creating effective public management strategies. In fact, 'while some strategic patterns might be intended', some are more spontaneous as they emerge from actors' reactions to other actors' strategies or unpredicted external events.[158] Public management strategies emerging from these spontaneous reactions are seen as 'outcomes of interactions', not just irregularities in policymaking and management strategies.[159] Within the literature, it was demonstrated that actors' interconnectedness influences each actor's strategies and outcomes. Thus, the literature on governance in complexity theory analyses the interdependent interactions between government organisations and various social organisations, which lead to spontaneous policies and strategies. Network theories, for instance, discussed the importance of interconnectedness and 'resource dependencies' in actors' interactions, which help social networks to evolve and sustain themselves.[160] This

[152] Andrea Pitasi, 'The Sociological Semantics of Complex Systems' (2014) 5(1) Journal of Sociological Research 203, 205.
[153] Ibid 204.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Erik-Hans Klijn, 'Complexity Theory and Public Administration: what's new?' (2008) 10(3) Public Management Review 299, 305.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.

entails that complex social systems constantly adapt or evolve into a new order through the diverse interactions and interdependence of their actors.

The literature has used complexity theory to address challenges in Law. Complexity theory characterises the legal system as an 'emergent, self-organising system' composed of an interconnected network of many parts, operating without a central controller.[161] This structure results in complex collective behaviours manifesting as observable 'patterns of law communications'.[162] Understanding states and their roles through the lens of complexity theory entails realising that they are the emerging product of 'complex interactions among individuals, formal and informal subgroups […]' and the 'tools and structures' used by actors within the system to navigate the unpredictability of their external environments.[163] For instance, the application of complexity theory in international law demonstrates that this system is a product of 'the actions and interactions of sovereign and independent states […]' and is also influenced by non-state actors who directly contribute to the 'patterns of communications' within the system.[164] The international law system evolves as actors change their behaviours to adapt to unpredictable circumstances, such as another country's actions, leading to the emergence of new structures or new paths.[165] Hence, without a clear view of all interactions in the system, state and non-state actors self-organise to adapt to unforeseen events, which impacts the development of the international law system over time.[166]

The insights of complexity theory have also been used in International Law to understand how new states emerge from the interactions between the legal and the political systems. Political and legal systems are viewed as complex systems that coexist and coevolve, whose patterns of communication influence every actor within both systems, their interactions with other actors, and the dynamics between the systems and their external environment. Wheatley argued that a rational observation of the complex international system leads to a better understanding of emergent phenomena in complex systems, such as the emergence of new states and their impact on political and legal systems.[167]

[161] Jamie Murray, Thomas E. Webb and Steven Wheatley, ' Encountering Law's complexity' in the Authors (eds) *Complexity Theory and Law: Mapping and emergent jurisprudence'* (Routledge, 2018) p 4.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Mark Chinen, 'Complexity Theory and the Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of State Responsibility' (2014) 25(3) The European Journal of International Law 703, 703.
[164] Steven Wheatley, The Idea of International Human Rights Law (Oxford University Press, 2019) p 49.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Steven Wheatley, 'The Emergence of New States in International Law: The Insights from Complexity Theory' (2016) 15(3) Chinese journal of international law 579, 582.

Additionally, complexity theory has been applied to understand the role of states in political and legal systems. States should not be viewed as a 'monolithic, insular whole' that disregards its constituents, but rather as an emerging product of its actors' interactions, making it pressing for states to be more accountable to their citizens.[168] Chinen explained that disregarding citizens' rights might impact the effectiveness and relevance of laws, as well as discourage citizens' willingness to perform their duties.[169]

Complexity theory has been applied across various disciplines to better understand what makes natural and social systems complex and how their internal dynamics and patterns help them adapt to unpredictability. However, it has faced criticism on several fronts. The next section will outline some of these critiques.

3.2.3. Criticisms of complexity theory

Complexity theory has been criticised within the literature based on different weaknesses identified. For instance, in the 1990s, the application of complexity theory in some fields, such as anthropology, was criticised for not following 'scientific processes' and being heavily based on computer simulation results, which could not be accurately used in the real world.[170] The mathematical processes used by some complexity theorists have also been criticised by some authors, who argue that the absence of proof undermines the applicability of these processes to human organisations due to their tendency to be overly general.[171]

Critics of complexity theory emphasised the concept's vagueness and lack of precision in writings, as they believed it was not well articulated enough to have a tangible impact on areas such as policymaking.[172] They argued that complexity authors' inability to agree on one definition makes the theory 'imprecise or distorted', thus rendering its implementation 'arbitrary or even misleading.'[173] The vagueness of the definition of complexity theory is influenced by its multidisciplinary nature, as its application varies

[168] Mark Chinen, 'Complexity Theory and the Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of State Responsibility' (2014) 25(3) The European Journal of International Law 703, 708.
[169] Ibid 718.
[170] J. Stephen Lansing, 'Complex Adaptive System,' 2003(32) Annual Review of Anthropology 183, 200.
[171] Bernard Burnes, 'Complexity theories and organizational change' (2005) 7(2) International Journal of Management Reviews 73, 86.
[172] Andrew Macintosh and Debra Wilkinson, 'Complexity Theory and the Constraints on Environmental Policymaking' 2016(28) Journal of Environmental Law 65, 85.
[173] Adam Day & Charles T. Hunt, 'A Perturbed Peace: Applying Complexity Theory to UN Peacekeeping' (2022) 29(1) International Peacekeeping 1, 5.

across different disciplines. This is explained by the fact that the definition and nature of any complexity research are bound to the perspective taken by each discipline, which challenges the general understanding of complexity theory.[174] The interactions between disciplines, such as natural or social sciences, encourage each discipline to borrow techniques and information from others or to 'speculate' on subjects outside of its field.[175] Furthermore, in social sciences, the theory's vagueness hinders its usefulness.[176] This is because it allows authors to conveniently pick some concepts while omitting others, which does not reflect the holistic approach of the theory. Like their components, complex systems' characteristics are '[…] closely related, and it is them working in concert that creates new order.'[177] This thesis argues that this criticism can be levelled at almost any conceptual framework, not just complexity theory. Complexity theory serves as a toolkit to enhance our understanding of social systems rather than a universal remedy for issues in the social sciences.

On the other hand, complexity theory should not be considered a new way of thinking, as previous attempts to 'explain social and political behaviour' through systems analysis have been done within social sciences.[178] Antireductionist and positivist approaches have been used as isolated examples within the literature or in a '[…] tradition of case study analysis to generate rich descriptions of specific decisions and events'.[179] The literature has also discussed the resemblance of complexity to the 'laissez-faire market ideology', which utilises the notions of self-organisation and emergence.[180]

An interesting argument related to complexity theory is the 'lack of clarity on how it manifests in practice'.[181] In fact, due to its 'lack of empirical case studies to evidence its utility', complexity theory is often criticised for not addressing issues effectively enough by giving concrete solutions. This increases the confusion among 'practitioners and policymakers', as the theory's implementation lacks accurate guidance for public decision-making processes.[182] This argument can be considered both a weakness and a

[174] Steven M. Manson, 'Simplifying complexity: A review of complexity theory' (2001) 32(3) Geoforum 405, 405.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Adam Day & Charles T. Hunt, 'A Perturbed Peace: Applying Complexity Theory to UN Peacekeeping' (2022) 29(1) International Peacekeeping 1, 6.
[177] Ibid 5.
[178] Paul Cairney and Robert Geyer, 'A critical Discussion of Complexity Theory: How does 'Complexity Thinking' improve our Understanding of Politics and Policymaking?' (2017) 3(2) Complexity, Governance & Networks 1, 2.
[179] Ibid 3.
[180] Yi Yang, 'Critical realism and complexity theory: Building a nonconstructivist systems research framework for effective governance analysis' (2021) 38(1) Systems Research Behavioural Science 177, 181.
[181] Adam Day & Charles T. Hunt, 'A Perturbed Peace: Applying Complexity Theory to UN Peacekeeping' (2022) 29(1) International Peacekeeping 1, 6.
[182] Ibid.

strength of complexity theory, as it represents a way to navigate challenges in complex systems rather than a direct or one-size-fits-all solution to these challenges.[183] However, Chapter 4 will illustrate how complexity theory can be practically applied by analysing case studies, highlighting its importance in understanding real-world issues.

Despite various attempts to use complexity theory to understand social systems holistically and effectively address their challenges, some still believe that complex social systems are too complex for individuals to understand. This thesis disagrees with this narrative because humans are the makers of the complex social system and, therefore, are the best actors to appreciate its intricacies and improve their reactions to its unpredictability. This view is supported by Yi Yang, who explained that as men and women are the makers of societal structure, they consequently understand the system.[184] As an 'intersubjective domain' made out of humans' consciousness, including thoughts, ideas, languages, signals and understandings among individuals or groups, the social world is 'intelligible' to people because they 'made it'.[185] This also raises another argument against removing all forms of complexity from all complex systems. This is not necessarily the goal of complexity theory, as it recognises that a system's robustness relies on a certain level of complexity.[186] This thesis does not seek to eliminate all complexities from the political system; instead, it aims to discover ways to navigate them effectively, thereby enhancing social accountability initiatives.

Complex systems operate through various mechanisms that dictate their functioning. These mechanisms help the systems to manage the flow of energy and information while adapting and evolving between different states, without falling into total anarchy. This process occurs without a central controller and relies solely on the system's internal dynamics and external changes in its environment. Within the literature, various features have been described to explain the dynamics of complex systems. Complex systems are: 'dynamic, complex, nonlinear, chaotic, unpredictable, sensitive to initial conditions, open, self-organising, feedback sensitive, and adaptive'.[187] The next section will briefly explain these features before focusing on three that embody the commonly acknowledged

[183] Ibid.
[184] Yi Yang, 'Critical realism and complexity theory: Building a nonconstructivist systems research framework for effective governance analysis' (2021) 38(1) Systems Research Behavioural Science 177, 181.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Scott E. Page, 'A complexity perspective on institutional design' (2012) 11(1) Sage Publications 5, 21.
[187] Diane Larsen-Freeman, 'Chaos I Complexity Science and Second Language Acquisition' (1997) 18(2) Applied Linguistics 141, 142.

characteristics of complex natural, social, and political systems, providing greater clarity. These features are self-organisation, feedback, and openness.

3.3. Features of Complex Systems

Complex systems differ from complicated systems due to the large number of actors, factors, and trajectories that can impact the order of social and natural systems. Within the literature, complex systems are described as dynamic systems. Constant internal and external information and energy flows facilitate dynamic interactions among agents within the system, as well as among various systems simultaneously. As each system becomes part of another system, they exchange information while keeping their integrity and partial autonomy from each other. The hierarchy in complex systems is not for controlling purposes but merely represents newer levels emerging from changes at the lower levels.[188]

Complex systems are also described as self-organised systems. Understanding such systems requires the consideration of the diversity of interactions and the high degree of connectivity among actors.[189] Complexity theory views systems as units composed of individual components whose organisation is built around a 'complex relationship network'.[190] The diversity and high number of interactions and collective action increase the system's complexity and limit the ability to predict systemic behaviour in the long term.[191] Actors are interdependent and interconnected, and their diversity allows the system to survive unpredictability, such as the extinction of a species, as agents can adapt and self-organise to regulate the system under new conditions. Self-organisation is, thus, an emerging factor of this adaptive process. This illustrates the diversity, adaptability, interconnectedness, and communication modes of complex systems.[192]

[188] Sandra Braman, 'The Autopoietic State: Communication and Democratic Potential in the Net' (1994) 45(6) Journal of the American Society for Information Science 358, 364.
[189] Amandine Orsini et al. 'Forum: Complex Systems and International Governance' (2020) 22(4) International Studies Review 1008, 1013.
[190] Şuay Nilhan Açıkalın and Erbil Can Artun, 'Chapter 7 The Concept of Self-Organized Criticality: The Case Study of the Arab Uprising' in Şefika Ş. Erçetin and Nihan Potas (eds) , *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2017, Springer Proceedings in Complexity* (Springer International Publishing, 2019) 73, 74.
[191] Ibid 75.
[192] Ibid 76.

Complex systems are described as unpredictable. Although some equate complex systems with chaotic systems, this thesis differentiates between the two types of systems due to the emergent characteristic of complex systems. Emergence is a process that occurs at various levels within a system's organisation. It illustrates that properties at one level cannot be found at the lower levels. Thus, it is impossible to understand behaviour at a higher level by isolating and analysing the dynamics at a lower level in the system. New properties at higher levels are emerging, resulting from interactions among individual actors at lower levels. Emergence makes it difficult to predict changes within a system, as these changes are believed to have their unique cause-and-effect correlation.[193] This enables 'novelty and new properties' to emerge at newer levels, out of interactions at the lower levels.[194] However, this does not entail that complex systems are chaotic. They maintain their order by acquiring new properties which emerge from the system's ability to adapt to its environment and self-organise from the bottom up. This self-organisation occurs as an emergent process, enabling the system to sustain itself and exhibit a 'large degree of resilience' during transitional periods of high uncertainty.[195]

Complex systems are described as nonlinear and sensitive to initial conditions. The concept of nonlinearity refers to the unforeseeable outcomes that result from agents' interactions, leading to the emergence of feedback loops that either amplify or attenuate the systemic response to these interactions.[196] The agents' interconnectedness is coupled with many variables that can have various to no effect in the system, depending on the intensity of feedback mechanisms, which in turn 'modulates' the system's behaviour.[197] This means that nonlinearity in a complex system enables it to adapt to situations it cannot predict.[198] The butterfly effect has been used as a metaphor to explain how 'small events in non-linear dynamic systems can have considerable trajectory-changing consequences', using the image of a butterfly fluttering its wings on one side of the world, as this action creates a hurricane in another.[199] Due to complex systems' feedback sensitivity, feedback mechanisms are important in modifying thresholds that will either enhance a specific

[193] Fulvio Mazzocchi, 'Complexity and the reductionism–holism debate in systems biology' (2012) 4(5) WIREs System Biology and Medicine 413, 420.
[194] Kristiaan P.W. Kok et al. 'Politics of complexity: Conceptualizing agency, power, and powering in the transitional dynamics of complex adaptive systems' 2021(50) Research Policy 1, 3.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Joachim P. Sturmberg et al. 'It is complicated!–misunderstanding the complexities of 'complex'' (2017) 23(2) Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice 426, 427.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Papa Mbengue et al. ' Management and Chaos Theory, Complexity Theory, and Self-Organizing Systems Theory' (2018) 9 Asia Pacific Journal of Research in Business Management 1, 2.

regulatory action or contain it.[200] They emerge to amplify the outcomes of small changes across the system when they are positive feedback loops or reduce systemic changes when they are negative feedback loops.[201]

Complex systems are described as adaptive due to their way of navigating with unpredictable circumstances. They adapt by learning and coevolving with their environment, while their actors coevolve with each other.[202] Coevolution occurs as systems coordinate their evolutionary cycles to evolve based on the stimuli sent by other systems.[203] Evolution emerges as a 'systemic property', as units change, disappear, or specialise to improve their ability to navigate uncertainty.[204] This explains why those systems are called complex adaptive systems. They are resilient due to their adaptive ability despite their apparent chaotic internal dynamics, which allows them to evolve into new relatively 'stable states' with similar or different initial conditions to the precedent system.[205] This characteristic allows complex systems to stabilise themselves from one order to another while evolving at the edge of chaos and constantly reorganising their structures.[206]

Complexity also stresses that systems can overlap, just like their individual agents can become 'embedded in each other'.[207] For example, Holland highlighted how the human body, a natural system, can be embedded in and overlap with other socio-ecological systems.[208] This leads to an increase in interactions with diverse sets of actors, such as humans in the social system, animals in the natural system or legal infrastructures and political institutions in the political system. Hence, the dynamics at the macro level of a system emerge from micro-level interactions.[209]

To provide more clarity, as multiple other features can be found in the literature, this thesis will summarise complex systems as self-organised, open and regulated through

[200] John Reinitz et al., 'Adaptation, fitness landscape learning and fast evolution' (2019) 8(358) F1000Research 1, 16.
[201] Kristiaan P.W. Kok et al. 'Politics of complexity: Conceptualizing agency, power, and powering in the transitional dynamics of complex adaptive systems' (2021) 50(3) Research Policy 1, 3.
[202] Fulvio Mazzocchi, 'Complexity and the reductionism–holism debate in systems biology' (2012) 4(5) WIREs System Biology and Medicine 413, 422.
[203] Sandra Braman, 'The Autopoietic State: Communication and Democratic Potential in the Net' (1994) 45(6) Journal of the American Society for Information Science 358, 364.
[204] Amandine Orsini et al. 'Forum: Complex Systems and International Governance' (2020) 22(4) International Studies Review 1008,1011.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Fulvio Mazzocchi, 'Complexity and the reductionism–holism debate in systems biology' (2012) 4(5) WIREs System Biology and Medicine 413, 422.
[207] Kristiaan P.W. Kok et al. 'Politics of complexity: Conceptualizing agency, power, and powering in the transitional dynamics of complex adaptive systems' (2021) 50(3) Research Policy 1, 3.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.

feedback mechanisms. In the next sections, we will see that complexity theory views complex systems as self-organised systems composed of multiple components interacting at various levels and whose behaviours influence the entire system in which they 'live', as much as the system's internal dynamics and external environment affect them. We will also see that complexity theory views complex systems as systems with nonlinear internal dynamics and evolution, meaning there is no proportional relationship between input and output. Positive and negative feedback mechanisms play a crucial role in reinforcing or mitigating the effects of these inputs or outputs, thereby underscoring the importance of feedback mechanisms as a key feature of complex systems. On the other hand, complexity views complex systems as open to their external environment, with which they exchange information, resources, and energy flows.

The next sections will explain the importance of self-organisation, feedback mechanisms and openness in natural, social and political systems. This will illustrate the features of complex systems in biology, social sciences and politics.

3.3.1. Self-Organisation

3.3.1.1. Self-organisation in natural systems

In natural sciences, complexity theory views complex systems through a holistic perspective, as this holistic approach enables the investigation of various organisms at 'different levels of the hierarchical structure'.[210] Natural complex systems are built on their components' internal characteristics, which enables them to self-organise.[211] Many authors have defined the process of self-organisation, but Ridout provides a clear definition. Self-organisation can be defined as a 'process in which a pattern at the global level of a system emerges solely from numerous interactions among lower-level components of the system'.[212] In self-organised systems, 'local information' directs the interactions between the components without considering the overall systemic pattern.[213]

[210] Przemyslaw Waliszewski, Marcin Molski and Jerzy Konarski, 'On the holistic approach in cellular and cancer biology: Nonlinearity, complexity, and quasi-determinism of the dynamic cellular network' (1998) 68(2) Journal of Surgical Oncology 70, 77.
[211] Valeria V. Isaeva, 'Self-organization in biological systems' (2012) 39(2) Biology Bulletin 110, 116.
[212] Martin S. Ridout, 'Reviewed Work(s): Self-Organization in Biological Systems by S. Camazine, J.-L. Deneubourg, N. R. Franks, J. Sneyd, G. Theraulaz and E. Bonabeau,' (2002) 58 Biometrics 478, 478.
[213] Ibid.

As a key concept explaining the formation of patterns in various systems, including natural systems, self-organisation results from 'collective interactions' among individual elements, which lead to the emergence of a general order 'in time and space of a given system'.[214] Hence, complexity theory views natural systems as dynamically self-organised systems exhibiting spontaneous 'spatiotemporal' emergent patterns.[215] This means that these systems exhibit self-organised or decentralised control, as illustrated by cells and organisms.[216]

Some natural systems exhibit centralised patterns of control to coordinate their components. This centralised control enables these systems to be better organised when facing threats by having a global response, instead of a localised response determined by individual subunits.[217] Contrary to human systems, where technology exacerbates communication, biological or natural systems that established 'powerful communication networks' have set arrangements with 'solid connections' between their components.[218] This stability in the organisation of some complex natural systems, and the interactions among their subunits, accelerates the development of a global 'communication network' within the system.[219] However, the example of ant colonies explains how 'needless redundancies' can occur without central control.[220] In fact, in cases when an 'ant colony changes nest sites', 'some workers carry brood items out of the old site while others carry them back in again.'[221] The redundancies within a biological system can impact the system's ability to find a globally optimal solution to a problem, making the system extremely vulnerable.[222] This means that in biological systems, decentralised control can prevent actors within a system from behaving cohesively when the system experiences sudden changes.

On the other hand, decentralised control can benefit other complex natural systems. Many biological systems rely on self-organisation either because they have not adapted to the point of reaching centralised control or because their internal selection does not require centralised control at the 'communicational' or 'computational' level.[223] Decentralised

[214] Roland Wedlich-Söldner and Timo Betz, 'Self-organization: the fundament of cell biology' (2018) 373 Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society 1, 1.
[215] Valeria V. Isaeva, 'Self-organization in biological systems' (2012) 39(2) Biology Bulletin 110, 110.
[216] Thomas D. Seeley, 'When Is Self-Organization Used in Biological Systems?' (2002) 202(3) The Biological Bulletin 314, 314.
[217] Ibid 315.
[218] Ibid 316.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid 315.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Thomas D. Seeley, 'When Is Self-Organization Used in Biological Systems?' (2002) 202(3) The Biological Bulletin 314, 315.

control can benefit some biological systems in situations where centralised control incurs higher costs due to the 'sophisticated communicational and computational abilities' that centralised control requires.[224] For instance, a biological system with centralised control, which is constantly exposed to challenges such as a 'loss of subunits', can produce a significant negative impact on the entire system.[225] In such systems, the loss of the central controller can weaken the entire system, while systems exhibiting decentralised patterns of control tend to be more 'robust to the loss of subunits.'[226]

Self-organisation is an important process that explains the level of complexity in biological systems because these systems' general patterns are 'produced by local interactions'.[227] The importance of the process of self-organisation in biological systems' internal development, especially organisms' maturation, lies in the 'local interactions' between these systems' elements, which lead to the formation of widespread patterns within the systems.[228] For instance, as a self-organised system, the 'adult body plan of an organism' is shaped by the interactions among multiple 'cells and tissues'.[229] These complex interactions are arbitrated by vital factors such as a 'differential gene expression, local chemical communication among cells, and local regulation that constitute development'.[230] This also means that the DNA sequence is not the only factor aiding organisms in developing, as an organism's development is produced by the complex self-organisation of its components.[231] In addition, natural systems differentiate themselves by their ability to inherit traits from previous natural systems, which enables them to build their own internal memory.[232]

In biological systems, self-organisation can be materialised by natural selection, as it refers to cells and organisms' ability to self-organise and become more robust, thus demonstrating the theories of 'natural selection and evolution.'[233] Natural selection entails competition between systems that can adapt and be the most 'sustainable' and 'flexible'.[234] The evolution of a self-organised system relies on the presence of a feedback

[224] Ibid 316.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.
[227] J. Cole Blaise, 'Evolution of Self-Organized Systems' (2002) 202(3) The Biological bulletin 256, 256.
[228] Valeria V. Isaeva, 'Self-organization in biological systems' (2012) 39(2) Biology Bulletin 110, 110.
[229] J. Cole Blaise, 'Evolution of Self-Organized Systems' (2002) 202(3) The Biological bulletin 256, 256.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Roland Wedlich-Söldner and Timo Betz, 'Self-organization: the fundament of cell biology' (2018) 373 Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society 1, 2.
[234] Valeria V. Isaeva, 'Self-organization in biological systems' (2012) 39(2) Biology Bulletin 110, 110.

mechanism between individual components and the 'self-organised pattern that emerges from the interaction.'[235] Therefore, an organism is produced by the 'genetic feedback' between its elements and its general self-organised observable characteristics.[236] Furthermore, ecosystems have different characteristics, such as their organisation in space or the 'distribution and abundance of species', which can be defined as 'emergent' from the natural selection process.[237] Hence, natural selection is a bottom-up process that responds to preestablished 'principles of evolutionary change.'[238] The next section will illustrate the idea of self-organisation in social systems.

3.3.1.2. Self-organisation in social systems

Complexity theory views social systems as self-organised systems, but with an organisation distinct from that of natural systems due to the complexity of human behaviour. Thus, analysing social issues requires understanding their inherent complexity and the inability to find one-size-fits-all solutions. The evolution of social systems is influenced by internal factors related to the agents' behaviours and environmental constraints. This makes social systems unique as human beings 'develop individual projects and desires', which is not the case in natural systems.[239] Moreover, human projects can stem from long-term expectations and predictions of other actors' desires. This state between 'desired and actual behaviour', as well as environmental challenges, affects the system's dynamics by reinforcing internal constraints.[240] Since internal interactions and external conditions influence societies' structures, complexity theorists view them as 'totalities'.[241] As 'the social whole is greater than the sum of its parts', following a holistic approach to understanding the system entails that complexity theory does not believe that the sum of the interactions among actors can represent the dynamics within the system as a whole.[242]

[235] J. Cole Blaise, 'Evolution of Self-Organized Systems' (2002) 202(3) The Biological bulletin 256, 260.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Simon A. Levin, 'Self-organization and the Emergence of Complexity in Ecological Systems' (2005) 55(12) Bioscience 1075, 1077.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Michael Reed and David L. Harvey, 'The New Science and the Old: Complexity and Realism in the Social Sciences' (1992) 22(4) Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 353, 370.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.

Drawing on the understanding of complex systems in the natural sciences, complexity has been applied to the social sciences and the analysis of human behaviour. Systems theory, for instance, was pivotal in using complexity theory in social sciences to better understand the social context in which organisations operate. Complexity theory deepened the understanding of societal issues by making their analysis 'progressively based on a verifiable reality'.[243] From this perspective, society can be viewed as a self-organised complex system, internally influenced by the behaviour of its components.[244] This is because the evolution of social systems is based on the communication between and the relationships among their individual components, which gives society its complex nature. In a complex social system, the interactions and 'interdependencies' between individuals allow the multiple 'sub-systemic parts' of the whole system to function.[245]

Social systems, viewed as complex systems, are shaped by their ability to self-create, as sub-systems learn and adapt through interaction.[246] Social systems can facilitate and promote the 'mutual subsistence of complex parts' by simultaneously creating and responding to the 'needs that arise from within'.[247] Therefore, society can be considered a self-organised and adaptive complex system, characterised by the interrelation and interdependence of its subsystems.[248] The general behaviour of individuals in social systems emerges from the 'holistic sum' of the multiple behaviours within those systems.[249] This is explained by the fact that a social system emerges following the 'dynamic interactions among individuals.'[250] As the system is influenced by its internal dynamics, which create multiple patterns from the bottom up, it also influences its components' behaviour to ensure its 'vitality and survival'.[251] Social systems are therefore: 'self-organised emergent entities.'[252]

Self-organisation is a dynamic process that continuously transforms a system's structure through the interactions of its agents, its historical context, the influence of external

[243] Miguel Bustamante-Ubilla and Felipe Arenas-Torres, 'Epistemological Foundations of Complexity Theory' (2022) 14(20) Sustainability 1,2.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Ibid.
[249] David Manuel-Navarrete, 'Approaches and Implications of using Complexity Theory for dealing with Social Systems'(2001) Workshop on Conservation and Sustainable Development- Comparative Perspectives (Yale University, August 2001) p 9 < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242403867_Approaches_and_Implications_of_using_Complexity_Theory_for_dealing_with_Social_Systems > accessed 26/06/2025.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.

forces, and internal circumstances.[253] These factors cannot be understood by only observing the behaviour of a single component or by resorting to a fixed principle.[254] Therefore, the process of self-organisation in complex systems enables their structure to evolve without constantly referring to 'first beginnings'.[255] This allows social systems to utilise their memory to establish order while continually adapting to changes and 'novelty' in their environment.[256]

Social systems, viewed through the lens of complexity theory, operate between chaos and stability.[257] As social systems 'evolve and co-evolve qualitatively over time', they are exposed to constant changes due to unforeseen events, as new components are created and 'new problems and opportunities' occur.[258] These unforeseen events impact the system by destroying some elements or leading to the 'creation or discovery of new ones'.[259] Social systems' analysis requires consideration of various data types over time, emphasising the multitude of factors that lead to their evolution over time.[260] Hence, viewing social systems as complex systems entails that they are self-organised, adapting through constant changes and stable states, as well as sensitive to the outcomes of interactions at lower levels, which can influence the way upper levels respond to change.[261] As social systems are characterised by nonlinear dynamics and operate far from equilibrium, they exhibit self-organisation tendencies at the macroscopic level of their internal organisation.[262] This self-organised pattern is a collective pattern that cannot be understood by simply observing the system's isolated components.[263]

Complexity theory's analysis of social systems and their institutions is essential to have a better understanding of the dynamics in social agents' interactions and how the structures of these dynamics are unique to every society and politics. This realisation has

[253] Robert Geyer, 'Beyond the Third Way: the science of complexity and the politics of choice' (2003) 5(2) British Journal of Politics and International Relations 237, 245.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid.
[256] David Manuel-Navarrete, 'Approaches and Implications of using Complexity Theory for dealing with Social Systems'(2001) Workshop on Conservation and Sustainable Development- Comparative Perspectives (Yale University, August 2001) p 13 < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242403867_Approaches_and_Implications_of_using_Complexity_Theory_for_dealing_with_Social_Systems > accessed 26/06/2025.
[257] Ibid 7.
[258] Peter M. Allen, Liz Varga, and Mark Strathern, 'The evolutionary complexity of social and economic systems: The inevitability of uncertainty and surprise' (2010) 12 Risk management 9, 11.
[259] Ibid.
[260] David Manuel-Navarrete, 'Approaches and Implications of using Complexity Theory for dealing with Social Systems'(2001) Workshop on Conservation and Sustainable Development- Comparative Perspectives (Yale University, August 2001) p 7 < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242403867_Approaches_and_Implications_of_using_Complexity_Theory_for_dealing_with_Social_Systems > accessed 26/06/2025.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Michael Reed and David L. Harvey, 'The New Science and the Old: Complexity and Realism in the Social Sciences' (1992) 22(4) Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 353, 360.
[263] Ibid.

been neglected within the literature, which specifically addresses human societies. Although institutions are important due to their ability to direct and restrict agents' communications, they are not irreversible. They can be 'subverted from below or reformed from above' depending on the actors' interests, which influence the entire social system in which they live. The variety of interests and the bottom-up dynamics in social systems either strengthen or remodel the systems' structure and rules.[264] This is even more relevant in the context of politics, which will be addressed in the next section.

3.3.1.3. Self-organisation in political systems

In a political system, as understood by complexity theory, all actors play an important role as their behaviours affect the system as much as the system influences the internal dynamics. Understanding political systems through the lens of complexity theory entails that although political systems are complex self-organising systems, they are also subjected to 'various forms of control and direction'.[265] Social systems exhibit 'self-organising properties' and 'organised properties'.[266]

Applying the understanding of complexity theory in natural sciences would mean viewing the political system as a complex system emerging from the outcomes of its elements' local interactions, rather than emerging from the outcomes of a 'central direction'.[267] This would entail that the political system emerges in 'the absence of central direction', which could be more realistic in biological systems where interactions between individual parts follow 'simple rules' determined by the local context.[268] As explained, in natural systems, no central controller defines the rules of the whole system. However, it is less straightforward in political systems where a central government determines the rules that local actors must follow.[269] Thus, emergence in political systems could refer to the systemic 'behaviour which results from local interaction despite central government policies or rules, not in their absence'.[270] This would be easier to explain than to view the

[264] Graham Room, 'Complexity, power and policy' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 20.
[265] Colin Wight, 'Theorizing International Relations Emergence, Organized Complexity, and Integrative Pluralism' in Emilian Kavalski (ed) *World Politics at the Edge of Chaos*, (State University of New York Press, 2015) p 58.
[266] Ibid 65.
[267] Paul Cairney and Robert Geyer, 'Introduction: A New Direction In Policymaking Theory and Practice?' in the authors (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar,2015) p 2.
[268] Ibid 3.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid.

political system as emerging from local interactions of actors unaware of the central government's attempts to establish order.[271]

Complexity theorists seek a deeper understanding of power relations within isolated communities. According to the literature, political complex systems differentiate themselves from natural systems through their agents' ability to respond individually to social and market signals, while accumulating multiple individual responses affecting the entire system. In addition, human societies are characterised by an internal competition between their actors, who constantly seek to 'extend their capacities and status within their respective complex system'.[272] Thus, their reaction to 'local signals' is also paired with their ability to influence systemic nonlinear changes in an attempt to 'reorganise and steer' resources.[273]

The self-organised nature of complex political systems is expressed through their 'order and regularities' and power dynamics, through which individual actors 'negotiate' or 'impose' that order on others.[274] In a complex adaptive system, every actor's action and the outcomes of that action are influenced by the networks to which each actor belongs.[275] Applied to the political system, this means that networks can be a 'source of power for actors' as information is distributed through those networks.[276] Some authors argue that networks have a greater ability to influence their members' interests when they are more 'institutionalised'.[277] On the other hand, complex systems are also influenced by the behaviours of their actors. Hence, complexity theory emphasises the need to understand the 'bottom-up' emergence of self-organisation patterns produced by local interactions among a system's agents.[278]

In political systems with a central government, the government plays a crucial role in enhancing society's capacity to effect change, particularly during times of conflict.[279] As governmental institutions self-organise to implement them, emerging policies can be

[271] Ibid.
[272] Graham Room, 'Complexity, power and policy' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 27.
[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid 28.
[275] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' (2022) 27(2) Perceptions 177, 188.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Graham Room, 'Complexity, power and policy' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 27.
[279] Ibid 29.

countered by internal dynamics within the system that tend toward disorder.[280] And as 'not even the most wicked of policy problems are wholly inescapable', it is essential to focus on ways complex political systems can be improved by enhancing their 'emergent powers'.[281] This requires, for instance, parting from traditional solutions relying on 'evidence-based policy-making' and adopting the understanding that 'policy interventions are not isolated'.[282] Thus, the outcomes of policy interventions can be influenced by the political ecosystem in which they are implemented and by other policy interventions with specific objectives.[283] This means that actors' interests and power dynamics within a system play a significant role in optimising the outcome of a policy intervention.[284] Some authors define it as a 'forward-looking' approach to mitigate the negative feedback loops that may derive from 'the exercise of power' in complex social systems.[285] Governments must, therefore, be held accountable for promoting agents' solidarity and compensating for possible damages 'across the society as a whole, if those damages are not to lie where they fall'.[286]

Moreover, linear approaches in policy theory historically led governments to make 'unidirectional, mechanistic and clocklike' decisions, following which public policies were often administered through merged perspectives.[287] Processing public policies through the lens of complexity theory requires the consideration of different 'policy outputs and outcomes' that may occur once these policies are launched.[288] It also entails considering the ability of governmental institutions to self-organise as a response to the outcomes of policy implementation. Although governments can 'create public policies', their authority is also related to various factors, including 'written laws and rules, extra-legal military, paramilitary or police actions, support of political leadership, and informal social norms and traditions that support government legitimacy and actions.'[289] Consequently, public policies created by governments are subjected to multiple factors which can impact the outcomes of their implementation.[290] Moreover, the diversity of

[280] Michael Givel, ''What's the big deal?': complexity versus traditional US policy approaches' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar,2015) p 71.
[281] Graham Room, 'Complexity, power and policy' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 29.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Michael Givel, 'What's the big deal?': complexity versus traditional US policy approaches' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 70.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Ibid.

internal and external factors in complex systems influences the system's dynamics through feedback mechanisms that amplify or restrict the actions and decisions of actors. The next section will expand on the second feature of complex systems: feedback mechanisms.

3.3.2. Feedback mechanisms

3.3.2.1. Feedback mechanisms in natural systems

Complex systems are characterised by self-organised networks or 'autogenesis', in which energy is imported into the system from the outside, and agents influence each other's behaviour, thus creating feedback loops.[291] Feedback can be described as a 'self-directed' mechanism that redirects a small portion of a system's output to its input.[292] The redirected output can take the form of energy or information, and the process can impact the system's behaviour based on its 'previous behaviour'.[293] This means that feedback loops can be defined as a series of changes generated by a variation in one system's component, and originating from a series of changes in other components.[294] Numerous feedback loops can be found in complex adaptive systems, enabling them to be 'interconnected'.[295]

Widely used in the field of cybernetics, feedback loops can be described as a recursive process in which a system's output influences its input, which then impacts the system's output.[296] Feedback mechanisms can be found in different complex systems, whether technical or social, resulting from how a system processes information.[297] Cybernetics' understanding of feedback mechanisms refers to how information is passed through and managed within complex systems, through their internal networks.[298] In addition, feedback mechanisms in complex systems are hard to predict and control.[299] This can be explained by unpredictable events coming from the external environment, which can lead

[291] Philip Anderson, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' (1999) 10(3) Organization Science 216, 222.
[292] Pablo T. Rodriguez-Gonzalez, Ramiro Rico-Martinez, and Vicente Rico-Ramirez, 'Effect of feedback loops on the sustainability and resilience of human-ecosystems' (2020) 426 Ecological Modelling 1, 2.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Frank Gadinger & Dirk Peters, 'Feedback loops in a world of complexity: a cybernetic approach at the interface of foreign policy analysis and international relations theory' (2016) 29(1) Cambridge Review of International Affairs 251, 254.
[297] Ibid.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid 255.

agents to respond unpredictably.[300] Therefore, feedback mechanisms are continuing processes due to the inability to control the outcomes of agents' actions or the entire system's behaviour, as they are not linear. This is explained by the fact that how information is shared within networks can hinder attempts to monitor and manage this information. In addition, information can be 'selectively processed' or get 'lost' or altered while travelling along networks.[301]

Feedback mechanisms enable complex natural systems to increase their robustness as they self-organise. They foster agents' adaptability to unpredictable challenges by facilitating their capacity to stabilise the system when facing perturbations, i.e unforeseen events like diseases.[302] For instance, in a biological system, a cell communicates with its neighbouring cells and the external environment using 'signalling pathways' or feedback mechanisms to adapt to external disruptions or incoming pathogens.[303] These feedback mechanisms in natural systems facilitate the system's robustness by acquiring information that prevents the system from a total shutdown due to the loss of its cells. For instance, feedback mechanisms optimise the behaviour of natural systems in natural selection, as demonstrated in various studies, by enabling them to retain the most robust elements after facing perturbations.[304] To better understand feedback mechanisms in complex systems, it is essential to know the concept of nonlinearity.

In biology, nonlinearity is opposed to linearity, which refers to the proportional relationship between an 'input-output system'.[305] Nonlinearity occurs when no 'proportional relationship between the input and the outcome' exists within a system.[306] In complex natural systems, the 'cellular network' has a complex internal structure due to the concept of nonlinearity and the network's tendency to experience recurrent 'chaotic states'.[307] The outcomes of nonlinear interactions in natural systems are varied and unpredictable, contrary to what is expected in a linear context.[308] We can consider that

[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Steffen Waldherr, Thomas Eissing, Frank Allgöwer,'Analysis of Feedback Mechanisms in Cell-biological Systems' (2008) 41(2) IFAC Proceedings Volumes 15861, 15862.
[303] Nicole Radde, 'The role of feedback mechanisms in biological network models—A tutorial' (2011) 13(5) Asian Journal of Control 597, 597.
[304] Steffen Waldherr, Thomas Eissing, Frank Allgöwer,'Analysis of Feedback Mechanisms in Cell-biological Systems' (2008) 41(2) IFAC Proceedings Volumes 15861, 15863.
[305] Natalia B. Janson, 'Non-linear dynamics of biological systems' (2012) 53(2) Contemporary Physics 137, 137.
[306] Przemyslaw Waliszewski, Marcin Molski and Jerzy Konarski, 'On the holistic approach in cellular and cancer biology: Nonlinearity, complexity, and quasi-determinism of the dynamic cellular network' (1998) 68(2) Journal of Surgical Oncology 70, 70.
[307] Ibid 74.
[308] Pierre Philippe and Omaima Mansi , 'Nonlinearity in the epidemiology of complex health and disease processes' (1998) 19(6) Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics 591, 591.

'all living systems are nonlinear', as the whole system's response to external influence cannot be reduced to the sum of responses of its individual elements.[309] Hence, complex natural systems' nonlinear nature and self-organisational properties enable them to adapt to unpredictable events effectively.[310]

Linear models' dynamics are limited in terms of 'possible outputs', while nonlinear models refrain from using a reductionist perspective.[311] This can be explained by the fact that what would usually be seen as randomness or 'error variation' in linear models would be addressed more efficiently in nonlinear models.[312] Nonlinear models provide a better understanding of sudden changes in complex systems. In contrast, linear models tend to use a reductionist perspective by assuming that 'the probability of an outcome is always the sum of its component forces and that the outcome is predictable', despite the occurrence of 'random errors'.[313] For instance, although linear perspectives can identify patterns that help predict and shape 'public health preventive programmes' efficiently, nonlinear approaches can better explain the lack of reliability in cause-and-effect relationships in biology.[314] Thus, understanding nonlinear dynamics can enable the creation of more efficient predictions.[315]

Nonlinearity in complex natural systems leads to the creation of internal feedback mechanisms.[316] Feedback mechanisms restrict the system to a certain 'hierarchical structure' regarding how its components are organised.[317] As feedback increases within a complex system, the system's complexity increases and vice versa.[318] For instance, due to its unpredictable nature, a disease can be explained as emerging from the sensitivity of a biological system to 'initial conditions' or 'exposures', which creates outcomes disseminated by a feedback mechanism.[319] Therefore, 'feedback loops' and a system's

[309] Natalia B. Janson, 'Non-linear dynamics of biological systems' (2012) 53(2) Contemporary Physics 137, 137.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Pierre Philippe and Omaima Mansi , 'Nonlinearity in the epidemiology of complex health and disease processes' (1998) 19(6) Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics 591, 592.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Pierre Philippe and Omaima Mansi , 'Nonlinearity in the epidemiology of complex health and disease processes' (1998) 19(6) Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics 591, 604.
[315] Ibid 592.
[316] Przemyslaw Waliszewski, Marcin Molski and Jerzy Konarski, 'On the holistic approach in cellular and cancer biology: Nonlinearity, complexity, and quasi-determinism of the dynamic cellular network' (1998) 68(2) Journal of Surgical Oncology 70, 75.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Pierre Philippe and Omaima Mansi , 'Nonlinearity in the epidemiology of complex health and disease processes' (1998) 19(6) Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics 591, 595.

sensitivity to initial exposures are determined by its 'strong nonlinear and chaotic dynamics'.[320]

When agents within a system are interconnected, either change is quickly dampened by agents, or chaos follows as 'changes keep reverberating throughout the system'.[321] Creating the conditions for complex systems to regulate their own behaviour, feedback loops represent signals and resources redistributed within the system: a controlling variable that can either be positive or negative.[322] As a critical variable enabling balance and stability to be maintained, negative feedback loops aim to regulate the system's behaviour to reach a predetermined goal.[323] Negative feedback loops occur when disruptions are reduced by the system's 'final response'.[324] Therefore, the feedback is negative when the 'output is restricted' by the input in a complex system.[325]

On the other hand, positive feedback loops aim at 'reinforcing' change within the system by generating 'amplifying, self-multiplying, or snowballing effects.'[326] The system's final response materialises in an increase in disruptions.[327] In other words, positive feedback loops occur when the 'output is amplified by the input' in a system's networks.[328] Furthermore, when a high number of agents reinforce positive feedback loops, it leads to an intensification of certain behaviours in the system.[329] Thus, other networks of agents reinforce the same feedback loops, which creates the condition for a 'predictable collective behaviour'.[330] We can take the example of global warming to illustrate positive feedback loops, as it partly results from an increase in 'water vapour in the atmosphere', which, in turn, produces more warming.[331]

In complex natural systems, feedback can arise in diverse ways: either from agents' memory or from information brought to the system by external factors.[332] While the

[320] Ibid.
[321] Philip Anderson, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' (1999) 10(3) Organization Science 216, 222.
[322] John H. Holland, Complexity: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford University Press, 2014) p39.
[323] Göktuğ Morçöl, A Complexity Theory for Public Policy (Taylor & Francis Group, 2012) p100.
[324] Pablo T. Rodriguez-Gonzalez, Ramiro Rico-Martinez, and Vicente Rico-Ramirez, 'Effect of feedback loops on the sustainability and resilience of human-ecosystems' (2020) 426 Ecological Modelling 1, 2.
[325] Frank Gadinger & Dirk Peters, 'Feedback loops in a world of complexity: a cybernetic approach at the interface of foreign policy analysis and international relations theory' (2016) 29(1) Cambridge Review of International Affairs 251, 254.
[326] Göktuğ Morçöl, A Complexity Theory for Public Policy (Taylor & Francis Group, 2012) p100.
[327] Pablo T. Rodriguez-Gonzalez, Ramiro Rico-Martinez, and Vicente Rico-Ramirez, 'Effect of feedback loops on the sustainability and resilience of human-ecosystems' (2020) 426 Ecological Modelling 1, 2.
[328] Frank Gadinger & Dirk Peters, 'Feedback loops in a world of complexity: a cybernetic approach at the interface of foreign policy analysis and international relations theory' (2016) 29(1) Cambridge Review of International Affairs 251, 254.
[329] Philip Anderson, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' (1999) 10(3) Organization Science 216, 222.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Pablo T. Rodriguez-Gonzalez, Ramiro Rico-Martinez, and Vicente Rico-Ramirez, 'Effect of feedback loops on the sustainability and resilience of human-ecosystems' (2020) 426 Ecological Modelling 1, 2.
[332] Neil Johnson, Simply Complexity: A Clear Guide to Complexity Theory (Oneworld Publications, 2009) p 26.

reception of feedback leads to the establishment of a temporary order, the absence of feedback creates more disorder within the system.[333] Feedback loops result from nonlinear and 'short-ranged' interactions among agents, which enable the accumulation of minor or significant changes with unforeseeable outcomes in the system.[334] Their nonlinear nature makes complex systems more resilient as new information and resources are redistributed. This explains the importance of feedback loops in building the resilience of complex systems by allowing them to 'self-regulate' when facing instability and uncertainty.[335]

3.3.2.2. Feedback mechanisms in social systems

Complexity theory views social systems as self-regulating complex systems that evolve in a state of 'far-from-equilibrium'.[336] This perspective contrasts with traditional social science approaches, which consider social systems to be 'homeostatic and reactive'.[337] Homeostatic systems exhibit mechanisms that maintain their structure and function in various circumstances, which makes them insensitive to 'genetic and environmental variations'.[338] Reactive systems maintain their role and interactions with their environment continuously through a nondeterministic or nonlinear process.[339] Due to their nonlinear nature, complex social systems are 'far-from-equilibrium systems', which are open to hasty changes and long-term tendencies toward 'evolutionary behaviour'.[340] Therefore, these systems are characterised by unique 'internal dynamics', evolving based on a 'set of self-replicating, non-linear feedback mechanisms that promote increasing structural complexity'.[341]

The complexity of social systems also lies in the observation of both linear and nonlinear patterns in these systems. The sporadic and nonlinear evolution of social systems fueled

[333] Ibid 28.
[334] Diana M. Austin, Lesley Ferkins, Jennie Swann, and Elizabeth Smythe, 'Being "nice": A complex activity among health professionals following a critical incident' (2019) 37(2) Systems Research and Behavioural Science 199, 200.
[335] Pablo T. Rodriguez-Gonzalez, Ramiro Rico-Martinez, and Vicente Rico-Ramirez, 'Effect of feedback loops on the sustainability and resilience of human-ecosystems' (2020) 426 Ecological Modelling 1, 9.
[336] Michael Reed and David L. Harvey, 'The New Science and the Old: Complexity and Realism in the Social Sciences' (1992) 22(4) Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 353, 359.
[337] Ibid 359.
[338] H. Frederik Nijhout et al. 'Systems biology of robustness and homeostatic mechanisms' (2018) 11(3) WIREs Systems Biology and Medicine 1, 1.
[339] Dennis Dams, Rob Gerth and Orna Grumberg 'Abstract Interpretation of Reactive Systems' (1997) 19(2) ACM Transactions on Programming Languages and Systems 254, 254.
[340] Michael Reed and David L. Harvey, 'The New Science and the Old: Complexity and Realism in the Social Sciences' (1992) 22(4) Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 353, 359.
[341] Ibid.

by feedback mechanisms cannot be understood by simply resorting to traditional scientific methods.[342] However, social systems are exposed to both linearity and nonlinearity due to the complex nature of human behaviour.[343] Although 'linear, predictable phenomena' are observable in social systems, many 'nonlinear processes' occur since interactions among human beings are inherently repetitive.[344] Thus, attempts to obtain specific predictions are not as effective, but we can still define various 'possible trajectories and their associated strange attractors'.[345] Strange attractors refer to the correlation between human interactions and the outcomes of these interactions.[346] These attractors have unique trajectories in social systems despite the changes they are constantly exposed to.[347] Despite the observable nonlinear and unpredictable patterns of social systems' evolution, these systems can stabilise themselves as they constantly reproduce, learn, and evolve based on their memories of past trajectories and expectations for the future.[348] Although the patterns followed by social systems are unpredictable, systems self-regulate based on positive or negative feedback, allowing them to transition between order and disorder: 'at the edge of chaos'.[349]

Social systems have key characteristics such as an 'overlapping interaction among elements, positive and negative feedback control loops, and non-linear relationships, and they are of high temporal order.[350] The notion of high temporality in complex systems can be explained by the difficulty of understanding and predicting critical changes at a specific point in time in complex networks, as the structures of these networks are maintained and reinforced by the high degree of interactions among individual actors.[351] Consequently, effectively managing such systems requires a holistic understanding of all the sophisticated factors defining actors' interconnectedness.[352] Within social systems,

[342] Ibid.
[343] David Manuel-Navarrete, 'Approaches and Implications of using Complexity Theory for dealing with Social Systems'(2001) Workshop on Conservation and Sustainable Development- Comparative Perspectives (Yale University, August 2001) p 5 < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242403867_Approaches_and_Implications_of_using_Complexity_Theory_for_dealing_with_Social_Systems > accessed 26/06/2025.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Ibid 8.
[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Robin Brooke-Smith and Michael G. Fullan, 'Old Paradigm, New Paradigm' in Robin Brooke-Smith (ed) *Leading Learners, Leading Schools* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2003) p 59.
[350] Robert Geyer, 'Beyond the Third Way: the science of complexity and the politics of choice' (2003) 5(2) British Journal of Politics and International Relations 237, 252.
[351] Potgieter Anet et al. 'Temporality in Link Prediction: Understanding Social Complexity' (University of Amsterdam, 2007) https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=f533e85c28b6921075d82369182bfbeaeac0ff95 p 4 accessed 26/06/2025.
[352] Nico Stehr and Reiner Grundmann, 'The authority of complexity' (2001) 52(2) British Journal of Sociology 313, 318.

minor events can have disproportionate outcomes on actors. For instance, the desire to achieve a certain lifestyle can 'spread contagiously throughout a population'.[353]

The sensitivity of social systems to 'initial conditions' is an important factor in explaining their nonlinearity and how feedback mechanisms spread across the system over time.[354] Changes occurring at any level within the system can affect its evolutionary path, which explains the need to understand a system's 'past behaviour' to foresee its 'evolutionary end-point'.[355] Although it is impossible to make exact predictions when observing complex systems, using their previous patterns to explain their trajectory is possible.[356] Hence, the exact trajectory chosen by a complex system might be unpredictable, but a historical analysis can explain how a system reached a 'bifurcation point'.[357] This can help an observer understand the system's 'present reality', as demonstrated by 'human histories'.[358] As volatile and unique as they are, studying their previous patterns can help identify a 'reasoned explanation'.[359]

In complex adaptive systems, such as social systems, feedback loops connect agents with one another.[360] Due to agents' interconnections and interdependence, one agent's behaviour can influence another agent's behaviour, networks of agents, or, at a broader scale, the whole system.[361] This is because each agent only processes and responds to information at the local level, coming from agents it is connected to.[362] This interconnectedness thus facilitates the spread of feedback from one agent to a cluster of agents, several clusters, and the system as a whole. Although feedback loops affect agents' behaviour, agents' behaviour can also generate feedback loops in complex adaptive systems as behaviours spread in networks.[363] Thus, 'local behaviour' in a system can generate 'global characteristics' which affect agents' interactions.[364]

Complexity explains how social systems are constantly at risk due to their evolution toward an unpredictable future, which can have either positive or negative outcomes. While establishing routines and institutions may help to define or enforce regular patterns

[353] Michael Reed and David L. Harvey, 'The New Science and the Old: Complexity and Realism in the Social Sciences' (1992) 22(4) Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 353, 360.
[354] Ibid 363.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ibid.
[357] Ibid 364.
[358] Ibid.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Philip Anderson, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' (1999) 10(3) Organization Science 216, 219.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid 225.
[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid.

within social systems, there is a need to constantly 'innovate' due to unforeseen changes occurring in the environment. The unpredictability of complex systems requires creating a 'temporary set of routines and regularities' to adapt.[365] Complexity theory emphasises the limitations of 'rational thinking' in uncertain contexts.[366] This is because uncertainty requires us to prepare for 'bad' surprises while keeping the system flexible enough to overcome obstacles.[367]

In addition, emergence is a property of social structures. Interactions between individual elements are based on 'simple rules', generating repetitive patterns and feedback loops.[368] Hence, individual interactions occur in a context where any social, political or economic change can change the social structure after a 'few million cycles of interaction'.[369] However, ensuring sustainable harmony within social systems requires leaving room for a certain degree of unpredictability and facilitating positive feedback mechanisms.[370] This would allow social systems to have more efficient responses to unpredictable events.[371] This is why complexity theory encourages social systems to find 'order within chaos' and adopt a more flexible approach to face unpredictable events and nonlinearity within the system more effectively.[372]

3.3.2.3. Feedback mechanisms in political systems

Previous theories that adopted the Newtonian perspective proved inefficient in understanding the world and addressing uncertainty in political systems.[373] Complexity theory views the political system as a complex system, with 'autonomous actors' exhibiting 'nonlinear behaviour'.[374] In such systems, minor alterations at one level can have disproportionate outcomes, as agents self-organise while going through 'alternating

[365] Peter M. Allen, Liz Varga, and Mark Strathern, 'The evolutionary complexity of social and economic systems: The inevitability of uncertainty and surprise' (2010) 12 Risk management 9, 29.
[366] Ibid.
[367] Ibid.
[368] David Manuel-Navarrete, 'Approaches and Implications of using Complexity Theory for dealing with Social Systems'(2001) Workshop on Conservation and Sustainable Development- Comparative Perspectives (Yale University, August 2001) p 6 < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242403867_Approaches_and_Implications_of_using_Complexity_Theory_for_dealing_with_Social_Systems > accessed 26/06/2025.
[369] Ibid.
[370] Ibid 15.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Stanley A. Feder, 'Forecasting For Policy Making In The Post–Cold War Period' (2002) 5 Annual Review of Political Science 111, 117.
[374] Ibid.

periods' of temporary stability and instability.[375] In addition, unstable periods can lead the system towards multiple trajectories, causing agents and the system's structure to reorganise themselves constantly and to remain flexible, rather than following the traditional view of attempting to remove all uncertainty.[376]

In political systems, changes to initial states influence future states, which explains the dynamic nature of interactions within the systems.[377] Internal dynamics lead to the reoccurrence of unpredictable changes over time, as 'the effect of one variable frequently depends on the state of another, and the success of one strategy depends on the strategies that others are following'.[378] These dynamics cannot be explained by a cause-and-effect analysis.[379] Viewing social and political systems through the lens of complexity theory requires focusing on how order and disorder emerge, as the reality of complex systems is expressed through a 'chaotic blend of orderly and disorderly phenomena'.[380] Due to their dynamic nature and their multiple actors interacting in various ways to address local issues, political systems are exposed to unpredictability.[381] Therefore, understanding feedback mechanisms in systems requires recognising the unpredictable outcomes of policies and political strategies, as they involve multiple actors interacting dynamically, which contrasts with the 'static nature of political institutions and systems'.[382] In this context, static institutions refer to the traditional understanding of the political system, which views institutions as actors with predefined roles aimed at ensuring their independence from one another. Complexity theory disagrees with this perspective and encourages political institutions and the political system in general, to be more flexible to adapt to constant unforeseen changes and overall disorder, while naturally defining strategies to contain this unpredictability efficiently.[383]

The interactions between the diverse actors in the political system are the product of the system's 'social construction', influencing actors' interests.[384] This is because, just as the

[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Robert Jervis, 'Complexity and the Analysis of Political and Social Life' (1997) 112(4) Political Science Quarterly 569, 575.
[378] Ibid.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Adrian Little, 'Complexity and real politics' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 36.
[381] Michael Givel, ''What's the big deal?': complexity versus traditional US policy approaches' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar,2015) p 70.
[382] Adrian Little, 'Complexity and real politics' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 37.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' (2022) 27(2) Perceptions 177, 185.

system's predefined rules impact agents' behaviours, interactions between actors can have an unpredictable impact on the whole system, as each individual's actions influence those of another individual.[385] Due to the nonlinear nature of actors' interactions within complex systems, such as the political system, they are 'particularly sensitive to initial conditions', which prevents accurate predictions about the systems from being made and affects the possibility of totally controlling the system.[386] From this understanding, the asymmetry within the system is increased when minor changes affecting one of the system's components lead to 'major and disproportionate' impacts on other components.[387] The Arab Spring can be used as an example to illustrate the sensitivity of complex systems to initial conditions.[388]

Açıkalın and Artin used the example of the Arab Spring to illustrate the butterfly effect in complex political systems. The series of chaotic events that characterised the Arab Spring began with a singular incident: a vendor who, feeling humiliated by the police over his lack of a permit to operate his stall, decided to set himself on fire in protest. This created a change in the local initial conditions, leading to a succession of events across the regional political system.[389] It also illustrates how systems are interdependent and interconnected, highlighting the fragility of political, economic, and social systems, and how the sensitivity of one region to a specific change can impact other regions, both nearby and distant from the original geographic area.[390]

Society within a political system plays an important role, as it can restrict some actors and moderate the frequency of unexpected shifts.[391] Understanding the dynamics within the system can help actors compensate for its unpredictability by promoting policies that either mitigate or capitalise on the outcomes of various decisions.[392] As unpredictable events such as political disputes or emerging policies reshape the political system, specific behaviours are inhibited, while others are enabled, which creates the conditions for 'new actors and disputes' to emerge unexpectedly.[393] These new phenomena, in turn,

[385] Ibid.
[386] Adam Day & Charles T. Hunt, 'A Perturbed Peace: Applying Complexity Theory to UN Peacekeeping' (2022) 29(1) International Peacekeeping 1, 4.
[387] Ibid.
[388] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' (2022) 27(2) Perceptions 177, 185.
[389] Şuay Nilhan Açıkalın and Erbil Can Artun, 'Chapter 7 The Concept of Self-Organized Criticality: The Case Study of the Arab Uprising' in Şefika Ş. Erçetin and Nihan Potas (eds) , *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2017, Springer Proceedings in Complexity* (Springer International Publishing, 2019) 73, 75.
[390] Ibid 78.
[391] Robert Jervis, 'Complexity and the Analysis of Political and Social Life' (1997) 112 (4) Political Science Quarterly 569, 586.
[392] Ibid 586.
[393] Ibid 575.

reshape the political system and actors' interests, resources and convictions. For instance, conflicts can radicalise certain actors of the political system while 'mobilising those who had not been previously involved'.[394]

Political actors, through their actions and personal interests, can have unpredictable impacts or create 'emergent properties' in a political system.[395] Complex systems shape the outcome of individuals' actions, and at the same time, individuals' actions affect the system, as explained by the concept of coevolution.[396] Actors' interactions simultaneously follow formal and 'unconventional rules', as well as the new information emerging from feedback loops.[397] Feedback loops can be negative or positive depending on their ability to either reinforce interactions among actors to recreate similar behaviour in the system, or generate new patterns that will disrupt the existing state of the system.[398] The scope of feedback loops in political systems can be observed through the 'long-term and short-term consequences' of policy implementation.[399] For instance, positive feedback loops could be a coalition of states implementing similar policies to strengthen their partnership for security purposes.[400] In this case, the positive feedback loops occur as the output of cooperation is amplified to achieve a common goal. Negative feedback loops could be policy strategies to promote deterrence, as demonstrated during the Cold War.[401] In this case, the output was the restrictive purpose of maintaining a certain order. The example of the Cold War illustrates the competition between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States and their respective allies, establishing a long-lasting, unpredictable equilibrium.[402]

The insights of complexity theory showed that policymakers in the public sector do not optimally reach their desired goals due to their 'rational thinking'.[403] Since changes can occur at any moment in complex systems, complexity theory applied to public governance explains the need to give up idealistic long-term ideas of the future when

[394] Ibid.
[395] Yi Yang, 'Critical realism and complexity theory: Building a nonconstructivist systems research framework for effective governance analysis' (2021) 38(1) Systems Research Behavioural Science 177, 181.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' (2022) 27(2) Perceptions 177, 184.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Ibid 186.
[400] Ibid.
[401] Ibid.
[402] Ibid 187.
[403] Adomas Vincas Rakšnys and Andrius Valickas, 'The Application of Complexity Theory in the Context of Public Governance Challenges' (2022) 21(41) Public Policy and Administration 526, 527.

attempting to 'implement change in any sphere of the public sector'.[404] The application of complexity theory in public governance requires observing systems to understand their internal dynamics beyond socially constructed boundaries.[405] Within the literature, some authors explained why some countries are more stable than others despite the instability of social and political systems.[406] Taking the example of the Netherlands, despite unfavourable internal conditions, including ethnic-based conflicts, religious strife, and language barriers, efforts by political leaders to mitigate political instability that may have led to a predicted civil war were successful.[407] Policies encouraging 'moderation and compromise' were crafted to anticipate negative feedback mechanisms within the system.[408] Hirschman has described this strategy as an 'action-arousing gloomy vision'.[409] Consequently, addressing social issues requires political actors to remain vigilant, as they simultaneously confront new problems while being constrained by 'established techniques of political management'.[410] This is because the present reality of political actors is constantly changing due to unpredictable shifts in the system, which necessitates an approach far from 'path-dependent modes of understanding'.[411]

Path dependency is a process through which past decisions and events can help determine systemic behaviour over time.[412] Self-reinforcing mechanisms that support path dependency are believed to bring 'increasing returns' or positive feedback to ensure the 'continuity of chosen paths'.[413] This is explained by the fact that collective action is usually centralised, as there is a large number of regulating institutions using their authority to perpetuate power asymmetries in an inherently complex system. From a complexity theory perspective, self-reinforcement mechanisms in this setting are less effective due to the lack of mechanisms promoting 'competition and learning' among actors, the short lifespan of politicians in the political system, and the presence of incentives for political institutions to maintain the system's status quo. This leads to challenges when it comes to reversing path dependency.[414] Hence, some authors

[404] Ibid 533.
[405] Ibid.
[406] Robert Jervis, 'Complexity and the Analysis of Political and Social Life' (1997) 112(4) Political Science Quarterly 569, 587.
[407] Ibid.
[408] Ibid.
[409] Ibid.
[410] Adrian Little, 'Complexity and real politics' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 36.
[411] Ibid.
[412] Susanne Hanger-Kopp et al. 'Defining and operationalizing path dependency for the development and monitoring of adaptation pathways' (2022) 72 Global Environmental Change 1, 2.
[413] Ibid 3.
[414] Ibid.

explained that direct approaches may not be ideal in complex systems, contrary to more 'circuitous' ones.[415]

In political systems, pluralism and power separations might create the ideal conditions to serve 'social goals' more effectively despite individuals' personal interests.[416] To prevent power abuse, and because a single person or institution cannot 'integrate all the information and interests in society', a pluralist government and the effectiveness of all branches are key factors to ensure sustainable democracy.[417] This will enable better management of conflicts and serve the greater good more efficiently than keeping a political system in a temporary stable state of power monopolisation.[418] Thus, although we may know how to achieve the intended outcomes in some cases, it is often impossible to predict the realisation of all the desired outcomes in most cases when it comes to complex systems.[419] It is essential to experiment with various policies consecutively and for actors to have flexible strategies that allow them to adapt to unexpected shifts within the system.[420] As explained by Jervis, 'flexibility and resilience are necessary for effective action'.[421]

In dictatorships where local interests restrict the outputs of policies promoting more democracy, the system becomes less open to deeper changes and positive feedback mechanisms that could alter harmful political practices. This is why openness is a crucial feature of complex systems, which makes them more resilient to instability and is essential for a sustainable political environment and relationships between actors. The next section will introduce this feature in complex natural, social, and political systems.

3.3.3. Openness

3.3.3.1. Openness in natural systems

Complexity insights in biology view living cells as an open system that receives 'energy and nutrients' from its environment.[422] Open natural systems exchange 'information,

[415] Robert Jervis, 'Complexity and the Analysis of Political and Social Life' (1997) 112(4) Political Science Quarterly 569, 590.
[416] Ibid.
[417] Ibid.
[418] Ibid.
[419] Ibid 592.
[420] Ibid.
[421] Ibid.
[422] Pier Luigi Luisi, 'Autopoiesis: a review and a reappraisal' (2003) 90(2) Naturwissenschaften 49, 54.

resources and energy' freely, contrary to closed systems, which 'retain these products for [their] own use'.[423] Closed systems have boundaries that protect them from their external environment, preventing them from being influenced by external changes.[424] On the other hand, open systems are not 'bounded', which makes them more prone to the influence of 'environmental forces' but also prone to internal variations.[425] Hence, a system is said to be closed when it does not interact with its environment.[426] In addition, closed systems do not receive external feedback from or send feedback to their environment. Consequently, they are 'self-contained' with 'internally determined' logics.[427] They also consist of subsystems, but those subsystems have fixed boundaries, functions and patterns of interactions, which characterise their close nature.[428] The thermodynamics perspective of closed systems states that they tend to 'degenerate to a fixed point equilibrium characterised by maximum disorder', due to the absence of external energy 'injected' into them.[429] Thus, closed systems are less flexible in the face of instability than open systems, which are more adaptable.

Some authors, such as Janson, define all systems in biology as 'open, dissipative and non-linear'.[430] He argues that all living systems are open since they are characterised by their ability to constantly 'feed on externally supplied nutrients' while eliminating decayed products and exchanging various 'mechanical, electro-magnetic [and] chemical' signals with their environment.[431] Due to their ability to continuously exchange energy, information, and resources with their environment, natural systems are considered open systems that operate far from equilibrium.[432] Complex natural systems are also open because the sum of their agents' interactions is 'emergent'.[433] Viewing these systems holistically entails that the whole system is a 'new entity or unit', differentiating itself from the original components, which it cannot be reduced to.[434]

[423] John R. Turner and Rose M. Baker, 'Complexity Theory: An Overview with Potential Applications for the Social Sciences' (2019) 7(1) Systems 1, 4.
[424] Ibid.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Colin Wight, 'Theorizing International Relations Emergence, Organized Complexity, and Integrative Pluralism' in Emilian Kavalski (ed) *World Politics at the Edge of Chaos*, (State University of New York Press, 2015) p 58.
[427] Ibid.
[428] Mario Tokoro, Open Systems Science : From Understanding Principles to Solving Problems (IOS Press, 2010) p 5.
[429] Philip Anderson, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' (1999) 10(3) Organization Science 216, 222.
[430] Natalia B. Janson, 'Non-linear dynamics of biological systems' (2012) 53(2) Contemporary Physics 137, 137.
[431] Ibid.
[432] Valeria V. Isaeva, 'Self-organization in biological systems' (2012) 39(2) Biology Bulletin 110, 110.
[433] Diana M. Austin, Lesley Ferkins, Jennie Swann, and Elizabeth Smythe, 'Being "nice": A complex activity among health professionals following a critical incident' (2019) 37(2) Systems Research and Behavioural Science 199, 200.
[434] John R. Turner and Rose M. Baker, 'Complexity Theory: An Overview with Potential Applications for the Social Sciences' (2019) 7(1) Systems 1, 10.

Natural systems' complexity is demonstrated by their irreducibility, meaning that the emergence of new, 'higher order states' cannot be understood by observing their 'original lower level states'.[435] Openness in such systems facilitates the system's ability to learn and adapt to its 'new environment', which generates a new order emerging from agents' interactions.[436] Therefore, emergent systems are generated as systems evolve.[437] In addition, emergence occurs at all levels in a system, as interactions among the individual agents in subsystems lead them to adapt and create change, which produces 'complex coordinated patterns of collective behaviour'.[438] This means that emergence results from agents' cooperation, expressed in their nonlinear interactions among themselves and their external environment, which facilitates the creation of 'self-organised structures' and new properties.[439]

The openness of natural systems makes them dynamic systems that are constantly evolving thanks to their memory. These systems change suddenly, as minor changes in the distribution of 'knowledge and information' in networks can disproportionately affect other parts of the system, shifting the system from more or less stable states.[440] Due to their open nature and nonlinear internal dynamics, complex natural systems retain a memory of their previous behaviour, which partly influences their present behaviour. This means that their openness enables them to adapt to new challenges by learning from how they previously overcame similar circumstances. Consequently, complex natural systems are sensitive and resilient to internal or external perturbations.[441] Understanding these systems as a whole, thus, necessarily requires previous knowledge of their components, as well as the consideration of the 'systematic context' in which these individual components operate.[442]

This also explains why open natural systems can be optimised. The functions of natural systems constantly evolve as they encounter unforeseen challenges in their external

[435] Ibid 8.
[436] Ibid 5.
[437] Ibid.
[438] John R. Turner and Rose M. Baker, 'Complexity Theory: An Overview with Potential Applications for the Social Sciences' (2019) 7(1) Systems 1, 5.
[439] Paolo Paradisi, Giorgio Kaniadakis and Antonio Maria Scarfone, 'The emergence of self-organization in complex systems – Preface' (2015) 81 Chaos, solitons, and fractals 407, 407.
[440]Hendrik Wagenaar, 'Governance, Complexity, and Democratic Participation: How Citizens and Public Officials Harness the Complexities of Neighbourhood Decline' (2007) 37(1) The American Review of Public Administration 17, 23.
[441] Mariano Bizzarri, Alessandro Palombo and Alessandra Cucina, 'Theoretical aspects of Systems Biology' (2013) 112(1-2) Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology 33, 36.
[442] Neil Pearce and Franco Merletti, 'Complexity, simplicity, and epidemiology' (2006) 35(3) International Journal of Epidemiology 515, 517.

environment, while their agents interact dynamically to pursue various objectives.[443] For instance, as cells in natural systems self-organise to navigate internal events, feedback mechanisms act as regulators, enabling agents to exchange information with their external environment.[444] The process of self-organisation through feedback mechanisms enables these systems to define multiple solutions when facing challenges, thereby sustaining a 'biological equilibrium'.[445] Therefore, the system will adopt different solutions depending on 'changing requirements (i.e., criteria) exerted in its dynamic environment'.[446] Biological optimisation occurs as new information or resources are exchanged with the external environment.[447]

3.3.3.2. Openness in social systems

In the social context, closed systems can be viewed as self-contained entities with limited openness to change, whether this change originates from internal or external forces. In closed social systems, all internal and external variables can be easily identified, and external variables have a limited influence on the system due to the outcomes being 'predetermined'.[448] In such a system, actors and their interactions can be isolated to understand the system's behaviour. The predetermined behaviour of the system makes it a relatively stable system.[449] However, social systems are considered open and adaptive in the literature due to their sensitivity to changes in initial conditions, the presence of feedback loops, nonlinearity in agents' interactions, and the butterfly effect, which can have unpredictable consequences.[450]

Consequently, in the context of human organisations, people with authority attempt to regulate the system by recruiting and interacting with 'new sources of energy' such as new members or stakeholders.[451] This leads to the emergence of 'new sets of challenges' requiring new solutions different from 'existing procedures'.[452] This can be explained by

[443] Sathish Periyasamy et al., 'The bottom–up approach to defining life: deciphering the functional organization of biological cells via multi-objective representation of biological complexity from molecules to cells' (2013) 4 Frontiers of Physiology 1, 1.
[444] Ibid.
[445] Ibid 2.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Ibid.
[448] Victoria Chick, 'On Open Systems' (2004) 24(1) Brazilian Journal of Political Economy 3, 6.
[449] Ibid.
[450] Emilian Kavalski, World Politics at the Edge of Chaos : Reflections on Complexity and Global Life (State University of New York Press, 2015) p 79.
[451] Philip Anderson, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' (1999) 10(3) Organization Science 216, 222.
[452] Ibid.

the fact that the more disordered an organisation is, 'the more energy must be generated' to maintain the system above the limit beyond which 'self-organisation is sustained'.[453] Complex adaptive systems (CAS), in complexity theory, refer to social self-organising open 'dynamical systems', that exchange information, energy, and 'other resources' with their external environment.[454] These systems can transform the resources exchanged to 'support action' without the intervention of an external controller or with minimal intervention of 'external forces', which gives them the ability to self-organise and to learn and adapt dynamically during their interactions with other systems, and internally.[455] As open systems, social systems are influenced by their external environment, but they also have an impact on it.[456]

An open system has boundaries enabling 'interaction with the environment'.[457] Various conditions affect the predictability of complex social systems by making 'near prediction' reliant on the extraction of 'meaningful relationships'.[458] Therefore, it is vital to consider a society's historical background and the 'layered, complex and structurally open' characteristics which construct 'social life'.[459] This is because, while being open to their environment, the internal structures of complex social systems can self-organise through their agents' interactions to adapt to multiple factors affecting their internal dynamics and interactions with their external environment.[460]

The openness of complex systems makes their structure dynamic, as they evolve following interactions with their environment, their internal interactions among actors, and their 'history'.[461] This leads to the emergence of behavioural patterns caused by rules within the system. [462] Because subsystems within social systems exhibit complex interactions, they become interdependent, thus making it impossible to fully understand their dynamics through a reductionist approach.[463] This also entails addressing challenges in open systems, which requires avoiding oversimplification and addressing their

[453] Ibid.
[454] John R. Turner and Rose M. Baker, 'Complexity Theory: An Overview with Potential Applications for the Social Sciences' (2019) 7(1) Systems 1, 4.
[455] Ibid.
[456] Ibid 6.
[457] Ibid 8.
[458] Ibid 18.
[459] Michael Reed and David L. Harvey, 'The New Science and the Old: Complexity and Realism in the Social Sciences' (1992) 22(4) Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 353, 367.
[460] Diana M. Austin, Lesley Ferkins, Jennie Swann, and Elizabeth Smythe, 'Being "nice": A complex activity among health professionals following a critical incident' (2019) 37(2) Systems Research and Behavioural Science 199, 200.
[461] Ibid.
[462] Ibid.
[463] Mario Tokoro, Open Systems Science : From Understanding Principles to Solving Problems (IOS Press, 2010) p 7.

challenges with the understanding that their 'definitions and specifications may vary over time'.[464] Thus, understanding the dynamic natures of changes in complex social systems necessitates a holistic approach.[465]

3.3.3.3. Openness in political systems

Viewing politics as a complex system necessitates an understanding of its open nature. Political systems are open to external conditions and internal dynamics, which necessitates a degree of flexibility from policymakers to mitigate disastrous situations.

In real life, closed systems can be illustrated by systems in which laws are standardised with linear outcomes. This enables actors to analyse patterns in a 'small set of inputs' to anticipate solutions for any situation.[466] Closed systems exhibit a fixed amount of energy, making the system reach an equilibrium in which all its contained energy has 'dissipated'.[467] Complexity theory explains that closed systems are 'dead' once they reach this equilibrium, since they represent systems where 'no change occurs'.[468] Social systems cannot be closed, as they experience constant change, making it impossible for them to reach an equilibrium.[469]

The open nature of complex political systems makes it difficult to make accurate decisions due to their inherent uncertainty. As such, complexity theory insights can be used to handle unpredictability in a complex political system by positively reinforcing the states' role in a context influenced by humans' unreliability and inability to respond to complex events cognitively.[470] The insights of complexity theory highlight humans' inability to effectively address unpredictability and uncertainty in complex systems, which explains the need to use politics as an 'institutional-regulative approach'.[471] Complexity theory sees the process of institutionalisation as a solution to address systemic complexity, which creates a 'precarious, dangerous and uncertain' future.[472]

---

[464] Ibid.
[465] Ibid.
[466] Colin Wight, 'Theorizing International Relations Emergence, Organized Complexity, and Integrative Pluralism' in Emilian Kavalski (ed) *World Politics at the Edge of Chaos*, (State University of New York Press, 2015) 53, 59.
[467] Ibid.
[468] Ibid.
[469] Ibid.
[470] Mark Olssen, 'Ascertaining the Normative Implications of Complexity Thinking' in Emilian Kavalski (ed) *World Politics at the Edge of Chaos,* (State University of New York Press, 2015) p139, 156.
[471] Ibid 157.
[472] Ibid.

Therefore, effective political institutions are viewed as channels to deal with complexity through their ability to coordinate and ensure 'survival and wellbeing' following democratic mechanisms.[473] Complexity highlights the importance of 'politics, institutionalisation and democracy' in preserving the flexibility and adaptability of the political system.[474]

Viewing the political system as an open system requires a shift in the approach of public institutions and organisations to implementing change when addressing chaotic circumstances, such as intrastate conflicts or terrorism. Traditional strategies for implementing peace in unstable countries have employed linear approaches to effect systemic change by establishing a set of actions designed to achieve a predictable outcome of maintaining or enforcing peace and security.[475] For instance, implementing change in developing countries, such as in Sub-Saharan Africa, has been hindered by an 'outside-in' approach using 'macro-indicators' and 'hard statistics' in decision-making.[476] This approach does not consider the interactions between the large number of coevolving actors at various levels, whose outcomes do not always result from a central government intervention.[477]

Open political systems can be optimised. Dealing with complex systems requires taking a step back and watching 'the process unfold' to understand the state of a system over time.[478] Sudden changes create instability in the environment, which is adjusted by the emergence of innovative solutions based on trust. As every local system of public provision is unique, various factors can be considered, such as communities' historical context, specific needs and 'socio-demographic profile'.[479]

[473] Ibid.
[474] Ibid.
[475] Adam Day & Charles T. Hunt, 'A Perturbed Peace: Applying Complexity Theory to UN Peacekeeping' 2022(29) 1, 2.
[476] Ibid.
[477] Ibid.
[478] Emilian Kavalski, World Politics at the Edge of Chaos : Reflections on Complexity and Global Life (State University of New York Press, 2015) p 67.
[479] Tony Kinder, Frédérique Six, Jari Stenvall &Ally Memon, 'Governance-as-legitimacy: are ecosystems replacing networks?' (2022) 24(1) Public Management review 8, 17.

Conclusion

Complexity theory can be described as a systems theory approach seeking to understand systems behaviour from a holistic, non-reductionist perspective, which means that it considers that it is not possible to understand an entire system's dynamics by simply isolating its parts. This theory was previously used in natural sciences before being applied to social sciences to explain the emergence of order in systems with apparent 'chaotic' dynamics. This chapter emphasises that self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness are the key features of complex natural, social and political systems. The insights of complexity theory in the natural, social, and political contexts show us the need to refrain from using a reductionist perspective that supports cause-and-effect thinking, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the patterns and complex dynamics that lead to more flexible and adaptive systems when facing unpredictable circumstances. In political systems, especially, we can observe self-organised and organised properties due to a central government and institutions constantly attempting to reach an ideal balance. At the same time, local actors' interactions with themselves and their external environment create emerging challenges that can offset the system's stability or create feedback loops with unpredictable effects, reinforcing democratic behaviour or facilitating a greater political change, favouring the populations.

Due to its features and dynamics, predicting or anticipating every shift in the complex political system is impossible. Thus, there must be flexibility in governance to promote positive feedback mechanisms and prevent the reinforcement of patterns that could lead to more instability. This chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of complex political systems and the variables that must be considered to comprehend the dynamics within those systems. Understanding the bottom-up dynamics in complex systems, which refers to the critical role played by actors at the local level as they interact and reinforce patterns of stability or instability within the system, highlights the relevance of localised, citizen-led approaches in strengthening stability in the political system. Viewing the political system as complex requires us to promote self-organisation, positive feedback mechanisms and openness in citizen-led approaches, such as social accountability, to anticipate contextual challenges flexibly and adapt to the uncertainty of complex systems. The next chapter will analyse whether successful social accountability programmes align with the features of the political systems as viewed through the lens of complexity theory.

CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH THE LENS OF COMPLEXITY THEORY

Introduction

The World Bank defines social accountability programmes as a short route to demand accountability, promoting more active citizen participation beyond elections, to hold governments and public service providers accountable. Social accountability emerged as a response to new development challenges in developing countries, particularly after the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals. This approach contrasts with the traditional state-centred strategy, which focused on strengthening political institutions and governments but proved less effective in holding them accountable. Financial aid from international organisations like the World Bank tends to support development programmes that often do not result in tangible benefits for locals populations. The Bank gradually recognised that political stability is essential for sustainable development, rather than solely focusing on economic development and maintaining political neutrality. To encourage more sustainable development, social accountability has emerged as an approach that empowers citizens and positions them at the core of policy-making. This shift in the Bank's perspective on governance aimed to address the poor quality of public service delivery, which is rooted in a lack of government accountability vis-à-vis its citizens. However, the literature review analysing the practice of social accountability programmes highlighted its mixed results. Some initiatives succeeded in enhancing citizen participation, boosting citizen engagement in local public decision-making, and providing greater access to information about the performance of local public service providers. This was not always the case, as not all programmes consistently yielded tangible results due to varying social, political, and economic contexts. The context dependency of social accountability programmes has resulted in a negative perception of their relevance as a development approach due to their conditional success. This negative

reading entails that it would be impossible for the World Bank to create a template that identifies patterns of success.

This thesis challenges the prevailing view on social accountability programmes by utilising the insights from complexity theory to better understand the domestic political system in which these programmes are implemented. It argues that the existing literature often overlooks the inherent complexity of political systems, regardless of the unique contextual challenges each country faces. The insights from the literature on complexity and development aid also supported this argument. By recognising and aligning with the specific characteristics of these complex systems, the thesis hypothesises that social accountability programmes may achieve greater success. Complexity theory tells us that political systems, like natural and other social systems, are complex. This viewpoint challenges the conventional reductionist perspective on complex systems, which posits that the outcomes of all actions or decisions can be explained through a linear cause-and-effect analysis. In addition, viewing the political system as complex means acknowledging that this system is inherently unpredictable. This highlights the challenges of making accurate predictions based solely on isolated events. Instead, complexity theory encourages us to view the system as a whole and focus on lower-level patterns leading to the emergence of specific system-wide behaviours. Doing so enables complex systems to navigate unpredictability more effectively and strengthen patterns that promote positive change. As a complex system, the political system adapts and evolves thanks to its specific features: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms and openness. With this understanding, we can hypothesise that social accountability programmes that gained more success aligned with the features of the complex political system despite the initial contextual challenges.

This chapter assesses the implementation and outcomes of three social accountability programmes: Send Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme, the White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria's Initiative in Niger State and the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP) in Cambodia, to determine whether their success aligns with the insights of complexity theory. These examples were selected because they highlight the problematic contextual circumstances in various developing countries, where central governments were initially unwilling to support the programmes. The initial social, economic, and political challenges faced in these examples are typically described in the literature as obstacles to success. The chapter begins by summarising the conclusions of

Chapters 1 and 2, highlighting the purpose of social accountability as understood by the World Bank and the limitations to its effectiveness identified in the literature. The second part of the chapter applies the insights of complexity theory to the three social accountability programmes mentioned, starting with a synopsis of each feature of a complex system. This part of the chapter, then, provides some background to the three examples and analyses whether they align with each of the three features of complexity theory. We find that aligning with complexity theory would involve reinforcing self-organisation in social accountability by facilitating citizen mobilisation and diversifying citizen networks; reinforcing positive feedback mechanisms by involving citizens in policy-making and reducing asymmetries; and increasing government openness to improve local response to unpredictability and develop actors' awareness of the political system's complexity. This thesis argues that social accountability programmes designed with this optic can serve the benefits of communities more sustainably, as they will be implemented in ways that combine flexibility and the management of complexity rather than adhering to dogmatic beliefs.

4.1. Synopsis of the practice of social accountability

Social accountability programmes have been increasingly implemented in various weak states experiencing political instability, where governments are unable to provide effectively for their populations. The first chapter highlighted that these programmes came as an alternative to the highly criticised, state-centred traditional approaches used by the World Bank to reduce poverty and support sustainable development and political stability in developing countries.

As the leading actor popularising social accountability on a global scale, the World Bank realised that its previous focus on economic growth was not sufficient to guarantee states' accountability vis-à-vis their citizens. Critics of its approach to governance before the 1980s highlighted various discrepancies, such as the fact that the Bank did not make enough effort to explain why 'many of the fastest growing economies of the world' experienced poor governance.[1] They also highlighted the Bank's limited understanding of the processes through which domestic institutions could be strengthened in developing countries and the importance of political factors in the outcomes of development aid.[2] The Bank's neo-institutionalist perspective, which focuses on reinforcing political institutions, embodied a one-size-fits-all approach, disregarding the importance of contextual socio-political factors such as power dynamics and personal interests.[3] After the failure of the Millennium Development Goals and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, which emphasise the need for greater government accountability to citizens and more inclusive development for marginalised populations, the World Bank revised its approach to governance.[4]

Representative democracy requires citizens to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the public sector's performance through voting, which the Bank has characterised as a long route to accountability.[5] In contrast, the short route to accountability promotes

[1] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) p 23 <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/433301485539630301-0050022017/original/WDR17BPEvolutionofWBThinkingonGovernance.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Désirée Ruppen and Fritz Brugger, '"I will sample until things get better – or until I die." Potential and limits of citizen science to promote social accountability for environmental pollution' (2022) 157 World Development 1, 3.
[4] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) p 9 <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[5] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Social Accountability in Review: From Conceptual Models to Grounded Practices of Civic Innovation' in the Authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (2024, EADI Global Development Series) p 26.

'democratic oversight', 'strengthening the direct links between citizens and service providers' and encouraging active citizen participation in public affairs beyond voting.[6] This short route, materialised by social accountability programmes, is described by the Bank as more effective in addressing 'corruption, clientelism and state capture' in developing countries.[7] Weak states often have a challenging relationship with their citizens, resulting in a lack of trust among the population and low civic engagement due to failures in public service delivery.[8] As a short route to demand accountability, social accountability has been used by the World Bank to encourage citizens' direct involvement in policy-making processes in between elections, hold public service providers accountable, and ensure governments are more responsive to citizens needs.[9] This approach can be defined as a 'citizen-centred approach encompassing a broad range of actions that citizens, communities and civil society organisations can use to hold state mechanisms accountable.'[10] Therefore, social accountability programmes aim to improve the performance of public service providers in countries facing 'ineffective monitoring systems' due to their weak institutions.[11]

The World Bank's adoption of social accountability is reflected in its World Development Reports over the years, which discuss solutions to effectively reduce poverty, promote sustainable development, and achieve long-lasting political stability in developing countries. For instance, the 2004 World Bank Development Report (WDR) highlighted the importance of reinforcing the 'short route to accountability', which promotes citizens' direct involvement and participation, especially those from marginalised groups.[12] The 2011 World Development Report analysed the occurrence of conflicts to understand the circumstances of states' weakening and how to strengthen states' institutions to ensure citizens 'security, justice and jobs'.[13] In 2015, the World Bank emphasised the importance

[6] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) p7 <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Pieternella Pieterse, 'Citizen feedback in a fragile setting: social accountability interventions in the primary healthcare sector in Sierra Leone' in Disaster, Special Issue: Humanitarian Governance (2019) 43(2) 132, 133.
[9] Nahitun Naher et al. 'Do social accountability approaches work? A review of the literature from selected low- and middle-income countries in the WHO South-East Asia region' (2020)35 Health Policy and Planning p i76, i77.
[10] Giri Prasad Panthi, 'Social Accountability for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health' (2016) 7 Himalayan Journal of Sociology & Anthropology 13, 17.
[11] Doreen Nico Kyando, 'Social accountability initiatives in the Delivery of public services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic literature review' (Institute of Development Policy, June 2022) p 5 < https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/ad52f6/195405.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[12] Ibid 6.
[13] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) piii <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/433301485539630301-0050022017/original/WDR17BPEvolutionofWBThinkingonGovernance.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

of ensuring that citizens are informed, represented, and involved in public decision-making; and that governments become open to sharing public information, consulting citizens, and receiving feedback.[14] The World Bank's World Development Reports illustrate a shift in the Bank's governance perspective. The focus has moved away from an excessive emphasis on a market-driven approach to a more balanced view that acknowledges the significance of political stability for sustainable development.[15]

The practice of social accountability highlighted three key themes: citizen participation, citizen involvement in decision-making, and citizen access to information. First, the World Bank understands citizen participation as citizens' ability to mobilise themselves to actively monitor local public service providers. By promoting active participation, social accountability programmes provide opportunities for individuals to make a direct and more tangible impact on the quality of local public services.[16] Monitoring the performance of public service providers and the overall performance of the government is a crucial aspect of social accountability initiatives. This civic engagement helps evaluate the performance of public services to determine whether they meet the needs of local populations.[17]

Secondly, social accountability programmes promote citizen engagement in decision-making, enabling direct influence on local public institutions and public service providers. This involves facilitating an open dialogue among citizens, civil society organisations, and public service providers to identify citizens' needs and collaboratively seek sustainable solutions to public service challenges.[18] Social accountability programmes also provide a space for minority or underrepresented groups to participate actively in public affairs, ensuring their needs are met locally.[19] However, reinforcing citizen engagement in decision-making entails recognising the importance of the supply side's responsiveness to gain more success. Hence, strengthening institutional capacity-

[14] Sophia Opiyo et al., 'Role of Feedback Mechanism as a Public Participation Pillar in Enhancing Performance of Devolved Governance Systems in Kenya' 2017(5) International Journal of Innovative Development & Policy Studies 1, 5.
[15] K. Sarwar Lateef 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) p 22 <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/433301485539630301-0050022017/original/WDR17BPEvolutionofWBThinkingonGovernance.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[16] Jun Ma, 'The Rise of Social Accountability in China' (2012) 71(2) The Australian Journal of Public Administration 111, 118.
[17] Jose Dias and Tassiana Tomé, 'Inverted State and Citizens' Roles in the Mozambican Health Sector' in Nelson, E., Bloom, G and Shankland, A. (Eds) Accountability for Health Equity: Galvanising a Movement for Universal Health Coverage (2018) 49(2) Institute of Development Studies 34, 36.
[18] Pieternella Pieterse, 'Citizen feedback in a fragile setting: social accountability interventions in the primary healthcare sector in Sierra Leone' in Disaster, Special Issue: Humanitarian Governance (2019) 43(2) 132, 132.
[19] Diogo Pereira & Ariane Roder Figueira, 'Effects of citizen participation in the social accountability of budget amendments' (2020) 27(1) The Journal of Legislative Studies 30, 35.

building is an essential step in facilitating citizen engagement.[20] For example, by providing a platform for citizens to engage in budget amendments, social accountability programmes allow them to influence policymakers directly, thereby giving citizens greater power over institutions they may not have previously accessed.[21]

Thirdly, social accountability programmes aim to improve citizens' access to information, as active participation and involvement in decision-making require access to and understanding of information about the public sector's performance. These programmes focus on increasing citizen awareness of their rights and entitlements, as well as increasing citizen access to information about the performance of public service providers. This stems from the realisation that citizens need access to information about their rights and what they are entitled to, in order to make more informed decisions and promote their interests efficiently.[22] Therefore, social accountability programmes emphasise the need to present information in a relatable and straightforward manner to support civic action. As citizens may have varying levels of awareness about specific public challenges, social accountability programmes aim to disseminate information about public service management in a transparent and inclusive manner for all citizens.[23]

The literature review on social accountability provides a nuanced analysis of the effectiveness of the programmes. Social accountability programmes have been implemented using different tools in diverse settings, such as 'in Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa'.[24] These tools can be grouped into three categories: tools facilitating citizen participation, tools collecting citizen feedback on the performance of local public services, and tools facilitating citizen access to information. Their implementation has received mixed results. The literature highlighted the programmes' dependence on contextual factors, meaning that social, political and economic circumstances influence their outcomes. Hence, the practice of social accountability has shown that every geographical area has unique specificities that shape the outcomes of

[20] Davison Muchadenyika 'Civil society, social accountability and service delivery in Zimbabwe' in the Authors (eds), Development Policy Review (2017) 35 Institute for Social Development 178, 182.
[21] Diogo Pereira & Ariane Roder Figueira, 'Effects of citizen participation in the social accountability of budget amendments' (2020) 27(1) The Journal of Legislative Studies 30, 46.
[22] Elsbet Lodenstein et al. '"We come as friends": approaches to social accountability by health committees in Northern Malawi' (2019) 19 BMC Health Services Research 1, 10.
[23] E. Kay M. Tisdall, 'Conceptualising children and young people's participation: examining vulnerability, social accountability and co-production' (2017) 21(1) The International Journal of Human Rights 59, 22.
[24] Doreen Nico Kyando, 'Social accountability initiatives in the Delivery of public services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic literature review' (Institute of Development Policy, June 2022) < https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/ad52f6/195405.pdf > p 6 accessed 26/06/2025.

interventions.[25] Some evidence demonstrated positive outcomes in certain regions, while other studies found little to no impact on public service delivery.[26]

Social accountability programmes demonstrated positive outcomes in contexts with favourable social, political and economic circumstances.[27] Several vital elements emerge when considering the social factors that contribute to positive outcomes. First, providing citizens with free access to relatable, accurate, and actionable information about rights and the performance of public services, while including marginalised communities, was essential.[28] Additionally, an active and organised civil society that could support civic action and scale up the outcomes of the programmes significantly enhanced the effectiveness of the programmes.[29] Furthermore, using both collaborative and confrontational tactics within social accountability programmes increased citizen participation while effectively pressuring local governments and public service providers to adopt a citizen-centred approach to address governance challenges.[30]

Some political and economic circumstances facilitated success in some contexts. The political factors included government openness and willingness to publish information, as well as creating a favourable environment for citizen participation.[31] A responsive and transparent government, with the resources and competence to implement the solutions that emerged during discussions with citizens, was essential to guarantee an actual improvement in the quality of public services.[32] Therefore, the literature emphasises the need to combine short and long routes to demand accountability, as programmes are more successful when the supply and demand sides share the same goals to improve local

[25] Jane C. Hertz, 'Social Accountability in Cross-Sectoral Service Delivery: the Kinerja Public Service Delivery Program in Indonesia' in Anna Wetterberg, Derick W. Brinkerhoff, Jana C. Hertz (eds) *Governance and Service Delivery: Practical Applications of Social Accountability* (RTI Press, 2016) p 4.
[26] Doreen Nico Kyando, 'Social accountability initiatives in the Delivery of public services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic literature review' (Institute of Development Policy, June 2022) < https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/ad52f6/195405.pdf > p 6 accessed 26/06/2025.
[27] Elvin Shava and Betty C Mubangizi, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms in a Decentralised State: Exploring Implementation Challenges' (2019) 8(2) African Journal of Governance and Development 74, 75.
[28] Doreen Nico Kyando, 'Social accountability initiatives in the Delivery of public services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic literature review' (Institute of Development Policy, June 2022) < https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/ad52f6/195405.pdf > p 5 accessed 26/06/2025.
[29] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Social Accountability in Review: From Conceptual Models to Grounded Practices of Civic Innovation' in the authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (2024, EADI Global Development Series) p 33.
[30] Ibid 181.
[31] Ibid 33.
[32] Esbern Friis-Hansen and Signe Marie Cold Ravnkilde, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms and Access to Public Service Delivery in Rural Africa' (Danish Institute For International Studies December 2013) p 46 < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265300089_Social_Accountability_Mechanisms_and_Access_to_Public_Service_Delivery_in_Rural_Africa > accessed 26/06/2025.

public services and openly negotiate ways to overcome challenges.[33] An open and responsive government is also crucial to institutionalising social accountability by promoting citizen-centred public sector reforms.[34] Economic factors contributing to success in social accountability programmes included environments where governments had the financial resources to support extensive information campaigns, and address corruption and the mismanagement of funds allocated to enhancing public services.[35] Even in challenging contexts, some social accountability programmes reinforced the social contract between governments and communities by amplifying citizen voices, increasing decentralisation and building the capacity of all actors involved.[36]

Nevertheless, social accountability programmes demonstrated little to no results in other contexts. Some critical social limitations to the success of the programmes included cultural challenges, the lack of inclusiveness in marginalised communities, illiteracy, and power asymmetries hindering citizens' ability to participate actively. Cultural challenges may arise from communities' fear of expressing their needs due to specific beliefs, fear of retaliation, and certain groups' inability to participate due to religious constraints.[37] Furthermore, the dismissal of disadvantaged groups or civil society organisations advocating for these groups' interests limited the programmes' successful implementation.[38] Power asymmetries referring to societal structures of authority, class relations, gender inequalities, and other social inequalities have led some programmes to have little to no impact on public services.[39] The evidence also showed that access to information did not necessarily lead to increased citizen participation or government responsiveness in some contexts.[40]

---

[33] Doreen Nico Kyando, 'Social accountability initiatives in the Delivery of public services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic literature review' (Institute of Development Policy, June 2022) < https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/ad52f6/195405.pdf > p 6 accessed 26/06/2025.

[34] Sophie King, Badru Bukenya and Sam Hikey, 'Understanding the role of context in shaping social accountability interventions: towards an evidence-based approach' (World Bank, June 2012) p18 < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220388.2015.1134778 > accessed 26/06/2025.

[35] Colin Anderson, 'Understanding accountability in practice: Obligations, scrutiny, and consequences' in the author (ed) *Development Policy Review* (2023, John Wiley & Sons Ltd) 1, 11.

[36] Sophie King, Badru Bukenya and Sam Hikey, 'Understanding the role of context in shaping social accountability interventions: towards an evidence-based approach' (World Bank, June 2012) p 18 < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220388.2015.1134778 > accessed 26/06/2025.

[37] Dr Eng Netra, 'Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia' (2015) 19 Cambodia Development Review 1,4.

[38] Esbern Friis-Hansen and Signe Marie Cold Ravnkilde, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms and Access to Public Service Delivery in Rural Africa' (Danish Institute For International Studies December 2013) p 46 < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265300089_Social_Accountability_Mechanisms_and_Access_to_Public_Service_Delivery_in_Rural_Africa > accessed 26/06/2025.

[39] Jean-Benoit Falisse and Hugues Nkengurutse, 'Citizens Committees and Local Elites: Elite Capture, Captured Elites, and Absent Elites in Health Facility Committees' (2022) 34 The European Journal of Development Research 1662, 1665.

[40] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Social Accountability in Review: From Conceptual Models to Grounded Practices of Civic Innovation' in the authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (2024, EADI Global Development Series) p 33.

The literature highlighted some political and economic circumstances limiting the programmes' effectiveness. First, governments' lack of capacity in terms of resources and competence hindered the programmes' success, as governments did not have the institutional capacity to support the programmes or respond to citizens' demands effectively.[41] This was the case in weaker states with fragile political settings.[42] Moreover, despite using collaborative tools, some social accountability programmes failed to increase governments' and public service providers' accountability or responsiveness. Power asymmetries between government officials and citizens were exacerbated by controlling governments using these programmes to pursue political interests, or through performative accountability and 'open washing'.[43] In some cases, citizens, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, resorted to assuming the roles of their local governments, resulting in an unfair transfer of responsibilities.[44]

Regarding economic factors, poorer countries, lacking logistics and financial resources, have been challenged in implementing social accountability programmes due to their reduced capacity to effectively cater to citizens' needs and manage public resources responsibly.[45] Civil society organisations with limited funding, or those funded by states or international donors with conflicting interests, could not effectively mobilise citizens in specific social accountability programmes.[46] Furthermore, the execution of social accountability programmes is time-limited and often lacks strategies to assess long-term impacts, as they typically consist of isolated initiatives, which hinders a comprehensive evaluation of their effectiveness.[47]

Hence, the literature on the practice of social accountability highlighted their dependence on various contextual 'socioeconomic, institutional, and political' factors and local

[41] Ward Vloeberghs and Sylvia I. Bergh, 'Social Accountability in Review: From Conceptual Models to Grounded Practices of Civic Innovation' in the authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (2024, EADI Global Development Series) 23,33.
[42] Mário Aquino Alves, 'Social Accountability as an Innovative Frame in Civic Action: The Case of Rede Nossa Sao Paulo' (2014) 25(3) Voluntas 818, 833.
[43] Colin Anderson, 'Understanding accountability in practice: Obligations, scrutiny, and consequences' in the author (ed) *Development Policy Review* (John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2023) p 184.
[44] Jose Dias and Tassiana Tomé, 'Inverted State and Citizens' Roles in the Mozambican Health Sector' in Erica Nelson, Gerald Bloom and Alex Shankland (eds) Accountability for Health Equity: Galvanising a Movement for Universal Health Coverage (2018) 49(20) IDS Bulletin 35,38.
[45] Elvin Shava and Betty C Mubangizi, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms in a Decentralised State: Exploring Implementation Challenges' (2019) 8(2) African Journal of Governance and Development 74, 81.
[46] Nick Devas and Ursula Grant, 'Local Government Decision-Making -Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence From Kenya and Uganda' (2003) 23(4)Public Administration And Development 307, 310
[47] Georges Danhoundo, Khalidha Nasiri and Mary E. Wiktorowicz, 'Improving social accountability processes in the health sector in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review' (2018) 18 BMC Public Health 1, 6.

'power dynamics.'[48] According to the literature, it is impossible to definitively determine whether social accountability programmes have been successful. Their mixed results have led various authors to dismiss them as an effective means of holding governments accountable and promoting sustainable development. This negative perception highlights the challenges faced by the World Bank in developing a consistent template for successful programmes aimed at enhancing the practice of social accountability. This thesis contests this narrative, arguing that analysing isolated programmes is insufficient for evaluating their effectiveness in a political system, especially without a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of domestic political systems.

Insights from the literature on complexity and development aid highlight solutions to address limitations of development programmes, like social accountability initiatives, often designed with a linear model that overlooks real-world complexity challenges. Viewing development programmes as operating within a complex political system implies that creating change is not a simple process. Development constitutes a complex adaptive process, significantly influenced by local conditions, including contextual factors, timing, and historical trajectories.[49] Hence, development aid operates within a dense network of relationships among individuals, communities, and nations, reflecting the intricate interplay between actors at various levels. Following the traditional approach to development, many initiatives often fall short because they overlook the interconnections among numerous variables in a complex system, focusing instead on just one variable and one solution.[50] Therefore, using complexity theory can represent a more accurate way to understand the world and face development challenges more effectively. The insights of complexity for development and aid require organisations such as the World Bank to develop more effective development projects by going from 'external push' – filling gaps predictably and linearly – to 'internal catalyst', meaning using adaptive experimental strategies instead of building on 'the existing model with slight tweaks and additional technical solutions.'[51] This chapter will explore how complexity theory applies to three social accountability programmes. The goal is to

[48] Frank Bousquet et al. 'Supporting Social Accountability in the Middle East and North Africa: Lessons from Transitions' (World Bank, January 1 2012) p 3 < https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/678031468275940310/677290bri00pub0ocial0accountability > accessed 26/06/2025.
[49] Ben Ramalingam et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> p 65.
[50] Scott Wisor, 'Reviewed Work: Aid on the Edge of Chaos: Rethinking International Cooperation in a Complex World' (2014) 20(3) Global Governance 487,488.
[51] Ben Ramalingam, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013) p 361.

demonstrate how complexity theory can enhance the success of development initiatives by increasing their resilience, experimental capacity, and creating a more sustainable impact on local public services and the empowerment of civil actors.

Drawing on insights from complexity theory, this thesis transcends the traditional cause-and-effect narrative that suggests contextual social, economic and political circumstances naturally render social accountability programmes ineffective. It argues that viewing the domestic political system as complex can help identify the patterns to overcome or better navigate contextual limitations. The next sections will use three examples to determine whether successful social accountability programmes align with understanding political systems as complex systems with three specific features: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms and openness.

4.2. Self-Organisation in Social Accountability Programmes

4.2.1. Self-organisation in complex systems

Complexity theory explains that natural, social and political systems are complex systems that are self-organised.

Natural systems are characterised by several key features: a large number of interdependent agents that interact dynamically in a nonlinear way, the absence of a central controller regulating these interactions, and the inherent unpredictability of the system that prevents any single agent from imposing or predicting the dynamics of the entire system. In addition, the whole system's behaviour results from the interactions at the lower levels of the system. This is because agents' actions are 'not mutually exclusive' but concurrently contribute to 'the pursuit of various collective tasks' in the system.[52] A cell can be taken as an example to explain how natural systems' components are 'hierarchically organised' to perform specific tasks that cohesively contribute to the functioning of the whole system.[53] Hence, natural systems display a significant diversity and self-organise to adapt to unpredictable circumstances. They evolve thanks to their

[52] Sathish Periyasamy et al., 'The bottom–up approach to defining life: deciphering the functional organization of biological cells via multi-objective representation of biological complexity from molecules to cells' (2013) 4 Frontiers of Physiology 1, 3.
[53] Ibid 2.

agents learning from one another and generating new patterns that optimise the system's response to perturbations.[54]

Self-organisation is a characteristic of social systems; however, it is essential to note that they are not purely self-organising systems, as their adaptation to unpredictable circumstances can be intentional or unintentional.[55] In social systems, self-organisation can be described as the 'emergence and maintenance of structures out of local interaction' that cannot be influenced by an isolated actor.[56] At lower levels of the system, 'rules or values, ethics and morals' are produced by the 'fairly stable relationship among agents'.[57] This, in turn, spreads at the 'macro-level' of the system to influence and constrain agents' behaviour through the 'endless process of socialisation and enculturation'.[58] The emergence of social structures is, therefore, an outcome of the high number of 'complex and nonlinear interactions' among the various actors in the system.[59] Moreover, a complex social system has a large number of actors, or individuals, whose networks' interactions, structure and behaviours are 'difficult to understand and predict'.[60] Social systems evolve due to their ability to emulate a large number of interactions among individual actors who constantly learn from previous actions and the information exchanged with their external environment. Hence, the self-organised dynamics in social systems help them to shift between stable and unstable states, thus generating 'patterns of behaviour that are irregular and unpredictable' but still structured.[61]

Complexity theory views political systems as self-organised systems. In political systems, the interconnections among agents lead to the emergence of self-organisation as a property of the entire system. Nations are made of a high number of diverse actors, i.e. 'groups of heterogeneous individuals […]', whose individual reactions are based on other actors' actions and the external environment.[62] Actors in political systems are

[54] Ibid 6.
[55] Emilian Kavalski, World Politics at the Edge of Chaos : Reflections on Complexity and Global Life (State University of New York Press, 2015) p 65.
[56] Jurian Edelenbos, Ingmar van Meerkerk and Todd Schenk, 'The Evolution of Community Self-Organization in Interaction With Government Institutions: Cross-Case Insights From Three Countries' (2018) 48(1) American Review of Public Administration 52, 53.
[57] Christian Fuchs, Wolfgang Hofkirchner and Bert Klauninger, ' The Dialectic of Bottom-up and Top-down Emergence in Social Systems' 2005 (3) Triple C 28, 33.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Jurian Edelenbos, Ingmar van Meerkerk and Todd Schenk, 'The Evolution of Community Self-Organization in Interaction With Government Institutions: Cross-Case Insights From Three Countries' (2018)48 American Review of Public Administration 52,53.
[60] Joseph Tan, H. Joseph Wen and Neveen Awad, 'Health Care And Services Delivery Systems as Complex Adaptive Systems' (2005) 48(5) Communications of the ACM 36, 38.
[61] D. Ndou Siphiwe, 'The Complexity of State- Civil Society Relations: Reflections on Practice and Theory' (2016) 13(2) Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology 16, 25.
[62] Gillian Bristow and Adrian Healy, 'Building Resilient Regions: Complex Adaptive Systems and the Role of Policy Intervention' (2014) 72 Raumforsch Raumordn 93, 95.

autonomous due to the absence of a central controller regulating their behaviour at the micro level, despite macro-level rules, i.e. 'social norms and institutions'.[63] These norms and institutions can be changed, partially overlooked, or interpreted differently by individuals.[64] This means that self-organisation in a political system is generated from the bottom-up, without a central controller, and as a result of 'individuals' decisions and interactions […].'[65] In such systems, control is mostly 'dispersed and decentralised'.[66] In addition, self-organisation in political systems enables them to adapt to sudden changes. It gives them the resilience and flexibility required to adjust to nonlinear dynamics, which refer to small perturbations at one level that can have a more or less disproportionate impact on the entire systemic behaviour.[67]

In complex political systems, governance refers to the 'structures and processes by which people in places make decisions and share power and shape the conditions for ordered rule and collective action'.[68] Understanding political systems as complex systems means recognising the government's role as a facilitating actor rather than a controlling one. This means that governments are supposed to provide the environment within which 'policy can evolve from the bottom up'.[69] Therefore, stabilising political systems requires a combination of 'bottom-up dynamics and top-down influence that mutually reinforce each other'.[70]

SEND Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Monitoring Initiative is a good example of promoting self-organisation in the domestic political system. This example demonstrates how citizens can enhance their ability to self-organise and expand their networks, even under challenging political conditions. Before exploring how self-organisation is promoted in this case study, it is essential to consider its role in improving feedback and transparency, which will be discussed in the next section. The emphasis on self-organisation here stems from the initiative's goal to boost citizen involvement, particularly through monitoring the distribution of fertilisers. This focus encouraged more activities around citizen active

[63] Volker Schneider, 'Governance and Complexity' in David Levi-Faur (ed) the Oxford Handbook of Governance (Oxford University Press, 2012) 129, 136.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Gillian Bristow and Adrian Healy, 'Building Resilient Regions: Complex Adaptive Systems and the Role of Policy Intervention' (2014) 72 Raumforsch Raumordn 93, 95.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid 94.
[68] Peter Scholten et al., 'Bottom-up initiatives toward climate change adaptation in cases in the Netherlands and the UK: a complexity leadership perspective' (2015) 33(5) Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy 1024, 1024.
[69] David Colander and Roland Kupers, Complexity and the Art of Public Policy: Solving Society's Problems from the Bottom Up (Princeton University Press, 2014) p 2.
[70] Ibid.

participation and self-mobilisation, thereby strengthening self-organisation within the project.

4.2.2. Analysing SEND Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Monitoring Initiative through the lens of Complexity Theory

4.2.2.1. Background

The Social Enterprise Development Foundation (SEND) Ghana is an independent advocacy and policy research organisation created in 1998 as the 'Ghanaian subsidiary of SEND West Africa' to collaborate with governments and local civil society organisations across various sectors.[71] SEND West Africa is an international organisation working with national non-governmental organisations in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia to promote good governance, gender equality, and the inclusion of marginalised groups, such as poorer populations and women, in national policy-making.[72] SEND Ghana advocates for the protection of Ghanaian citizens' rights and well-being.[73] Collaborating with various national, regional, and international organisations to contribute to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, SEND Ghana has implemented numerous citizen-centred programmes over the years.[74] The organisation has also implemented social accountability programmes following the creation of its District Citizen Monitoring Committees (DCMC), whose members belong to diverse social groups, including women, the youth, traditional leaders, and disabled people.[75] These committees organise themselves to raise awareness among local populations, provide information and evidence on the performance of public services, engage with policymakers, regularly monitor the implementation of programmes, and ensure the commitment of stakeholders.[76] SEND Ghana's social accountability programmes primarily utilise public expenditure tracking, but other mechanisms, such as community

[71] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) p15 < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[72] SEND West Africa, 'Who We Are' (SEND West Africa) < https://www.sendwestafrica.org/nu/who-we-are/#1634564118153-4c869471-67dd > accessed 26/06/2025.
[73] SEND Ghana, 'About Us' (SEND Ghana) < https://sendwestafrica.org/nu/gh/about-us/ > accessed 26/06/2025.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) p 15 < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[76] Ibid.

action and scorecards, are also employed to enhance citizen mobilisation and active participation.[77]

In 2008, to improve the productivity of its agricultural sector and reduce poverty among farmers, the Ghanaian government launched a Fertiliser Subsidy Programme (GFSP).[78] The Fertiliser Subsidy Programme aimed to increase the local use of fertilisers by reducing costs and prioritising support for the 'most constrained farmers'.[79] This programme followed an economic crisis in 2007, which led to an increase in energy, food and fertiliser prices and a decrease in 'domestic food production, causing food insecurity nationwide.[80] The Fertiliser Subsidy Programme introduced a voucher system aimed at smaller farmers, making fertilisers more affordable, while reducing transportation and handling costs by having the government act as a direct intermediary in purchasing fertilisers.[81] Since its implementation, the programme has faced numerous challenges, particularly corruption and the smuggling of fertilisers to neighbouring countries.[82] This prompted several civil society organisations to form a coalition and implement social accountability initiatives that support local communities in monitoring the programme's execution.[83]

While the programme faced several challenges during its implementation, this thesis argues that it serves as a strong example of a social accountability initiative that embodies the three characteristics of a complex system: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness.

4.2.2.1.1. Feedback mechanisms in SEND Ghana's Initiative

This case study pertains to the thesis on promoting positive feedback mechanisms by demonstrating how social accountability programmes can anticipate challenges and adapt to overcome obstacles such as a lack of support from government representatives. Feedback mechanisms play a vital role in determining how changes occur within a

[77] Ibid.
[78] Francis Tsiboe et al. 'Effect of fertiliser subsidy on household level cereal production in Ghana' (2021)13 Scientific African 1, 1.
[79] Ibid 2.
[80] Ibid 3.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) p 3 < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[83] Ibid.

complex system.[84] This is because the interactions among actors can impact the system in unpredictable ways by either amplifying specific outcomes to create systemic change, or restraining the outcomes of some actions to stabilise the system.[85] Hence, actors' interconnections in complex systems lead to the emergence of feedback loops that relate micro behaviours, interaction dynamics, and larger global trends.[86] This thesis argues that SEND Ghana's initiative strengthened positive feedback loops by creating a collaborative environment that promotes information exchange, thereby boosting citizen participation and diminishing power imbalances between political and civil actors.

SEND Ghana's initiative illustrates how social accountability programmes can enhance the coordination of local civil society organisations and increase their capacity to self-organise and better represent local community interests. The initiative was implemented in a context where citizens viewed public institutions as unresponsive to civil society organisations, regarding the creation of opportunities for citizen participation in governance.[87] Civil society organisations were perceived as 'antagonistic' towards the government and ineffective in engaging with officials and institutions in a productive manner.[88] To tackle this issue, the initiative significantly improved coordination among local civil society organisations, boosting their capacity to self-organise and effectively represent their communities' interests. In 2005, over one thousand smallholder farmer groups convened to establish the Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (PFAG), to advocate for reforms that improve the livelihoods and dignity of farmers.[89] Since the implementation of the Fertiliser Subsidy Programme, the PFAG has actively engaged with the government, drawing attention to issues such as the improper utilisation of the initial fertiliser coupon system, which ultimately led to its discontinuation.[90] However, the PFAG's efforts received a limited response from the government. Recognising the limitations of previous policy outcomes, the International Budget Partnership (IBP), alongside the PFAG and SEND Ghana, launched a new strategy to enhance fiscal

[84] Ben Ramalingam Ben et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) p 8 <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> accessed 26/06/2025.
[85] Ibid 16.
[86] Ibid 5.
[87] Harriet Nuamah Agyemang, SEND Ghana: Experiences from giving Ghana's Government a Place in the Driver's Seat of our Social Accountability Project' (GPSA, December 2018) p 1 < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/342401607318887998/pdf/SEND-Ghana-Experiences-from-Giving-Ghana-s-Government-a-place-in-the-Driver-s-Seat-of-our-Social-Accountability-Project.pdf > Accessed 26/06/2025.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Brendan Halloran and Patrick Stephenson, 'Chapter 4: Smallholder farmers, food security and COVID-19 in Ghana: Civil society navigating fiscal governance and service delivery during crisis' in Nannette Abrahams et al (eds*) 'Shrinking or Opening? Civic Space in Africa during COVID-19'* (GiZ, 2022) p 41 <https://d-nb.info/126701010X/34#page=48> accessed 26/05/2025.
[90] Ibid.

governance related to the Fertiliser Subsidy Programme. This initiative went beyond creating change temporarily to seek substantial, long-term advancements driven by smallholder farmers.[91]

In complex systems, the dissemination of accurate information among all stakeholders is necessary to reinforce positive feedback loops that can lead to systemic change over time. This is because information flows reduce power abuse created by the monopolisation of information in the hands of a single person or institution, which cannot 'integrate all the information and interests in society'.[92] SEND Ghana's initiative aimed to mobilise local citizens in gathering data, sharing updated information, and overseeing fertiliser distribution to curb smuggling, all of which required capacity building. Hence, the programme started with local civil society organisations' training and sensitising communities by providing updated information on the 'costs, types, and availability of fertilisers in the districts'.[93] This established positive feedback loops, as enhanced collaboration between civil and political entities cultivated a supportive environment for constructive negotiations.[94] Furthermore, the collaborative environment bolstered citizens' capacity for self-organisation by leveraging decentralised District Citizen Monitoring Committees.[95] These committees collaborated with government institutions and non-governmental organisations to strengthen community oversight of government programmes.[96]

By fostering a collaborative environment, SEND Ghana's initiative aligned with complexity theory's insights, motivating communities to strengthen their resilience through innovative solutions that enhance their ability to influence the system from the bottom up.[97] The initiative encouraged citizen involvement in defining citizen-centred policy, which reinforced positive feedback mechanisms, facilitating the launch of a 'citizen's alternative budget' to inform the government on budget proposals that meet

[91] Ibid 38.
[92] Robert Jervis, 'Complexity and the Analysis of Political and Social Life' 1997(112) Political Science Quarterly 569,590.
[93] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) p 13 < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[94] Guerzovich Florencia and Poli Maria, ' How Social Accountability strengthens Cross-sector Initiatives to Deliver Quality Health Services?' (GPSA, 2019) p 25 <https://collaboration.worldbank.org/content/usergenerated/asi/cloud/attachments/sites/collaboration-for-development/en/groups/healthsystemsflagship/documents1/_jcr_content/content/primary/blog/how_social_accountabilitystrengthenscross-sector-VHoh/HOW%20SOCIAL%20ACCOUNTABILITY%20STRENGTHENS%20cross-sector%20intiatives%20to%20deliver%20quality%20health%20services.pdf > Accessed 26/06/2025.
[95] Marie Gildemyn, 'From Signposting to Straightening Crooked Paths' (Doctor in Development Studies Thesis, University of Antwerp 2015) p 209.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Elena A. Korosteleva and Irina Petrova, 'What makes communities resilient in times of complexity and change?' (2022) 35 (2) Cambridge Review of International Affairs 137,143.

local citizens' needs and expectations.[98] This reduced power imbalances by empowering local communities to self-organise, define their needs, and gain greater influence over government policies, while also educating them about their rights and the functioning of public services.[99] Additionally, collaboration among various local civil society organisations and 'extensive media attention' strengthened positive feedback mechanisms that helped smallholder farmers mitigate fertiliser smuggling.[100]

The next section will explain how SEND Ghana's initiative successfully promoted openness in the political system, through the improvement of actors' response to unpredictability and their increased awareness of the system's complexity.

4.2.2.2.2. Openness in Send Ghana's Initiative

This case study demonstrated the promotion of openness through a preparatory phase, which helped civil actors anticipate the government's lack of collaboration. Openness in complex systems fosters resilience thinking, enabling the management of uncertainty and nonlinearity more flexibly and effectively.[101] This enables actors to adapt as they experiment and devise innovative solutions to local challenges in a collaborative manner. This thesis argues that SEND Ghana's approach enhanced the actors' understanding of the system's complexity and prepared them for the challenges that arose during the implementation of the initiative.

In complex political systems, actors must be more adaptable to constant, unforeseen changes and overall disorder, as well as more efficient in managing issues.[102] The SEND Ghana's initiative supported the implementation and monitoring of the government's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme by anticipating corruption challenges and emphasising the mobilisation of local communities and farmer-based organisations. The innovative approach developed by SEND Ghana, along with other organisations like the Peasant

[98] Ibid.
[99] Tony Dogbe and Joana Kwabena-Adade, 'Ghana: Budget Monitoring by SEND-Ghana and its Partners Helps Improve Nutrition for Children and Support Local Farmers' (International Budget Partnership Impact Case Study, September 2012) p 5 < https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2333672 > Accessed 26/06/2025.
[100] Brendan Halloran and Patrick Stephenson, 'Chapter 4: Smallholder farmers, food security and COVID-19 in Ghana: Civil society navigating fiscal governance and service delivery during crisis' in Nannette Abrahams et al (eds) *'Shrinking or Opening? Civic Space in Africa during COVID-19'* (GiZ, 2022) p 49 <https://d-nb.info/126701010X/34#page=48> accessed 26/06/2025.
[101] Ben Ramalingam Ben et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) p 347 <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> accessed 26/06/2025.
[102] Adrian Little, 'Complexity and real politics' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015) p37.

Farmers Association of Ghana, resulted in long-term improvements in the mobilisation and self-organisation of smallholder farmers.[103] This coalition of civil society organisations went beyond their previous isolated efforts, which had achieved little impact, exerting more pressure on the government and strengthening its willingness to engage directly with citizens' and local farmers' concerns.[104] This aligns with the importance of openness in complex political systems, particularly in enhancing the system's ability to respond to unpredictability.

Information flow is essential in complex political systems because it helps actors diminish power imbalances and promote behaviours that can lead to lasting systemic change. As individuals gain a deeper understanding of the system, they can better 'compensate' for potential outcomes by supporting policies that either correct issues or capitalise on unforeseen opportunities.[105] The initiative was implemented in geographical areas where information gaps were particularly evident, preventing citizens from effectively monitoring and assessing the government's performance.[106] To address information gaps, the initiative employed SEND Ghana's Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation framework for policy advocacy. It leveraged collected evidence to engage with authorities at local, regional, and national levels of government.[107] Additionally, it monitored the commitments made by public officials at different governmental tiers to enforce accountability.[108] By increasing the effectiveness of citizen committees at the district level and collaborating with local civil society organisations, the initiative successfully enhanced cooperation among actors at local, regional, and national levels.[109] Therefore, the programme significantly improved the capabilities of local civil society organisations that had been facing challenges in holding public service providers accountable and assisting smallholder farmers impacted by the Fertiliser Subsidy Programme.[110] This

[103] Brendan Halloran and Patrick Stephenson, 'Chapter 4: Smallholder farmers, food security and COVID-19 in Ghana: Civil society navigating fiscal governance and service delivery during crisis' in Nannette Abrahams et al (eds) *'Shrinking or Opening? Civic Space in Africa during COVID-19'* (GiZ, 2022) p 49 <https://d-nb.info/126701010X/34#page=48> accessed 26/06/2025.
[104] Ibid 42.
[105] Robert Jervis, 'Complexity and the Analysis of Political and Social Life' 1997(112) Political Science Quarterly 569,586.
[106] Marie Gildemyn, 'From Signposting to Straightening Crooked Paths' (Doctor in Development Studies Thesis, University of Antwerp 2015) p 107.
[107] Tony Dogbe and Joana Kwabena-Adade, 'Ghana: Budget Monitoring by SEND-Ghana and its Partners Helps Improve Nutrition for Children and Support Local Farmers' (International Budget Partnership Impact Case Study, September 2012) p 5 < https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2333672 > Accessed 26/06/2025.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid 8.
[110] Brendan Halloran and Patrick Stephenson, 'Chapter 4: Smallholder farmers, food security and COVID-19 in Ghana: Civil society navigating fiscal governance and service delivery during crisis' in Nannette Abrahams et al (eds) '*Shrinking or Opening? Civic Space in Africa during COVID-19'* (GiZ, 2022) p 49 <https://d-nb.info/126701010X/34#page=48> accessed 26/05/2025.

aligns with the promotion of openness in terms of improving actors' awareness of the system's complexity.

Nonetheless, this case study particularly exemplifies how social accountability initiatives enhance citizens' abilities to self-organise and diversify citizen networks, thereby making a greater impact on domestic political system, which the next section will explain.

4.2.2.2. Self-organisation in SEND Ghana's Initiative

4.2.2.2.1. Increasing Citizen Ability To Self-Organise

The SEND Ghana Fertiliser Subsidy initiative is a good example of the possibility of increasing citizens' ability to self-organise, in social accountability programmes.

Using the insights of complexity theory, the political system is a complex system in which self-organisation emerges from the actions and interactions of actors at the lower levels. Citizens organise themselves and evolve alongside other actors within an environment defined by societal rules, policies, and institutional boundaries. Hence, citizens' self-organisation occurs in an 'already crowded and institutionalised public field', in which citizens at the local level 'initiate, own, and exploit specific collective community-based services'.[111] Self-organisation should be understood as an initiative of citizens themselves, based on their actual 'motives, networks, communities, processes and objectives', detached from government-initiated participatory initiatives, and through which citizens and civil society organisations develop a different relationship with local governments and public agencies.[112] This was demonstrated in the SEND Ghana Fertiliser Subsidy Initiative.

This initiative empowered individual citizens and farmers within local communities to form committees with the goal of collecting data and assessing public reports. These committees identified instances of abuse and relayed the challenges and potential solutions to government officials based on the information they gathered.[113] Thanks to

[111] José Nederhand et al. 'The governance of self-organization: Which governance strategy do policy officials and citizens prefer?' (2018) 52 Policy Sciences 233, 234.
[112] Beitske Boonstra and Luuk Boelens, 'Self-organization in urban development: towards a new perspective on spatial planning' (2011) 4(2) Urban Research & Practice 99, 109.
[113] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) p 14 < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

citizens' self-mobilisation in the programme, various incidents of smuggling fertilisers were reported, along with the routes smugglers used to escape law enforcement officers.[114] Civil society organisations established various mechanisms in synergy with farmer organisations and local communities to prevent smuggling along the border towns.[115] Smuggling instances have been intercepted in various locations, which has reduced attempts in different border towns.[116] In addition, local citizens' monitoring of fertiliser management led to the establishment of national checkpoints and heightened public scrutiny of fertiliser distribution. These represented significant improvements compared to the beginning of the programme, during which there were no checkpoints between loading and retail points.[117] Furthermore, citizen self-organisation was supported by local civil society organisations, national agencies and independent media outlets that did not rely on government funding and even went against the government publicly.[118]

In addition, the experience of citizens self-organising to identify local challenges, propose solutions and monitor the implementation of these solutions improved local governments' responsiveness beyond the agricultural sector. In some instances, individual citizens collaborated with media outlets such as the 'local radio station' on their own initiative to express their concerns about their local government and public service providers' performance.[119] These issues were then relayed to power holders, who addressed them within a short period.[120] In this situation, SEND Ghana opted not to use a confrontational approach to address corruption and smuggling. Instead of merely identifying problems, the organisation aimed to leverage local media outlets to share information that could encourage civic engagement.[121] Furthermore, this initiative helped to popularise the idea of local citizen participation in contexts where ordinary citizens were previously not empowered to mobilise themselves. Consequently, it helped to 'demystify' state-society interactions through the sensitisation and active involvement of local communities.[122] The programme reinforced citizens' self-organised patterns in various instances. For instance, some local citizens mobilised themselves to visit the office of the Minister of Agriculture to advocate for specific service delivery issues in their communities.[123] This was achieved

[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid 18.
[117] Ibid 17.
[118] Ibid 18.
[119] Ibid 19.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid 20.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

due to SEND Ghana's well-connected status, providing more government officials access.[124]

The insights from complexity theory emphasise the importance of governments in creating a supportive environment for citizens to self-organise. This is explained by the fact that governments play a crucial role in blocking, facilitating or trying to stir citizen self-organisation.[125] Hence, governments must provide the space for bottom-up mobilisation rather than trying to 'initiate and organise them'.[126] Complexity theory encourages top-down commitment to facilitate self-organisation by allowing individuals 'personalised versions of democracy' to be freely expressed.'[127] This was demonstrated in the SEND Ghana fertiliser subsidy initiative.

The programme opted for a collaborative approach, engaging local civil society organisations and government representatives to promote more 'diplomacy and dialogue'.[128] SEND Ghana trained citizen committee members and partner civil society organisations on the importance of not appearing 'interrogational' when engaging with public officials, to prevent them from seeing the intervention as a 'witch hunt' rather than an advocacy initiative.[129] To anticipate government officials' reluctance to participate, SEND Ghana also organised various advocacy training to sensitise government officials and strengthen the relationship between them and civil society organisations.[130] This collaboration aimed to facilitate negotiations addressing local challenges in a diplomatic way that would be more sustainable. The challenge with this approach is that it slowed down the intervention.[131] The programme relied on government officials to provide data on public expenditure, revenues, and budget tracking. Consequently, some power holders used diplomatic negotiations to slow down anti-smuggling activities and benefit their personal interests. To counter this challenge, civil society organisations involved in the programme used a variety of strategies, such as commissioning 'investigative journalism

[124] Brendan Halloran and Patrick Stephenson, 'Chapter 4: Smallholder farmers, food security and COVID-19 in Ghana: Civil society navigating fiscal governance and service delivery during crisis' in Nannette Abrahams et al (eds*) 'Shrinking or Opening? Civic Space in Africa during COVID-19'* (GiZ, 2022) p 47 <https://d-nb.info/126701010X/34#page=48> accessed 26/06/2025.
[125] José Nederhand et al. 'The governance of self-organization: Which governance strategy do policy officials and citizens prefer?' (2018) 52 Policy Sciences 233, 237.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Renée Houston, 'Participation as chaos: Lessons from the principles of complexity theory for democracy' (2000) 57(4) World Futures 315, 334.
[128] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) p21 < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

pieces', to anticipate delays in negotiations with government officials.[132] The collaborative approach, thus, enabled government officials to be 'more willing to cooperate'.[133] In cases where local governments failed to respond to the needs of citizens, local communities organised themselves to initiate protests and express their problems and priorities.[134]

The next section illustrates how the SEND Ghana initiative showcased the potential to diversify citizen networks in social accountability initiatives.

4.2.2.2.2. Diversifying Citizen Networks

Complexity theory tells us that diversity is necessary in the evolution of complex systems, as it enables the system to survive unpredictability, by increasing the resources available for agents to adapt and self-organise to regulate the system under new conditions.[135] Hence, diversifying citizen networks can improve citizens' ability to self-organise by developing communities' capacity-building skills and encouraging the emergence of more robust networks of actors that will advocate for local needs effectively. Capacity building is an important factor that can affect the success of community development initiatives, as it addresses citizens' ability to '[…] identify, mobilise, and address social and public health problems'.[136]

Diversifying citizen networks in a complex political system requires the empowerment of civil society organisations, whose actions can go beyond the boundaries and path dependencies set by governments. Civil society organisations should progressively strategise their activities outside government boundaries to protect community interests effectively.[137] This is because empowering civil society organisations to self-organise and mobilise local communities can positively impact citizen participation, as a social movement comprises a 'network of groups that are communicatively linked'.[138] Thus,

[132] Ibid 22.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Şuay Nilhan Açıkalın and Erbil Can Artun, 'Chapter 7 The Concept of Self-Organized Criticality: The Case Study of the Arab Uprising' in Şefika Ş. Erçetin and Nihan Potas (eds) *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2017, Explorations of Chaos and Complexity Theory* (Springer Nature, 2017) p 75.
[136] Malika Igalla, Jurian Edelenbos and Ingmar van Meerkerk, 'Citizens in Action, What Do They Accomplish? A Systematic Literature Review of Citizen Initiatives, Their Main Characteristics, Outcomes, and Factors' (2019) 30 Voluntas 1176, 1183.
[137] Beitske Boonstra and Luuk Boelens, 'Self-organization in urban development: towards a new perspective on spatial planning' (2011) 4(2) Urban Research & Practice 99, 108.
[138] Ibid 110.

self-organising movements in the political system result from a 'networked, co-operative, synergetic production of emergent qualities and systems'.[139] This was demonstrated in the SEND Ghana's initiative.

SEND Ghana successfully expanded the networks of civil actors by leveraging their extensive connections, allowing them to collaborate with various stakeholders in civil society organisations and public institutions. For example, SEND Ghana formed alliances with multiple public forums, including the Aid Effectiveness Forum and the Ghana School Feeding Platform, along with regional councils, district assemblies, parliament, and different ministries, such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture.[140] SEND Ghana's strong connections and cooperative approach build on prior initiatives, such as the Grassroots Economic Literacy and Advocacy Programme (GELAP).[141] This programme focused on enhancing good governance practices, ensuring accountability, and promoting equity in the implementation of the government's 'pro-poor policies and programmes'.[142]

The initiative enabled civil society organisations to increase benefits for smallholder farmers by establishing a coalition that effectively designed and organised the programme's monitoring. By increasing 'vigilance from below', civil society organisations pressured the government to be more transparent.[143] This increased the opportunities for more beneficiaries to have access to subsidised fertilisers. The coalition of civil society organisations has strengthened monitoring mechanisms, making the anti-corruption intervention more effective at reporting shortages.[144] Additionally, civil society organisations and independent media outlets facilitated the mainstreaming of citizen participation by compelling government officials to be present and 'answer their constituents,' thereby imposing reputational costs for absenteeism.[145]

Diversifying citizen networks means ensuring the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. The lack of inclusion of disadvantaged groups can lead to 'differential access to resources and

[139] Ibid.
[140] Marie Gildemyn, 'From Signposting to Straightening Crooked Paths' (Doctor in Development Studies Thesis, University of Antwerp 2015) p 147.
[141] Tony Dogbe and Joana Kwabena-Adade, 'Ghana: Budget Monitoring by SEND-Ghana and its Partners Helps Improve Nutrition for Children and Support Local Farmers' (International Budget Partnership Impact Case Study, September 2012) < https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2333672 > p 4 Accessed 26/06/2025.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) p 19 < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid 20.

opportunities because of formal and informal hierarchies of class, ethnicity, position, or power in the community.'[146] This can also lead to the prevalence of the interests of privileged actors within the community, thus limiting disadvantaged groups' ability to voice their needs and concerns about local public service delivery. Thus, the more inclusive citizen participation initiatives are, the greater the participation and the more effective local self-organisation will be.[147]

Furthermore, empowering disadvantaged groups can lead to a higher rate of citizen participation and mobilisation, as it can improve citizens' ability to articulate their needs when meeting in 'new settings', increase trust among individuals, and increase the sense of responsibility in each group.[148] In this case, citizen self-organisation will be more effective, as it would be promoted in an environment where all groups feel represented and legitimate to express themselves. The initiative demonstrated positive results in mobilising smallholder farmers and providing them with a 'larger platform to air their grievances', which would have previously not been taken as seriously by local governments.[149] Citizen committees also played a significant role in relaying the challenges faced by targeted communities, by tracking the progress of committee meetings and channelling concerns through a dedicated electronic platform.[150]

The existence of 'free riders' driven by opportunism increases the 'cost of collaboration' and limits communities' ability to mobilise themselves at a larger scale. This can be addressed by cultivating a sense of community. Developing a 'sense of community purpose' involves limiting 'opportunistic behaviour', increasing citizens' ability to interact repeatedly at a local level, and encouraging them to self-organise through collective action.[151] In the case of SEND Ghana's initiative, a critical challenge was the personal cost to committee members, as well as the logistical and operational problems and the political implications of bottom-up accountability. This was because anti-smuggling activities increased tensions among communities, as members of the committees were reprimanded or treated as 'traitors' for denouncing abuses and working

[146] Manoj K. Shrestha 'Internal versus External Social Capital and the Success of Community Initiatives: A Case of Self-Organizing Collaborative Governance in Nepal' (2013) 73(1) Public Administration Review 154, 156.
[147] Ibid 157.
[148] Beitske Boonstra and Luuk Boelens, 'Self-organization in urban development: towards a new perspective on spatial planning' (2011) 4(2) Urban Research & Practice 99, 100.
[149] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) p 20 < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[150] Ibid 15.
[151] Manoj K. Shrestha 'Internal versus External Social Capital and the Success of Community Initiatives: A Case of Self-Organizing Collaborative Governance in Nepal' (2013) 73(1) Public Administration Review 154, 156.

against 'the interests of entire groups within the community and, in some cases, the whole community itself'.[152]

The initiative has been implemented in a challenging context where clientelism could be found at various levels of the country's political and social dynamics, which made it 'vulnerable to local-level struggles and negotiations' despite the presence of 'robust horizontal mechanisms'.[153] Yet, despite contextual social, economic and political challenges, this example showed that social accountability can mobilise citizens for successful activism, improve the relationship between states and citizens, and enable local governments to scale up targeted social accountability initiatives. This initiative encouraged citizen self-organisation by allowing them to organise themselves locally, identify critical issues, and define ways to engage public service providers and national and local governments to solve them. It also demonstrated a key insight of complexity theory: the ability to constantly experiment with new strategies, to be flexible, and to be resilient in the face of unpredictable circumstances.

SEND Ghana and their partners constantly readapted their strategies to overcome the barriers created by the highly centralised political context by finding innovative ways around state actors' lack of responsiveness or citizens' low capacity. Furthermore, SEND Ghana, the PFAG, and the IBP maintained their collaboration to oversee subsidised fertilisers across different districts. In 2020, they gathered evidence for a policy document highlighting the inadequate government investments in agriculture compared to the scale of challenges impacting farmers' livelihoods and food security in Ghana.[154] This initiative inspired other civil society organisations to adopt participatory monitoring and the citizen evaluation of development programmes, prompting SEND Ghana to create a template to teach development practitioners how to 'empower citizens to hold their governments accountable at various levels'.[155] The model emphasises diversifying citizen networks,

[152] Kofi Takyi Asante and Saul Mullard, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) p23 < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[153] Ibid 21.
[154] Brendan Halloran and Patrick Stephenson, 'Chapter 4: Smallholder farmers, food security and COVID-19 in Ghana: Civil society navigating fiscal governance and service delivery during crisis' in Nannette Abrahams et al (eds) *'Shrinking or Opening? Civic Space in Africa during COVID-19'* (GiZ, 2022) p 43 <https://d-nb.info/126701010X/34#page=48> accessed 26/06/2025.
[155] SEND Ghana, 'Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation Send's Approach to Promoting Social Accountability: Implementation Manual' (Send Ghana, 2016) <https://sendwestafrica.org/nu/gh/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/Participatory_Monitoring_and_Evaluation_PME_Framework_2016.pdf> p 6 accessed 26/06/2025.

highlighting the need to include disadvantaged groups in participatory monitoring and focusing on health and education sectors for 'pro-poor initiatives'.[156]

Citizens' capacity for self-organisation is enhanced by positive feedback mechanisms within a complex political system. These mechanisms reinforce specific behaviours among various actors during social accountability programmes, leading to lasting changes beyond the initiatives' conclusion. The next section discusses how the White Ribbon initiative in Niger State fostered positive feedback mechanisms.

4.3. Feedback Mechanisms in Social Accountability

4.3.1. Feedback Mechanisms in Complex Systems

Complexity theory shows that natural, social and political systems exhibit feedback mechanisms.

Complex natural systems exhibit nonlinear interactions among agents and between agents and their environment. These interactions enable natural systems to self-regulate using feedback mechanisms to shift towards different equilibrium points.[157] Feedback mechanisms enable natural systems to stabilise themselves when facing perturbations.[158] For instance, a cell communicates with neighbouring cells and the external environment using 'signalling pathways' or feedback mechanisms to adapt to external disruptions.[159] This feature optimises the system's behaviour through natural selection, ensuring its functioning remains stable during perturbations.[160] In addition, due to the nonlinear dynamics in complex natural systems, feedback mechanisms can be negative or positive depending on whether energy inputs from the environment or the outputs, i.e. the outcomes of agents' behaviour, are 'dampened' or 'amplified' in the system.[161] Hence, feedback mechanisms enable complex natural systems to influence their environment,

[156] SEND Ghana, 'Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation Send's Approach to Promoting Social Accountability: Implementation Manual' (Send Ghana, 2016) <https://sendwestafrica.org/nu/gh/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/Participatory_Monitoring_and_Evaluation_PME_Framework_2016.pdf> p 6 accessed 26/06/2025.
[157] Steffen Waldherr, Thomas Eissing, Frank Allgöwer, 'Analysis of Feedback Mechanisms in Cell-biological Systems' (2008) 41(2) IFAC Proceedings Volumes 15861, 15861.
[158] Ibid 1562.
[159] Nicole Radde, 'The role of feedback mechanisms in biological network models—A tutorial' (2011) 13(5) Asian Journal of Control 597,597.
[160] Steffen Waldherr, Thomas Eissing, Frank Allgöwer,'Analysis of Feedback Mechanisms in Cell-biological Systems' (2008) 41(2) IFAC Proceedings Volumes 15861, 15863.
[161] Paul Cairney and Robert Geyer, 'A critical Discussion of Complexity Theory: How does 'Complexity Thinking' improve our Understanding of Politics and Policymaking?' (2017) 3(2) Complexity, Governance & Networks 1, 3.

while being influenced by responses and shared energy from that environment, resulting in constant adjustments in the system's behaviour.[162]

In social systems, feedback mechanisms define the ability of systems' outputs to influence the systems' input and vice versa. As information moves through networks of agents, positive feedback mechanisms amplify the information's output within the system, while negative feedback mechanisms restrict it.[163] This process is nonlinear because the external environment can introduce unpredictable factors that are not entirely within the control of the agents within the system.[164] Hence, feedback mechanisms increase the resilience of social systems by enhancing their ability to mitigate internal issues and the uncertainty brought about by their external environment.[165] It is possible to predict a social system's behaviour or evolution in the short term; however, constant fluctuations prevent accurate predictions and total control.[166]

Political systems also have feedback mechanisms that amplify or dampen the outcomes of actors' actions and unpredictable external events throughout the system.[167] Viewing the political system as non-complex implies that any change in the system's initial conditions will have a proportionate effect on the system's behaviour, which is not always the case. This is because nonlinearity in complex systems is materialised by a butterfly effect through which small changes can have 'radically divergent outcomes'.[168] Feedback mechanisms enable the connection between the system's output and its input.[169] As agents interact with each other and evolve to face uncertainty, feedback mechanisms form a 'causality loop' that either stabilises or destabilises the system.[170] Negative feedback mechanisms temporarily preserve a system's order and current behavioural patterns.[171] In contrast, positive feedback mechanisms move the system to a different state without achieving an ultimate order or descending into chaos.[172] Positive feedback facilitates the

[162] Frank Gadinger and Dirk Peters, 'Feedback loops in a world of complexity: a cybernetic approach at the interface of foreign policy analysis and international relations theory' (2014) 29(1) Cambridge Review of International Affairs 251, 254.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Pablo T. Rodriguez-Gonzalez, Ramiro Rico-Martinez, Vicente Rico-Ramirez, 'Effect of feedback loops on the sustainability and resilience of human ecosystems' (2020) 426Ecological Modelling 1, 9.
[166] K. Michael Mathews, Michael C. White and Rebecca G. Long, 'Why Study the Complexity Sciences in the Social Sciences?' (1999) 52 Human Relations 439, 446.
[167] Richard Meissner and Inga Jacobs, 'Theorising complex water governance in Africa: The case of the proposed Epupa Dam on the Kunene River' (2016) 16(1) International Environmental Agreements : Politics, Law and Economics 21, 29.
[168] Robert Geyer and Samir Rihani 'Complexity and Public Policy' (1st ed Routledge, 2010) p 16.
[169] Emilian Kavalski, World Politics at the Edge of Chaos : Reflections on Complexity and Global Life, edited by Emilian Kavalski, (State University of New York Press, 2015) p 66.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.

occurrence of useful regulatory behaviours in the systems.[173] Introducing positive feedback in a system thus enables to keep the 'system variable to a fixed set of possible values' so that the system's behaviour gets closer to ideal.[174]

Due to their numerous internal interactions, interdependent actors, and feedback mechanisms, the nonlinear dynamics in complex political systems complicate the use of linear cause-and-effect reasoning to explain policy outcomes.[175] Therefore, feedback mechanisms make governance 'precarious' as governing requires understanding that unpredictable events can challenge the political system's temporary order.[176] An illustrative example highlighting the significance of fostering feedback mechanisms that support positive change in a political system is the White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria's initiative in Niger State. This social accountability programme demonstrates how increased citizen engagement in policymaking can promote responsible citizenship and help diminish power asymmetries, even in challenging initial political conditions. The next section analyses the background of this case study, while explaining how it aligns with the promotion of self-organisation and openness, despite a focus on feedback mechanisms. The focus on the promotion of feedback mechanisms in this case study, relates to the fact that this initiative emphasised a collaborative social accountability approach going beyond citizen participation to reinforce the social contract between local citizens, specifically women and girls, and the local government.

4.3.2. Analysing The Nigeria's White Ribbon Alliance's Initiative in Niger State through the lens of Complexity Theory

4.3.2.1. Background

As an International not-for-profit organisation, the White Ribbon Alliance (WRA) was created in 1999 to support local citizen-led movements advocating for the health and well-being of mothers and newborns in over 20 countries. This organisation prioritised

[173] Olivier Cinquin and Jacques Demongeot, 'Roles of positive and negative feedback in biological systems' (2002) 325 Comptes Rendus Biologies 1085, 1091.
[174] Ibid 1092.
[175] Emilian Kavalski, World Politics at the Edge of Chaos: Reflections on Complexity and Global Life (State University of New York Press, 2015) p 183.
[176] Frank Gadinger and Dirk Peters, 'Feedback loops in a world of complexity: a cybernetic approach at the interface of foreign policy analysis and international relations theory' (2014) 29(1) 251, 254.

citizens' needs in national development by finding 'holistic solutions' targeting challenges in the health sector.[177] To foster change within communities, the White Ribbon Alliance promotes direct citizen involvement in decision-making and aims to increase citizens' knowledge of health and human rights.[178] The organisation also gathers citizens' feedback and uses media outlets to amplify their voices while creating feedback loops to strengthen long-term partnerships among decision-makers, citizens, and civil society organisations.[179] Founded in 2009, the White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria aims to support the WRA agenda in the Nigerian health sector by activating citizen-led movements.[180]

Previously involved in various transparency and accountability advocacy activities, the White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria initiated a three-year social accountability initiative in Niger State, Nigeria, in 2015 to empower citizens to demand accountability from public healthcare service providers.[181] This campaign aimed to increase the 'quality, supply, and use of primary health care facilities', specifically targeting the needs of mothers, newborns and children.[182] The choice of Niger State came from the observation of local challenges, such as high fertility rate, 'low contraceptive prevalence' and 'high maternal mortality'.[183] To understand the background of this social accountability initiative, it is essential to note that Niger State experienced a significant deficit of midwives, having merely 66 for every one million women of reproductive age.[184] This scarcity contributed to elevated maternal and newborn mortality rates. In addition, women and girls in Niger State identified water, sanitation, and hygiene as their primary health concern, specifically advocating for access to running water and clean facilities in health centres.[185] Consequently, the WRA Nigeria initiative aimed to amplify women's voices concerning the challenges in the local health sector, in order to hold their government more accountable.[186]

---

[177] White Ribbon Alliance, 'Building a Movement: A history of White Ribbon Alliance' (White Ribbon Alliance) < https://whiteribbonalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/WRA-Book-of-Wins_10.10.22.pdf > p 6 accessed 26/06/2025.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Rachel Sullivan Robinson and Tariah Adams, 'Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 1, 4.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid 2.
[183] Ibid 1.
[184] White Ribbon Alliance, 'Niger State hired hundreds of health workers in response to women's childbirth experiences' (White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria) <https://whiteribbonalliance.org/stories/niger-state-hired-hundreds-of-health-workers/ > accessed 26/06/2025.
[185] White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria, 'More than 35 health facilities in Niger State upgraded with improved water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities' (White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria) <https://whiteribbonalliance.org/stories/more-than-35-health-facilities-in-niger-state-upgraded-with-improved-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-facilities/> accessed 26/06/2025.
[186] Ibid.

In 2016, The World Bank and the Gates Foundation partnered with Niger State and two other states in Nigeria to establish a yearly 'Basic Health Care Provision Fund' of approximately N35 billion, to facilitate the creation of a National Health Insurance Scheme and a National Primary Health Care Development Agency regulating the 'purchase of drugs'.[187] However, the management of this fund raised concerns as it was only partially released by 2020, highlighting the state's lack of accountability caused by widespread local corruption, which complicates the tracking of the state's health budget.[188] The WRA Nigeria's campaign focused on three local governments: Agwara, Mariga, and Bosso.[189] It adopted a progressive approach to address upcoming challenges and find innovative solutions to improve government responsiveness, enhance public health services, and increase citizen monitoring of government actions.[190] This multi-pronged strategy aimed to increase the programme's sustainability and effectiveness. WRA Nigeria's campaign also centred on three main objectives: enhancing citizen engagement in health decision-making, obtaining public commitments from the State Ministry of Health for accountability processes, and implementing those processes.[191] WRA Nigeria contended that accomplishing these goals would result in better maternal and child health outcomes, concentrating on three essential activities: advocating to policymakers, organising town halls and community dialogues, and training citizen journalists.[192]

Similarly to the SEND Ghana example, this initiative started by enhancing the capacity of all stakeholders involved, acknowledging that, like citizen engagement, state support was crucial for the programme's successful implementation. The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria trained policymakers and citizens on accountability to clarify who was accountable, to whom they were accountable and what they were accountable for.[193] This part of the programme stressed policymakers' role in effectively relaying the 'knowledge of citizens' needs' to the state and the local service providers to gain more support and resources.[194] By clarifying the meaning of accountability in the programme, WRA

[187] Rachel Sullivan Robinson and Tariah Adams, 'Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 1, 7.
[188] Ibid 8.
[189] Ibid 4.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Rachel Sullivan Robinson, 'Setting the Stage for Increased Accountability: The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria Campaign to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Niger State' p 6 (Accountability Research Center, May 2019) Accountability Note Number 6 <https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccountabilityNote-6-Nigeria-WRA-web-May-22-2019.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid 10.
[194] Ibid.

Nigeria aimed to change the local government's perception of the term and increase state actors' cooperation. For instance, they changed 'citizen-led accountability' for 'citizen engagement', as state actors viewed the term 'accountability' as an 'aggressive' or 'offensive' financial term that would lead them to spend or allow citizens to micromanage public funds' spending, especially in corrupt environments.[195] WRA Nigeria also employed 'significant time and energy' before the programme's implementation to learn how to persuade local governments and gain the support of 'high-level individuals in the state'.[196]

Although this case study encountered challenges and is imperfect as a social accountability initiative, this thesis argues that it closely aligns with the three key features of complex systems: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness. The next section will explain how the case study demonstrated the promotion of self-organisation, by increasing citizens' ability to self-organise and diversifying civil actors' networks.

4.3.2.1.1. Self-organisation in Nigeria's White Ribbon Alliance's Initiative in Niger State

The WRA Nigeria's initiative in Niger state is pertinent to this thesis because it illustrates a successful strategy to stimulate public demand for enhanced maternal healthcare, while simultaneously holding the government accountable through advocacy, community involvement, and citizen empowerment. Complexity theory emphasises the need to understand the 'bottom-up' emergence of self-organising patterns produced by interactions between the agents of local systems.[197] Self-organisation occurs as an emergent process, enabling the system to sustain itself and exhibit a 'large degree of resilience' during transitional periods of high uncertainty.[198] In fact, as change and resilience cannot be forced from above, promoting self-organisation in complex systems is crucial to give actors the freedom to interact and receive feedback from other actors in their environment, thereby defining local solutions that are beneficial and more relevant

[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Graham Room, 'Complexity, power and policy' in Geyer Robert and Cairney Paul (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 27.
[198] Kristiaan P.W. Kok et al. 'Politics of complexity: Conceptualizing agency, power, and powering in the transitional dynamics of complex adaptive systems' 2021(50) Research Policy 1,3.

to their specific local circumstances.[199] This thesis contends that the WRA Nigeria's initiative increased civil actors' resilience by developing their self-organising abilities and diversifying their networks.

Before the campaign launched by WRA Nigeria, there was little citizen involvement in health-related decision-making in Niger State.[200] While ward development committees had been in place since 2000 to encourage community participation in health, they primarily served as instruments for political patronage rather than genuinely promoting citizen engagement.[201] This situation evolved as WRA Nigeria increased citizens' participation by mobilising local citizens and health care workers who recognised the importance of community participation in health, which provided a natural way to introduce the campaign.[202] This supports the idea of encouraging self-organisation by broadening citizens' networks to improve their ability to mobilise. For instance, the initiative supported the publication of citizen stories by using citizens themselves, as journalists, to write those stories and critically engage with the government's response. Although some stories were perceived as overly critical and removed by the government from online platforms, journalists continued to take risks in publishing stories that highlighted the mismanagement of the public health budget, as well as the poor conditions of health facilities.[203] Hence, the initiative reinforced citizen mobilisation and participation by promoting the self-organisation of citizen networks and supporting citizen-led activities aiming at disseminating actionable information for local communities, healthcare workers and political actors.

This example demonstrated how civil society organisations can adeptly self-organise to manage local uncertainties and engage both citizens and the government to promote greater accountability. Furthermore, it showed how civil society organisations can foster government commitment in a challenging political context and discover innovative methods to enhance citizens' capacity and educate them about their rights. Hence, this initiative not only boosted citizen participation and self-organisation, fostering greater

[199] Ramalingam Ben et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> p 52 accessed 26/06/2025.
[200] Ibid 9.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Rachel Sullivan Robinson, 'Setting the Stage for Increased Accountability: The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria Campaign to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Niger State' p 17 (Accountability Research Center, May 2019) Accountability Note Number 6 <https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccountabilityNote-6-Nigeria-WRA-web-May-22-2019.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

involvement that pressured public agencies, but also encouraged public actors to be more receptive to citizens' needs.

The next section explains how the initiative was able to increase openness at the local level, by improving actors' response to unpredictability and developing their awareness of the system's complexity.

4.3.2.1.2. Openness in Nigeria's White Ribbon Alliance's Initiative in Niger State

This example demonstrated how social accountability programmes can successfully reinforce openness in a domestic political system, by improving actors' responses to unpredictability and developing their awareness of the system's complexity. Openness in complex systems is necessary to increase self-organising patterns at the local level. This is because openness enables complex systems to maintain their dynamic structure and evolve based on the information from their environment and the outcomes of internal actors' interactions.[204] Viewing politics as a complex system requires us to understand that these systems are open to external conditions and internal dynamics, which necessitates a degree of flexibility in the implementation of development programmes, especially in challenging contexts. In addition, the process of promoting good governance requires increasing state openness to provide an adequate dissemination of public resources, serving people's 'basic human needs', which will open up opportunities for citizens to self-organise, thus promoting 'good civic governance'.[205] This was demonstrated in the WRA Nigeria's initiative in Niger State.

To highlight the importance of this initiative in fostering openness, it's essential to acknowledge that Niger state operates within a socio-cultural context shaped by religious conservatism, particularly following the adoption of Shari'a law in 2009, alongside strict bureaucratic practices in public administration.[206] Previous participatory efforts have demonstrated that the state's distinct religious identity does not inherently hinder government representatives' openness and cooperation with citizens and civil society

[204] Diana M. Austin, Lesley Ferkins, Jennie Swann, and Elizabeth Smythe, 'Being "nice": A complex activity among health professionals following a critical incident' 2019(37) Systems Research and Behavioural Science 199,200.
[205] Thomas G Weiss, 'Governance, good governance, and global governance: Conceptual and actual challenges'2000(21)Third World Quarterly 795,805.
[206] Kunnuji et al., 'Variable Implementation of Sexuality Education in Three Nigerian States' Studies in Family Planning (2017) 48(4) 307, 368.

organisations.[207] However, Niger State's participatory initiatives encounter obstacles due to dysfunctional and underfunded bureaucracies, which impede the execution of multi-sectoral programmes that depend on cooperation among diverse organisational structures and non-governmental entities.[208] This situation hampers the effectiveness of participatory programmes, as rigid bureaucracies restrict the flexibility and adaptability essential for addressing governance challenges.

In this case study, White Ribbon Nigeria successfully increased state openness to allocate a larger portion of the public budget toward implementing family planning initiatives, and recruiting skilled healthcare workers in public health facilities.[209] For instance, the 'What Women Want' Campaign and the 'Midwives Voices' Campaign initiated by WRA Nigeria resulted in annual budget increases of 33% in 2019 and 18% in 2020.[210] These campaigns reflect the thesis's understanding of openness in political systems by raising citizens' awareness of the system's complexity through their involvement in strategies to secure their rights, and interact constructively with government representatives. Before this initiative, only 5 per cent of citizens felt that the government adequately informed them about the allocation of public funds or its plans for enhancing local public services.[211]

This case study also aligns with this thesis' understanding of openness in terms of improving the political system's response to unpredictability. WRA Nigeria concentrated on training citizen committees and public officials to improve government responsiveness to citizens' needs. This training resulted in noticeable improvements in healthcare facilities after town hall meetings and reports from citizens journalists.[212] Furthermore, by advocating for and fostering a collaborative environment where citizens, healthcare providers, and local government representatives could discuss effective solutions to tackle local challenges, the initiative helped recruit 500 additional nurses and midwives to serve 274 local public health facilities in the state.[213]

---

[207] Ibid 362.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Nigeria Health Watch, 'Accessing Quality Maternal Health Care in Niger State: Women's Voices for Action' (Medium, April 5 2023) https://nigeriahealthwatch.medium.com/womens-voices-for-action-and-access-to-quality-maternal-health-care-in-niger-state-a-baseline-6ce2f46aefa Accessed 26/06/2025.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Rachel Sullivan Robinson, 'Setting the Stage for Increased Accountability: The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria Campaign to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Niger State' p 5 (Accountability Research Center, May 2019) Accountability Note Number 6 <https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccountabilityNote-6-Nigeria-WRA-web-May-22-2019.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.

However, this case study is an excellent example of how successful social accountability initiatives promote positive feedback loops within the local political system. As the next section will discuss, this example paved the way for productive discussions that identified issues in the healthcare sector, supporting the development and practical implementation of citizen-centred solutions. Additionally, it laid the groundwork for increased citizen-state engagement and a reduction in power asymmetries, ultimately leading to greater accountability from the local government.

4.3.2.2. Feedback Mechanisms in WRA Nigeria's Initiative

4.3.2.2.1. Increasing Citizen Involvement in Policy Making

The next section explains how the WRA Nigeria's initiative in Niger state promoted positive feedback mechanisms by increasing citizen involvement in policy making.

Central and local governments play an important role in increasing society's capacity to effect change in complex political systems. Actors' interconnectedness means that every decision can disproportionately impact the system from the local level, while also affecting actors within the network at various levels. The insights of complexity underscore the importance of recognising that the outcomes of policy interventions can be influenced by the political ecosystem in which they are implemented, regardless of their initial objectives.[214] Hence, governments are responsible for reinforcing the social contract by utilising a 'forward-looking' approach to mitigate the negative feedback loops that may arise from exercising power.[215] This entails that governments cannot be isolated from development programmes. Instead, governments must stay flexible to facilitate citizens' self-organisation and involvement in public decision-making. This is because innovative solutions in complex systems emerge from the behaviours of individual actors and the networks to which they belong. The diversity of the networks leads agents to develop 'emergent capabilities', which increases their ability to find more effective solutions to public challenges.[216]

[214] Graham Room, 'Complexity, power and policy' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 29.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Peter M. Allen, 'Evolution: complexity, uncertainty and innovation' (2014) 24(2) Journal of evolutionary economics 265, 267.

The White Ribbon Nigeria initiative successfully overcame some challenges related to the local government's lack of responsiveness, facilitating citizen engagement in decision-making. Initially reluctant to participate, Niger state's government officials believed that WRA Nigeria would promote an 'anti-government' campaign or support the political opposition.[217] This complicated initial discussions between WRA Nigeria and state actors, as the public officials did not have a 'prior model for structuring its relationship with them'.[218] This is because Niger State's government had previously worked with other non-governmental organisations which had a different approach than WRA Nigeria; therefore, they could not use previous experiences to anticipate and manipulate the programme. WRA Nigeria strengthened its relationship with state actors by building trust, securing the support of key political officials, regularly visiting state representatives, and patiently explaining the objectives of the social accountability intervention.[219] It also employed significant time and resources to gather the support of 'high-level individuals'.[220] Following the first phase, WRA Nigeria successfully mobilised health care service providers, traditional leaders, local citizens, and government representatives.

Furthermore, WRA Nigeria engaged citizens to identify potential challenges in implementing this social accountability initiative and understand their perspectives on accountability. Discussions led by citizens and individual research revealed that the public sector and state-owned media outlets primarily perceived accountability in the context of healthcare budgets and funding allocations.[221] As a result, the WRA Nigeria communications officer redefined citizen-led accountability as a way to formulate solutions, emphasising the essential role of public participation in policy development and implementation.[222] Discussions with policymakers emphasised that accountability encompasses more than just financial matters, indicating that a collaborative dialogue is essential to address maternal, newborn, and child health concerns.[223] These actions, combined with WRA Nigeria's well-connected status, gave this initiative an advantage,

[217] Rachel Sullivan Robinson and Tariah Adams, 'Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 2, 9.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid 10.
[221] Rachel Sullivan Robinson, 'Setting the Stage for Increased Accountability: The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria Campaign to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Niger State' p 12 (Accountability Research Center, May 2019) Accountability Note Number 6 <https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccountabilityNote-6-Nigeria-WRA-web-May-22-2019.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid.

as WRA Nigeria leveraged the relationships it had built to engage key individuals from public agencies and local governments who were initially hesitant about the campaign.[224]

The insights of complexity stress that policymaking occurs in an unpredictable political system, in which feedback loops can lead to the emergence of new policies that are more or less costly for society.[225] Positive feedback mechanisms can make policymaking less costly and more beneficial when they serve the greater good and include disadvantaged groups.[226] Negative feedback mechanisms increase the social costs of public policies and diminish their political benefits by exacerbating implementation challenges and neglecting the needs of certain social groups.[227] This is explained by the fact that an effective development strategy requires the inclusion of all groups, but especially disadvantaged populations, by reinforcing their ability to 'organise themselves to effect progressive social change'.[228] This can establish a 'social feedback mechanism' that enhances individuals' democratic political participation, thereby creating an evolving society that reflects 'changing human potentials'.[229] Individuals bring about change in the political system as they adapt individually, based on their experiences and environmental patterns.[230]

In addition, citizens' local engagement in decision-making can alter the 'architecture and the interaction patterns' in local governance by reinforcing their influence in the system, thereby increasing their proximity to 'institutional and procedural categories'.[231] Promoting the collaboration of demand and supply side actors can reinforce a 'spontaneous' coordination, characteristic of self-organising complex systems.[232] This means collaborative social accountability initiatives can lead actors with opposing interests to spontaneously work together in a defined setting, increasing 'trust and cooperation' among them and thus leading to productive 'feedback on different solutions'.[233] Furthermore, increasing actors' interactions at the local level can reinforce

[224] Ibid 10.
[225] Michael Givel, ''What's the big deal?': complexity versus traditional US policy approaches' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015) p 65.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Ken Cole, 'Globalization: understanding complexity' (2003) 3(4) Progress in Development Studies 323, 336
[229] Ibid.
[230] Elizabeth Eppel, 'Complexity thinking in public administration's theories-in-use' (2017) 19(6) Public Management Review 845, 848.
[231] Hendrik Wagenaar, 'Governance, Complexity, and Democratic Participation' (2007) 37(1) The American Review of Public Administration 17, 42.
[232] Ibid 43.
[233] Ibid.

positive feedback loops emerging from the progressive alignment of actors' 'interests and cognitions'.[234]

The programme aligned with these insights by diversifying the social groups involved in community dialogues, which increased citizen engagement and led to the development of inclusive and practical solutions to local challenges in the public sector. The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria organised community dialogues that involved diverse social groups. Three mechanisms of citizen engagement were used in this first phase of the programme's implementation: 'community dialogues, town halls, and citizen journalists'.[235] Community dialogues aimed to mobilise local communities without the presence of high-level government officials, while town halls facilitated discussions between citizens and government representatives. Various social groups, including youth leaders, women's groups, and teachers' associations, were involved in community dialogues to ensure representation across all social groups.[236] Citizens attended town halls and community dialogues in large numbers, as they sought to address government representatives directly.[237] Also, community dialogues helped identify common healthcare issues in communities, leading to the definition of precise demands and solutions relayed to public officials during town hall meetings. Public officials listened to the needs of the citizens and collaborated with them to define a 'feasible action plan'.[238]

Through the engagement of diverse social groups and the facilitation of proximity between citizens and government representatives, White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria could mobilise citizens and increase their involvement in public decision-making, but also improve the state's accountability in the health sector and the 'capacity of the ward health development committees'.[239] Meetings were organised with policymakers to address their concerns and emphasise the importance of collaboration with the state's strategic health plans. Actors involved in these meetings understood that the intervention aimed to improve service delivery in the healthcare system, which was in line with the state's objectives, not against it.[240] Town halls not only enhanced 'the accountability ecosystem' but also solidified local governments' dedication to enacting change in the health sector

[234] Ibid 41.
[235] Rachel Sullivan Robinson and Tariah Adams, 'Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 2, 11.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid.

in numerous cases.[241] This was the situation for the Chanchaga local government, which facilitated the distribution of new equipment that 'had been procured prior to the town hall, but was sitting unused in the state medical store', to 10 health care facilities.[242] Another town hall highlighted the shortage of qualified midwives in health facilities, prompting the state government to hire 100 more midwives as part of ongoing efforts to improve primary healthcare in the state.[243]

The programme's initial phase revealed that excessive emphasis had been placed on community dialogues and the facilitation of town halls without any substantial response from the government to citizens' plans. Hence, White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria emphasised institutionalising social accountability through the 'Basic Health Care Provision Fund Accountability Framework' in partnership with local non-governmental organisations.[244] This accountability framework defined the roles and duties of governmental and community-based stakeholders. It established practical tools for community engagement, initiated listening sessions led by community committees, and developed scorecards to be filled out by civil society organisations twice a year.[245] This framework also increased the 'accessibility and transparency' in allocating funding for the programme.[246]

This initiative showed that successful collaborative social accountability programmes rely on citizen engagement to strengthen positive feedback mechanisms. They do this by anticipating government challenges, involving diverse social groups to generate innovative solutions, bringing citizens closer to state actors, and organising citizens efficiently to make negotiations more effective. This streamlines local public decision-making by directing actors' efforts toward immediate local issues, resulting in a more direct approach to tackling challenges and delivering solutions that are more relevant to the community context.[247]

---

[241] Rachel Sullivan Robinson, 'Setting the Stage for Increased Accountability: The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria Campaign to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Niger State' p 15 (Accountability Research Center, May 2019) Accountability Note Number 6 <https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccountabilityNote-6-Nigeria-WRA-web-May-22-2019.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Rachel Sullivan Robinson and Tariah Adams, 'Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 2, 13.
[245] Ibid 14.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Hendrik Wagenaar, 'Governance, Complexity, and Democratic Participation' (2007) 37(1) The American Review of Public Administration 17, 30.

The next section highlights the programme's effectiveness in reducing power asymmetries through feedback mechanisms.

4.3.2.2.2. Reducing Power Asymmetries

The insights of complexity theory tell us that feedback mechanisms play a key role in reinforcing patterns within a system, whether positive or negative. Hence, feedback mechanisms can help increase or decrease power asymmetries within a system. Asymmetry in a complex system can be viewed as a 'status inequality', allowing some actors to have an advantage in terms of 'hierarchical positions, knowledge, or formal authority'.[248] Asymmetry can, therefore, 'demotivate' the less advantaged actors who do not have the means to be heard.[249] Power asymmetry can be seen as a negative feedback mechanism reinforcing dysfunctional behaviour, as actors continuously adopt conflicting positions when dealing with other groups they perceive as 'adversaries'.[250] Reducing power asymmetries is crucial, as it encourages more powerful actors to leverage their knowledge and resources for the benefit of the entire community. At the same time, it empowers and motivates disadvantaged groups to recognise the importance of their contributions.

Reducing power asymmetries in complex political systems involves strengthening the ability of actors with less capacity to be heard. In complex political systems, citizen participation in public decision-making can act as 'an intermediate and end citizenship outcome'.[251] Citizen involvement can lead to intermediate citizenship outcomes by enhancing citizens' knowledge and skills within social and political networks, enabling them to participate more effectively. It can also reinforce positive feedback mechanisms at the local level, further increasing opportunities for citizen involvement in decision-making.[252] While engaging in the decision-making process at the local level, citizens learn to deal with the 'complexity of policy issues' and get exposed to diverse opposing

[248] Dr Peter Massingham, Catherine Fritz-Kalish and Ian McAuley, 'Emergent Communities of Practice: A complexity theory lens' (2020) 2(1) Journal of Behavioural Economics and Social Systems 17, 26.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid 27.
[251] Amber Wichowsky and Donald P. Moynihan, 'Measuring How Administration Shapes Citizenship: A Policy Feedback Perspective on Performance Management' (2008) 68(5) Public Administration Review 908, 912.
[252] Ibid 913.

interests and opinions from the various actors involved.[253] This experience can reinforce their ability to critically assess political and social issues, enabling them to express their needs in ways that benefit the common interest. A collaborative approach that enables citizens to engage in public decision-making actively, can enhance positive feedback loops by improving their ability to manage conflicting interests, effectively articulate their positions, be open to differing opinions and arrive at a 'productive compromise'.[254] This was demonstrated in the programme.

The programme's second phase launched the Global Secretariat's 'What Women Want' Campaign to gather information about local women's reproductive and maternal health needs. White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria used citizen journalists in the state to conduct nationwide surveys and gather over '78000 women and girls' experiences about their access to healthcare.[255] These citizen journalists were trained in journalism skills, including writing compelling yet ethical citizen stories, contacting media outlets, and understanding how to engage policymakers and plan community dialogues. Thirty citizen journalists received training, all of whom had at least a secondary education and received no compensation.[256] More than half of them were women, and four had professional experience in journalism.[257] The training covered topics such as maternal health issues, writing human interest stories, using visuals to narrate stories, collaborating with the media, planning community meetings, accessing policymakers, and understanding ethical considerations in journalism.[258] Developing their journalism skills amplified citizens' voices by increasing the exposure of public health challenges for advocacy purposes, publishing the results of monitoring the performance of service providers, and celebrating 'examples of government responsiveness'.[259] Furthermore, WRA Nigeria played an active role in publishing the stories of citizen journalists on online platforms, aiming to

[253] Hendrik Wagenaar, 'Governance, Complexity, and Democratic Participation' (2007) 37(1) The American Review of Public Administration 17, 29.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Rachel Sullivan Robinson and Tariah Adams, 'Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 2, 13.
[256] Rachel Sullivan Robinson, 'Setting the Stage for Increased Accountability: The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria Campaign to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Niger State' p 16 (Accountability Research Center, May 2019) Accountability Note Number 6 <https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccountabilityNote-6-Nigeria-WRA-web-May-22-2019.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Rachel Sullivan Robinson and Tariah Adams, 'Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 2, 12.

prevent the political manipulation of these narratives in an environment where the media is 'largely state-owned, and does not operate from a tradition of critique'.[260]

Reducing power asymmetries in a complex political system requires ensuring the sustainability of negotiations and the solutions they yield. As negotiations occur in social accountability programmes, coalitions of local actors must be created to ensure the continuation of the partnerships. This refers to the creation of 'new self-resourced partnerships' representing common interests identified during negotiations, that will connect citizens to decision-makers, track the implementation of the solutions found, and stimulate actors' willingness to collaborate in the future.[261] This can refer to local community committees and civil society organisations partnering, even after the initiatives, to scale up the outcomes. These actors, in turn, play the role of strange attractors, reinforcing positive feedback mechanisms from the bottom up. This was demonstrated in the programme.

The impact of citizen journalists led to the emergence of 'super mobilisers' in communities.[262] These 'super mobilisers' actively advocated for change in their communities, mobilising citizens and conducting 'watchdog activities', like visiting citizens in various neighbourhoods to inquire about their experiences with maternal health.[263] This gave super mobilisers more in-depth knowledge about citizens' experiences and led them to speak up for their communities during town halls despite attempts by public officials to silence them.[264] Super-mobilisers were utilised as strange attractors to enhance positive feedback mechanisms, encouraging citizens' engagement and mobilisation in the political system. Consequently, the programme enhanced citizens' ability to advocate for their needs actively, encouraging their self-organisation to foster the development of skilled individuals, who further amplified citizens' voices and improved the flow of information. It also highlights the importance of self-organised citizenship in addressing issues that directly meet the community's needs and in developing solutions that will more effectively impact citizens' well-being and local

[260] Rachel Sullivan Robinson, 'Setting the Stage for Increased Accountability: The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria Campaign to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Niger State' p 16 (Accountability Research Center, May 2019) Accountability Note Number 6 <https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccountabilityNote-6-Nigeria-WRA-web-May-22-2019.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[261] Dr Peter Massingham, Catherine Fritz-Kalish and Ian McAuley, 'Emergent Communities of Practice: A complexity theory lens' (2020) 2(1) Journal of Behavioural Economics and Social Systems 17, 31.
[262] Rachel Sullivan Robinson and Tariah Adams, 'Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 2, 12.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid.

public service delivery. It is essential to note that some citizen journalists departed the area midway through the campaign, prompting WRA Nigeria to seek replacements. However, by the conclusion of the third year of the campaign, half of the remaining citizen journalists were still actively 'seeking and/or contributing stories'.[265]

On the other hand, a crucial step towards reducing power asymmetries in a complex political system is to enhance interactions among various actors and foster close relationships among group members as they discuss local issues. This approach, called 'exploration learning', facilitates negotiations as actors spend more time understanding their roles, differences, needs and limitations.[266] Exploration learning utilises the increased interactions among actors to define and accentuate common interests, as well as possible solutions that would collaboratively benefit citizens and governments.[267] Thus, this perspective uses proximity as a positive feedback mechanism, reinforcing patterns of negotiations and collaboration over time.[268] This approach requires the inclusion of multiple networks of actors, as new actors participating in the negotiations will 'expand the negotiation space', increase opportunities for common interests to be identified, minimise the time spent on negotiations, and make the problem-solving process faster and more adaptable.[269] This was demonstrated in the programme.

Local governments' reluctance to increase funding for maternal health has challenged the programme's implementation, as has the time required to engage all stakeholders through community dialogues, town hall meetings, citizen journalist groups, and community volunteering. White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria effectively navigated upcoming challenges by constantly readjusting its approach. The organisation successfully 'convinced the previously unwilling state government to engage with citizens'.[270] In addition, meetings among citizens were organised from the beginning of the programme to identify potential barriers to its implementation.[271] Moreover, WRA Nigeria took this opportunity to clarify the meaning of 'citizen-led accountability' and gather citizens' feedback as an important

[265] Rachel Sullivan Robinson, 'Setting the Stage for Increased Accountability: The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria Campaign to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Niger State' p 16 (Accountability Research Center, May 2019) Accountability Note Number 6 <https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccountabilityNote-6-Nigeria-WRA-web-May-22-2019.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[266] Dr Peter Massingham, Catherine Fritz-Kalish and Ian McAuley, 'Emergent Communities of Practice: A complexity theory lens' (2020) 2(1) Journal of Behavioural Economics and Social Systems 17, 27.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Rachel Sullivan Robinson and Tariah Adams, 'Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 2, 15.
[271] Ibid 11.

resource for formulating and implementing better policies in the state.[272] WRA Nigeria created a standardised reporting template that streamlined feedback collection following the initial three-year campaign.[273] Local communities utilised this template to report logistical challenges in health centres, including power shortages.[274] In response, the Niger State government addressed these issues and collaborated with ward health development committees to plan more effective local health projects.[275]

Challenges such as the need for various resources to implement the intervention, time, logistical limitations to citizen mobilisation, and engaging with 'numerous, complex systems' can be pointed out, highlighting the need for political and economic support to institutionalise social accountability.[276] For instance, local governments did not always extend their commitments to fund the programme's implementation or the activities of the ward development committees.[277] The bureaucratic framework of Niger state also posed a challenge to effective collaboration among government ministries and civil society organisations.[278] Still, this example highlights the importance of adapting to unpredictable circumstances in complex systems. It shows that even in socially, economically and politically challenging contexts, it is still possible to increase citizen engagement to demand accountability from state actors to a certain extent. It emphasises the need to carry out development projects in phases, build trust, and provide relevant information about objectives while clarifying misunderstandings.

Additionally, the programme demonstrated that it is essential to operate at multiple levels to gain access to and support from suppliers both nationally and locally. This thesis argues that the activism experience offered by this intervention served as a positive feedback loop, enhancing citizen involvement in public decision-making and improving their interaction with public service providers and local government officials. These achievements created pathways for change to occur in the system from the local level. Therefore, the success of this programme aligned with complexity theory by emphasising

[272] Ibid.
[273] Rachel Sullivan Robinson, 'Setting the Stage for Increased Accountability: The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria Campaign to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Niger State' p 10 (Accountability Research Center, May 2019) Accountability Note Number 6 <https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccountabilityNote-6-Nigeria-WRA-web-May-22-2019.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[274] Ibid 11.
[275] Ibid.
[276]Rachel Sullivan Robinson and Tariah Adams, 'Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 2, 16.
[277] Ibid 15.
[278] Kunnuji et al., 'Variable Implementation of Sexuality Education in Three Nigerian States' Studies in Family Planning (2017) 48(4) 307, 370.

the importance of positive feedback mechanisms, which are cultivated through increased citizen engagement in policy-making and reduced power imbalances.

However, the effectiveness of positive feedback mechanisms could not be achieved without the government's openness, which facilitates the dissemination of relevant information. The next section will explain how the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project aligned with this insight of complexity theory.

4.4. Openness in Social Accountability

4.4.1. Openness in Complex Systems

Natural systems are open systems. All living systems can be characterised by their ability to constantly 'feed on externally supplied nutrients' while eliminating decayed products and exchanging various 'mechanical, electro-magnetic [and] chemical' signals with their environment.[279] Therefore, the ability of natural systems to self-organise and adapt to unpredictable events relies on both internal and external factors. [280]This also means their openness makes them sensitive and resilient to internal or external perturbations.[281] Natural systems evolve as they encounter unforeseen challenges from their external environment, and as their agents interact to pursue various objectives.[282] For instance, as cells self-organise to adapt to upcoming challenges, feedback mechanisms act as regulators, enabling agents to exchange information with their external environment.[283] This enables the system to access and implement various solutions based on new information shared by the external environment.[284] Thus, complex natural systems continuously optimise their response to unpredictable circumstances due to their openness, which allows for the flow of new information and resources between the system and its external environment.[285]

[279] Natalia B. Janson, 'Non-linear dynamics of biological systems' (2012) 53(2) Contemporary Physics 137, 137.
[280] Emilian Kavalski, World Politics at the Edge of Chaos : Reflections on Complexity and Global Life, (State University of New York Press, 2015) p 59.
[281] Mariano Bizzarri, Alessandro Palombo and Alessandra Cucina, 'Theoretical aspects of Systems Biology' (2013) 112(1-2) Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology 33, 36.
[282] Sathish Periyasamy et al., 'The bottom–up approach to defining life: deciphering the functional organization of biological cells via multi-objective representation of biological complexity from molecules to cells' (2013) 4 Frontiers of Physiology 1, 1.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Ibid 2.
[285] Ibid 2.

Complex social systems are open systems. Due to their high number of agents and interactions, they exhibit nonlinear dynamics influenced by both external and internal factors. Social systems differ from natural systems because human beings 'develop individual projects and desires'.[286] Agents are biased by their belief systems, which influence their perception of their environment. Therefore, they are more or less restricted by their access to information and resources, which leads them to follow different trajectories.[287] Additionally, actors operate autonomously because there is no central authority that can completely control their behaviour at the micro level. While social norms and institutions establish macro-level rules, these rules can be altered, partially disregarded, or interpreted differently by individuals.[288]

The behaviour of social actors is influenced by their long-term expectations and predictions regarding the desires of other actors.[289] This state between 'desired and actual behaviour', paired with environmental challenges, constrains the evolution of social systems.[290] Despite establishing routines and institutions to establish regular patterns within social systems, there is a need to constantly 'innovate' due to unforeseen changes occurring in the environment.[291] Although it is impossible to make exact predictions about the evolution of complex systems, using their previous patterns to explain their trajectory is possible.[292] Unstable periods can lead social systems towards multiple trajectories, encouraging constant self-organisation and openness to stay flexible, rather than following the traditional view of attempting to remove all uncertainty.[293] Hence, effectively managing complex social systems requires understanding that their openness leads to the emergence of various local factors that accentuate the interconnectedness of actors.[294]

Complex political systems are open systems. In complex political systems, actors' behaviours are restrained by the external environment, i.e. other systems, and the

[286] Michael Reed and David L. Harvey, 'The New Science and the Old: Complexity and Realism in the Social Sciences' (1992) 22(4) Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 353, 370.
[287] Volker Schneider, 'Governance and Complexity' in David Levi-Faur (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Governance* (Oxford University Press, 2012) p 136.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Michael Reed and David L. Harvey, 'The New Science and the Old: Complexity and Realism in the Social Sciences' (1992) 22(4) Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 353, 370.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Peter M. Allen, Liz Varga and Mark Strathern, 'The evolutionary complexity of social and economic systems: The inevitability of uncertainty and surprise' (2010) 12 Risk management 9, 29.
[292] Michael Reed and David L. Harvey, 'The New Science and the Old: Complexity and Realism in the Social Sciences' (1992) 22(4) Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 353, 363.
[293] Stanley A. Feder, 'Forecasting For Policy Making In The Post–Cold War Period' (2002) 5 Annual Review of Political Science 111,117.
[294] Nico Stehr and Reiner Grundmann, 'The authority of complexity' (2001) 52(2) British Journal of Sociology 313, 318.

emerging outcomes of their interactions.[295] This is because complex political systems are systems in which 'energy fluctuates'.[296] The political system's openness is demonstrated by agents' ability to hold multiple roles across various networks, both within and outside the system, which may overlap in terms of 'mandates, functions, and memberships'.[297] This openness facilitates the sharing of resources across various clusters or networks, such as funding, expertise, or joint programmes.[298] It is important to understand the limitations of predictions in social systems, and instead, stay flexible and learn from past decisions to find innovative solutions and ensure a more 'sustainable future'.[299]

Agents' ability to adapt to uncertainty requires being open to their external environment for better anticipation and flexibility. This is because as actors coevolve in the social fabric, they are 'embedded into political, economic and cultural rule systems', which helps disseminate various resources across networks within the social system.[300] The unpredictability caused by nonlinear dynamics in complex political systems and their actors' interdependence prevents the production of 'demonstrable conclusions' or linear explanations of upcoming events.[301] This is explained by the fact that attempts to predict the system's behaviour might not be accurate, as the system's current behaviour is only valid as long as its structure is maintained, and this structure can change suddenly due to the system's openness to external influence.[302] Linear approaches can lead governments to make 'unidirectional, mechanistic and clocklike' decisions, following which public policies are 'often' administered through merged perspectives.[303] Therefore, dealing with complex political systems requires taking a step back and watching 'the process unfold' to understand the state of a system.[304] Thus, political institutions must be more flexible to adapt to unforeseen changes and efficiently contain political issues.[305]

[295] Volker Schneider, 'Governance and Complexity' in David Levi-Faur (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Governance* (Oxford University Press, 2012) 129, 140.
[296] Victoria Chick, 'On Open Systems' (2004) 24(1) Brazilian Journal of Political Economy 3, 8.
[297] Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Oliver Westerwinter, 'The global governance complexity cube: Varieties of institutional complexity in global governance' (2022) 17 The Review of International Organizations 233, 241.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Peter M. Allen, 'Coherence, chaos and evolution' (1994) 26(6) Futures 583, 597
[300] Volker Schneider, 'Governance and Complexity' in David Levi-Faur (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Governance* (Oxford University Press, 2012) 129, 140.
[301] Victoria Chick, 'On Open Systems' (2004) 24(1) Brazilian Journal of Political Economy 3, 15.
[302] Peter M. Allen, 'Coherence, chaos and evolution' (1994) 26(6) Futures 583, 583.
[303] Michael Givel, ''What's the big deal?': complexity versus traditional US policy approaches' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015) 65, 70.
[304] Emilian Kavalski, World Politics at the Edge of Chaos : Reflections on Complexity and Global Life, (State University of New York Press, 2015) p 67.
[305] Adrian Little, 'Complexity and real politics' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Elgar, 2015) p 37.

The Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP) exemplifies efforts to promote openness within the domestic political system. It demonstrated how the system can better respond to unpredictability and enhanced local actors' understanding of its complexity. The emphasis on openness is directly related to the programme's focus on offering citizens trustworthy information and fostering dialogue among them, local public service providers, and the local government. However, the next section will also highlight how this example promoted self-organisation and positive feedback mechanisms.

4.4.2. Analysing The Community Scorecards For Health Services Project (CSHSP) through the lens of Complexity Theory

4.4.2.1. Background

Initiated by the World Bank and the Cambodian Ministry of Interior under the banner of the Demand for Good Governance (DFGG) project, the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP) aimed to improve the performance of 20 healthcare centres in Takeo's Kirivong operational district in Cambodia.[306] Kirivong Operational District is one of the 69 health districts in Cambodia, functioning as the lowest tier in the health system and providing healthcare services to a population exceeding 200,000 individuals.[307] Despite the government being the leading healthcare provider, only 22% of treatments were administered by public health facilities, which demonstrated low service quality.[308] In contrast, the largely informal and unregulated private sector, with questionable quality, provided 48% of total treatments; while 21% of patients turned to non-medical sources, such as traditional healers, religious practitioners, and drug vendors.[309]

The Demand for Good Governance (DFGG) project aimed to enhance good governance practices in Cambodia by strengthening public institutions, fostering partnerships

[306] Vong Mun, 'What Makes Local Authorities Responsive? Lessons from Two Social Accountability Projects in Cambodia' (2017) 21(3) Cambodia Development Review 8, 8.
[307] Bart Jacobs and Neil Price, 'Improving access for the poorest to public sector health services: insights from Kirivong Operational Health District in Cambodia' (2006) 21 (1) Health Policy and Planning 27, 28.
[308] Bruno Meessen et al, 'Health and social protection: experiences from Cambodia, China and Lao PDR' (2008) 23 Studies in Health Services Organisation and Policy 1, 197.
[309] Ibid.

between governments and civil society organisations, and promoting decentralisation.[310] This was preceded by the good governance agenda, which emphasised accountability in public administration to create an 'enabling environment for private sector-led growth'.[311] The emphasis on the private sector stemmed from the World Bank's belief that it would be more effective in ensuring 'quality, productivity, market-style incentives, and performance management'.[312] Nevertheless, the good governance agenda has shifted from a 'narrow state-centric approach to development' to a 'broader multistakeholder approach' driven by the World Bank and its development partners.[313] This change reflects the increasing significance of citizen involvement in development programmes within the Bank's governance strategy.[314] As a result, new development programmes in Cambodia increasingly stressed the importance of civil society organisations in ensuring government accountability by 'promoting and monitoring transparency' in the battle against corruption.[315]

The DFGG project included four key elements: promoting accountability from state institutions, educating citizens by sharing 'technical policy information', enhancing 'the mediation of demand', strengthening 'feedback avenues and mechanisms for closer interactions between citizens and officials', ensuring public officials respond effectively to improve services, and monitoring policy implementation through citizens' informed engagement.[316] It also emphasised collaborative social accountability instead of confrontational tactics to demand accountability from the public sector.[317] This aimed to create a platform for open negotiations to identify relevant solutions to local public service delivery challenges that would benefit civil society organisations and the government.[318] In addition, a significant focus of the DFGG project was on social sectors such as healthcare and education, as they were perceived to be 'less politically contentious' and more likely to generate a positive response from service providers and

[310] World Bank, 'Project Performance Assessment Report: Cambodia—Demand for Good Governance Project' (World Bank, June 26 2017) p viii.< https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/987321500652281850/pdf/116799-PPAR-P101156-PUBLIC.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[311] David J. Norman, 'From shouting to counting: civil society and good governance reform in Cambodia' (2014) 27 (2) The Pacific Review 241, 243.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Ibid 245.
[316] Ibid 253.
[317] Vong Mun, 'What Makes Local Authorities Responsive? Lessons from Two Social Accountability Projects in Cambodia' (2017) 21(3) Cambodia Development Review 8, 8.
[318] Ibid.

state actors.[319] The context of Cambodia is interesting because of its weak 'formal systems of accountability', which limited the responsiveness of its political institutions.[320]

The significance of decentralisation in this project lies in the necessity for central government support in implementing social accountability initiatives at the local level, as local governments often face limitations due to a lack of experience, technical and institutional capacity, or funding.[321] The Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP) aimed to improve the quality of health services based on citizen feedback. Feedback from citizens revealed critical issues, including poor staff attitudes, inadequate hygiene and sanitation practices, ineffective prescribing methods, irregular working hours, and overall deficiencies in the local health centre's performance.[322] This section will focus on analysing the implementation of the project in the Chi Khmar Health Centre, as the programme covered several healthcare centres, with different contexts and experiences. The Chi Khmar health centre, which covered three communes with nearly 160,000 inhabitants at the time, demonstrated positive results in improving the performance of public health service providers.[323]

While the programme faced several challenges during its implementation, this thesis argues that it serves as a strong example of a social accountability initiative that embodies the three characteristics of a complex system: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness.

4.4.2.1.1. Self-organisation in the CSHSP

This case study relates to this thesis, demonstrating a successful collaborative social accountability programme that reinforced the self-organisation of civil actors and diversified their networks.

The self-organised nature of complex systems is expressed through their 'order and regularities', power dynamics, and individual actors, as well as success in 'negotiating or

[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid.
[321] World Bank, 'Project Performance Assessment Report: Cambodia—Demand for Good Governance Project' (World Bank, June 26 2017) p viii.< https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/987321500652281850/pdf/116799-PPAR-P101156-PUBLIC.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.
[322] Vong Mun, 'What Makes Local Authorities Responsive? Lessons from Two Social Accountability Projects in Cambodia' (2017) 21(3) Cambodia Development Review 8, 9.
[323] Dr Eng Netra, 'Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia' (2015) 19 Cambodia Development Review 1, 3.

imposing that order on others'.[324] In a complex adaptive system, every actor's action and its outcomes are influenced by the networks in which they operate.[325] Applied to the political system, this means that networks can be a 'source of power for actors' as information is distributed through those networks.[326] Also, self-organisation is to be understood as individuals' active participation, but also in terms of a top-down support for 'process of communication practices' and 'self-organising emergent behaviour'.[327] This allows for the creation of a space for 'emergent communication', in which actors can freely express themselves and establish the initial conditions for democratic practices to emerge in a meaningful way.[328] This example promoted the creation of various networks among civil actors, which facilitated citizens' organisation and engagement, and put more pressure on local governments and public service providers to respond to citizens' needs.

The four elements of the DFGG project in Cambodia included strengthening feedback avenues for closer interactions between civil actors and political actors, as well as monitoring political actors' responsiveness through citizen mobilisation.[329] This required promoting broader engagement of non-state actors in Cambodia to create stronger demand for good governance.[330] The Community Scorecards for Health Services Project effectively strengthened the efforts of local civil society groups by involving independent and reliable non-governmental organisations to carry out targeted activities that built closer ties with citizens, thereby improving their readiness to get involved. In fact, the programme took place in a setting where democracy was relatively weak, necessitating capacity building for both local activists and public officials.[331] Therefore, the initiative necessitated the engagement of proactive civil society organisations and community members, alongside various funding sources, primarily from the World Bank's donors and non-governmental organisations.[332] Members of citizen committees in Kirivong

[324] Graham Room, 'Complexity, power and policy' in Robert Geyer and Paul Cairney (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015) p28.
[325] Şuay Nilhan Acikalin 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' (2022) 27 (2) Perceptions 177, 188.
[326] Ibid.
[327] Renée Houston, 'Participation as Chaos: Lessons from the Principles of Complexity Theory for Democracy' (2000) 57 (4) World Futures 315 , 334.
[328] Ibid 334.
[329] David J. Norman, 'From shouting to counting: civil society and good governance reform in Cambodia' 27(2) 2014, The Pacific Review 241, 253.
[330]World Bank, 'Project Appraisal Document' Report No: 42366-KH P 4 (World Bank, October 23 2008) p 4 <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/854641468216605838/pdf/423660PAD0P1011LY10IDA1R20081029711.pdf> Accesed 26/06/2025.
[331] Ibid 1.
[332] Bruno Meessen et al, 'Health and social protection: experiences from Cambodia, China and Lao PDR' (2008) 23 Studies in Health Services Organisation and Policy 1, 370.

belonged to a broader organisation with strong community networks aimed at sharing information and gathering food and funds for the local communities.[333] In addition, a Community Participation Advisory Committee was established, comprising monks, village chiefs, and District chiefs, to guide local governments on cultural appropriateness during discussions with citizens and encourage citizens' active participation in health issues.[334] This aligns with the diversification of citizens' networks and the facilitation of civil actors' self-organisation.

It is also important to note that the first phase of the initiative aimed to strengthen community participation through the involvement of Buddhist and Muslim religious groups, along with local government representatives, to constitute several Health Centre Management Committees. The establishment of Village Health Support Groups has boosted citizens' participation in the monthly community outreach programmes, which public service providers conducted to disseminate information on 'antenatal care, contraceptive provision, postnatal care, and vaccination'.[335] The Health centre Management Committees and the Village Health Support Groups were supported by 'an advisory board consisting of the Deputy Governors in charge of Health and the District Chief Monk', to establish health equity funds that would fund poorer citizens' healthcare.[336] Additionally, to foster an 'enabling context' for community monitoring in Kirivong, a Conflict Resolution Committee was established to clarify rules, regulations, programme objectives, and the formation of a 'monitoring team'.[337] Training was provided by the local civil society, international advisers and the Ministry of Health to optimise capacity building for technical issues.[338] Hence, the initiative showcased the diversification of networks among citizens and non-state actors to establish citizen-centred solutions to the local health centres' challenges.

The next section will explain how the initiative promoted positive feedback mechanisms through the increased involvement of citizens in decision making and the reduction of power asymmetries.

[333] Bart Jacobs and Neil Price, 'Community participation in externally funded health projects: lessons from Cambodia' (2003)18 (4) Health and Policy Planning 399, 408.
[334] Ibid 402.
[335] Bart Jacobs et al., 'From public to private and back again: sustaining a high service-delivery level during transition of management authority: a Cambodia case study' (2010) 25 (3) Health Policy and Planning 197, 199.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid 200.
[338] Ibid.

4.4.2.1.2. Feedback mechanisms in the CSHSP

This case study pertains to this thesis, demonstrating a successful collaborative social accountability programme that strongly reinforced positive feedback mechanisms at the local level.

In complex systems, one agent's behaviour can influence another agent's behaviour, some networks of agents, or the entire system due to the interdependence of actors.[339] Thus, local behaviour in a system can generate 'global characteristics' that could either amplify the behaviour of local agents to create systemic change through positive feedback mechanisms, or restrict the output of their actions to stabilise the current state of the system through negative feedback mechanisms.[340] For social actors to have a genuine influence on the system in terms of creating sustainable, citizen-centred change, positive feedback mechanisms must be promoted to increase their political participation and enable individuals to realise their social potential and self-organising abilities.[341] This thesis contends that the promotion of positive feedback mechanisms in social accountability programmes is exacerbated by a higher level of collaboration among local actors which enables them to learn from each others' experiences, thus distributing intelligence; increasing actors' ability to anticipate or respond to systemic problems more effectively; and create innovative solutions through community engagement and information sharing to reduce power asymmetries. This was demonstrated in the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project.

The Demand for Good Governance Project in Cambodia aimed to tackle governance issues, i.e low accountability from the government and 'endemic corruption', to achieve more economic growth while prioritising social development.[342] To pursue this objective, the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project emphasised capacity building at the local level, empowering local activists and public officials to collaborate and define citizen-centred solutions to local public health service challenges. The activities in the Kirivong Operational Health District focused on strengthening team building,

[339] Philip Anderson, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' 1999(10) Organization Science 216, 219.
[340] Ibid 225.
[341] Ken Cole, 'Globalization: Understanding Complexity' (2003) 3 (4) Progress in Development Studies 323, 336.
[342] David J. Norman, 'From shouting to counting: civil society and good governance reform in Cambodia' 27(2) 2014, The Pacific Review 241, 253.

communication, and organisational skills for both civil and political actors.[343] Additionally, this initiative involved an extended preparation period to inform government agencies and civil society organisations about social accountability, as will be detailed in the next section. The prolonged preparation phase enabled an increased awareness of the actors involved in the relevance of social accountability programmes and the role each actor plays in ensuring the programme's success. For instance, following progressive decentralisation waves that began in 2002, local civil society organisations received training on social accountability, including the skills to lead and implement social accountability programmes tailored to the needs of local citizens.[344] This aligns with the understanding of promoting positive feedback mechanisms in this thesis, as it showcases a reduction in power asymmetries between social actors and political actors.

In addition, partnerships with nongovernmental and grassroots organisations facilitated the participation of underprivileged communities, allowing for stronger collaborations with rural public healthcare providers.[345] The collaborative approach improved the healthcare system by increasing the accountability of local public healthcare providers, enhancing the capacity of the nonprofit sector, empowering civil society organisations, and creating a more interconnected network of social actors.[346] Therefore, the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project demonstrated how social accountability initiatives can effectively identify potential challenges early and stay adaptable to tackle unexpected problems, like the government's limited economic capacity to sustain the programme implementation. For example, faced with government funding constraints, civil society organisations adopted a non-confrontational, collaborative approach to proactively identify potential issues and suggest alternative solutions within a political environment where 'democracy activities are still limited'.[347] This aligns with the promotion of feedback mechanisms, promoting a higher involvement of citizens and civil actors in defining citizen-centred solutions to public service challenges.

Additionally, by increasing citizen involvement and reducing power imbalances, the initiative strengthened positive feedback loops that led to more substantial changes in the

[343] Bart Jacobs et al., 'From public to private and back again: sustaining a high service-delivery level during transition of management authority: a Cambodia case study' Health and Policy Planning (2010) 25(3) 197, 200.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Bruno Meessen et al., 'Can public hospitals be pro-poor? The health equity fund experience in Cambodia' in the authors (eds) Health and Social Protection: Experiences from Cambodia, China and Lao (2008) 23 Studies in Health Services Organisation and Policy 469,486.
[346] Ibid.
[347] Ibid 7.

behaviours of communities and public service providers, as well as in citizens' relationships with healthcare providers. Independent evaluations of the initiative identified a 'behaviour change' extending beyond the programme, indicating that citizens became more aware and supportive of immunisation and assisted births, with coverage rising from 44% to 66%.[348] In the past, women were less likely to deliver at public health facilities because of concerns about irregular staff and random closures.[349] The initiative fostered improved cooperation between civil actors and public service providers, leading to increased community trust starting from the second year of the programme, primarily through community monitoring of healthcare service performance.[350]

However, this case study specifically illustrates how social accountability initiatives promote openness in the political system by enhancing actors' responses to unpredictability and increasing their awareness of the system's complexity, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.4.2.2. Openness in Cambodia's CSHSP

4.4.2.2.1. Improving the Political System's Response to Unpredictability

This case study pertains to this thesis, demonstrating a successful collaborative social accountability programme that improved actors' ability to manage unpredictability in the political system.

The insights from complexity theory emphasise the importance of government openness in enabling citizens to express their concerns and creating a safe space for constructive discussions between citizens and local authorities.[351] In contexts where political actors try to keep the system 'closed' by limiting access to information and minimising the collaboration among agents at various levels, the environment cannot change, and shared information and resources 'quickly fade and die'.[352] Representative systems in which

[348] Bart Jacobs et al., 'From public to private and back again: sustaining a high service-delivery level during transition of management authority: a Cambodia case study' Health and Policy Planning (2010) 25(3) 197, 205.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Sophia Opiyo et al., 'Role of Feedback Mechanism as a Public Participation Pillar in Enhancing Performance of Devolved Governance Systems in Kenya' (2017) 5(1) International Journal of Innovative Development & Policy Studies 1, 7.
[352] Hendrik Wagenaar, 'Governance, Complexity, and Democratic Participation' (2007) 37(1) The American Review of Public Administration 17, 43.

information is strictly controlled at the top, often struggle to adapt to the unpredictability of the political system. Their rigidity leads to overly centralised decision-making, which hinders the effective fulfilment of citizens' needs, even when elected officials represent them.[353] Allowing citizens to access public information is crucial for fostering the system's self-organisation from the bottom up. Therefore, information must be shared through 'open communication channels' that allow for the emergence of 'clear feedback mechanisms'.[354] This was demonstrated in the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP) at Chi Khmar Health Centre.

Government openness facilitated citizen engagement and helped anticipate significant challenges before and during the programme's implementation. Due to the contextual limitations of low government and civil society capacity, the project began by increasing trust between the supply and demand sides, and educating public institutions on the meaning and mechanisms of social accountability. To achieve this, the Programme to Enhance Capacity in Social Accountability (PECSA) was launched five years before the implementation of the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP), providing public institutions with sufficient time to become familiar with the concept and mechanisms of social accountability, particularly community scorecards.[355] This initiative enabled the government to prepare ahead of the programme and be more willing to 'listen and act' in future interventions.[356]

Training district-level public service providers and government representatives has been essential in enhancing the skills of all stakeholders involved in the programme, including the Kirivong District staff and local communities.[357] This training aimed to enhance team building, communication, interpersonal skills, leadership, and participation among district members.[358] It also emphasised promoting community engagement, self-organisation, and financial management among civil actors.[359] Additionally, it facilitated better anticipation of technical issues that arose during the programme's implementation.[360] Furthermore, the World Bank expanded on an earlier initiative known

[353] Ibid.
[354] José Nederhand, Victor Bekkers & William Voorberg, 'Self-Organization and the Role of Government: How and why does self-organization evolve in the shadow of hierarchy?' (2016)18 Public Management Review 1063, 1066.
[355] Vong Mun, 'What Makes Local Authorities Responsive? Lessons from Two Social Accountability Projects in Cambodia' (2017) 21(3)Cambodia Development Review 8, 9.
[356] Ibid.
[357] Bart Jacobs et al., 'From public to private and back again: sustaining a high service-delivery level during transition of management authority: a Cambodia case study' Health and Policy Planning (2010) 25(3) 197, 200.
[358] Ibid.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Ibid.

as the Project to Enhance Capacity in Social Accountability. This project, which occurred over two years prior to the CSHSP in Cambodia, highlighted the significance of offering 'direct support to non-state actors' and strengthening their capabilities.[361] Therefore, the CSHSP began with a thorough assessment of civil society during the programme's preparation phase, aimed at understanding the elements that affect the involvement of civil society organisations in Cambodia, as well as the dynamics of the state-citizen relationship.

Facilitating citizens' access to information would mean promoting opportunities and channels for citizens to access actionable information related to the performance of public service providers. The free flow of information within a complex system can lead to the emergence of a positive change within this system, as 'it is through information that change occurs'.[362] In the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP), a significant emphasis was put on providing 'administrative support for the chosen policy objectives' of the local government by ensuring that information flows were consistent and relevant to challenges in the health sector.[363] A 'standardised list of indicators' developed by the government was used as a template to advocate for policy reforms and demand more accountability from the local government.[364] The initiative's findings demonstrated the link between service providers' responsiveness and their capacity to resolve the specific problems arising from negotiations with citizens and non-state actors. Also, the Chi Khmar Health Centre could effectively address citizens' feedback and take responsibility for issues identified, such as 'poor behaviour or absenteeism', which could be resolved without significant financial input.[365] For instance, it could address citizen demands in scorecards, such as improving healthcare equipment, without the immediate involvement of the central government.[366]

Government openness led to significant citizen-centred improvements at the Chi Khmar Health Centre. Community scorecards used as a mechanism in this intervention facilitated the expression of citizens' voices and the discovery of gaps in service delivery while

[361] Independent Evaluation Group, 'Project Performance Assessment Report: Cambodia Demand for Good Governance' Report No.: 116799 (World Bank, June 26 2017) p 20 < https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/sites/default/files/Data/reports/ppar-cambodiagoodgovernance-07212017.pdf > Accessed 26/06/2025.
[362] Peter W. Brodbeck, 'Complexity theory and organization procedure design' (2002) 8(4) Business Process Management Journal 377, 396.
[363] Vong Mun, 'What Makes Local Authorities Responsive? Lessons from Two Social Accountability Projects in Cambodia' (2017) 21(3)Cambodia Development Review 8, 9.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Ibid 11.
[366] Dr Eng Netra, 'Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia' (2015) 19 Cambodia Development Review 1, 4.

defining 'corrective measures' to solve issues.[367] For instance, a pump supplying water to toilets and a disposal facility for medical waste were installed. Moreover, specific staff-related problems and challenges related to the working environment at the health centre were addressed to create a more 'user-friendly service', thus improving the diagnostic process and ensuring all services were provided within defined working hours.[368]

The next section will discuss how the case study helped develop the actors' awareness of the system's complexity during the programme.

4.4.2.2.2. Developing Actors' Awareness of the Political System's Complexity

Complex systems are still treated as simple or merely complicated systems, which is problematic. This can be demonstrated by the higher focus on traditional arrangements or the tools related to the long route to accountability, which explains domestic governance challenges. Projects with large-scale implementation aiming to solve development issues are still implemented without the considerable knowledge, skills and contextual resources to ensure their success.[369] Managing complexity requires observing how information acquisition and selection are processed, leading to the recognition of key patterns that emerge over time through the accumulation of experience. This can be called developing a 'situational awareness' of the complex nature of governance.[370] Hence, developing situational awareness of the complex nature of the political system requires an understanding that openness, adaptability, and flexibility are not intended to prevent planning, but rather to make the system more resilient to uncertainty. This thesis argues that social accountability programmes designed with this optic can serve the benefits of communities more sustainably, as they will be implemented in ways that combine flexibility and management rather than dogmatic beliefs.[371]

The notion of time in complex systems is also essential to increase situational awareness of complexity. This is because 'the higher the complexity of a system, the longer it will

[367] Ibid.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Retno Wulan Damayanti, Budi Hartono and Andi Rahadiyan Wijaya, 'Clarifying megaproject complexity in developing countries: A literature review and conceptual study' (2021) 13 International Journal of Engineering Business Management 1, 1.
[370] Christopher Koliba, Lasse Gerrits, Mary Lee Rhodes and Jack W. Meek, Complexity theory and systems analysis in Christopher Ansell, and Jacob Torfing, (eds) *Handbook on Theories of Governance* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016) 364, 375.
[371] Adam Day & Charles T. Hunt, 'A Perturbed Peace: Applying Complexity Theory to UN Peacekeeping' (2022) 29(1) International Peacekeeping 1, 6.

take for concrete expectations to develop' across the systems.[372] This was demonstrated in the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP). State preparedness was important in explaining its openness to implement the programme more effectively. The five-year preparation of actors before the programme's implementation reduced the uncertainty around state actors' responsiveness by giving them enough time to 'familiarise with the concept and practice, and anticipate its ramifications'.[373] In addition, the choice of non-governmental organisations played a crucial role in facilitating citizens' mobilisation and supporting state actors in the programme's implementation. Development non-governmental organisations were chosen over those simply focusing on advocacy to enhance the government's 'ongoing poverty reduction effort', due to their practical experience in implementing local development schemes.[374]

Buddhism for Health was chosen as a nongovernmental organisation to make the programme more 'impartial and trustworthy' for local populations.[375] The five-year preparation period provided sufficient time for the relationship between public officials and public service providers in the health sector to strengthen and lay the groundwork for new approaches.[376] Hence, the programme facilitated the emergence of 'strong, reciprocal relationships' between actors in the political system, facilitating the flow of resources and experiences, which led to the development of innovative solutions benefiting local communities.[377] Additionally, despite the challenging political climate, nonstate actors successfully facilitated productive interactions with government officials, overcoming the hurdles posed by political turmoil and increasing state limitations.[378]

The Community Scorecards for Health Services Project experienced various local challenges, such as the difficulty in mobilising villagers to attend local meetings, and the lack of interest of some social groups who felt forced to comply with an 'authoritative invitation and fulfil a social routine'.[379] The World Bank noted mixed results regarding

[372] Andrea Minto and Edoardo Trincanato, 'The Policy and Regulatory Engagement with Corruption: Insights from Complexity Theory' (2022) 13(1) European Journal of Risk Regulation 21, 44.
[373] Vong Mun, 'Responsiveness without Accountability: The Case of Social Accountability in Cambodia' (ICoDA, 10 November 2015) < https://repository.unair.ac.id/97685/7/11A_DEVELOPMENT%20SOFT%20SKILL_OK.pdf > p324 accessed 26/06/2025.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Vong Mun, 'What Makes Local Authorities Responsive? Lessons from Two Social Accountability Projects in Cambodia' (2017) 21(3) Cambodia Development Review 8, 9.
[376] Vong Mun, 'Responsiveness without Accountability: The Case of Social Accountability in Cambodia' (ICoDA, 10 November 2015) < https://repository.unair.ac.id/97685/7/11A_DEVELOPMENT%20SOFT%20SKILL_OK.pdf > p 324 accessed 26/06/2025.
[377] Ibid.
[378] Independent Evaluation Group, 'Project Performance Assessment Report: Cambodia Demand for Good Governance' Report No.: 116799 (World Bank, June 26 2017) p 23 < https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/sites/default/files/Data/reports/ppar-cambodiagoodgovernance-07212017.pdf > Accessed 26/06/2025.
[379] Dr Eng Netra, 'Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia' (2015) 19 Cambodia Development Review 1,4.

the goal of increasing the government's commitment due to the limited resources dedicated to the programme.[380] Nonetheless, state institutions revealed their willingness to actively engage non-state actors and institutionalise social accountability by integrating the Social Accountability Framework into the National Strategic Development Plan.[381] As a result, the World Bank considered the government's performance during the initiative to be satisfactory.[382] This assessment also stems from the government's consistent commitment to the project, even during a period of political and economic challenge.[383] For example, the government took proactive steps to address various issues during the programme, including a 'five-month delay in project effectiveness' and the withdrawal of two implementing agencies due to financial concerns.[384] The World Bank recognised that 'no single project can address all the challenges for promoting Demand for Governance, therefore, 'long-term efforts will be required'.[385]

Still, this example highlights the importance of openness in the political system for adapting to local challenges effectively. The government provided a space for citizens to voice their needs, utilising various social accountability tools to disseminate public information on service delivery gaps and gather citizens' feedback. Citizen involvement and government responsiveness significantly enhanced local services to better meet citizens' needs. This example shows that, contrary to the common belief that limited capacity hampers social accountability programmes, some success is possible by planning ahead challenges, while staying flexible to navigate unforeseen issues. By optimising the system's response to upcoming challenges through fostering trust among the participants, enhancing the supply side's understanding of its role, and facilitating the exchange of information among all involved actors before the programme begins, greater effectiveness can be attained. Moreover, developing actors' awareness of the system's complexity can enhance the system's flexibility and resilience, enabling the creation of more sustainable solutions.

[380] Independent Evaluation Group, 'Project Performance Assessment Report: Cambodia Demand for Good Governance' Report No.: 116799 (World Bank, June 26 2017) p 21 < https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/sites/default/files/Data/reports/ppar-cambodiagoodgovernance-07212017.pdf > Accessed 26/06/2025.
[381] Ibid.
[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Ibid.
[385] World Bank, 'Project Appraisal Document' Report No: 42366-KH P 4 (World Bank, October 23 2008) p 3 <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/854641468216605838/pdf/423660PAD0P1011LY10IDA1R20081029711.pdf> Accesed 26/06/2025.

Conclusion

Social accountability encourages active citizen participation, engagement in decision-making, and improved access to public information, acting as a shorter route to demand greater accountability from governments and local public service providers. The mixed results on the World Bank's practice of social accountability, highlight its dependence on economic, social and political factors, making it difficult to track the programmes' success. This thesis aimed to determine when social accountability programmes are most effective within the political system, highlighting that the existing literature lacks a comprehensive understanding of the system's complexity. Complexity theory was selected as a theoretical framework, because it allows us to go beyond the traditional linear cause-and-effect view of the political system. This traditional approach to understanding the functioning of political systems often overlooks the key characteristics of these systems that hinder the possibility of accurate predictions. Viewing the political system through the lens of complexity theory entails departing from traditional linear perspectives, which rely on cause-and-effect reasoning, in unpredictable contexts with nonlinear dynamics. This also means that Complexity theory views natural, social and political systems as complex systems with key characteristics: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms and openness.

This chapter assessed the implementation and outcomes of three social accountability programmes: Send Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme, the White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria's Initiative in Niger State, and the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP) in Cambodia, to determine whether their success aligned with the insights of complexity theory. The chapter illustrated that recognising the complex nature of domestic politics can significantly enhance the success of social accountability programmes, as evidenced by the case studies. It emphasised that even in the face of social, economic, and political challenges, often cited in the literature as barriers to effective social accountability, some programmes have successfully navigated some of the complexities of local political environments. These programmes have crafted innovative strategies and exhibited remarkable flexibility, thereby substantially increasing their prospects for success. SEND Ghana's social accountability initiative specifically demonstrated the possibility of increasing citizen self-organisation by empowering citizens to self-mobilise and diversifying citizen networks. White Ribbon

Alliance Nigeria's initiative strongly reinforced positive feedback mechanisms by promoting citizen-centred policy-making and reducing power asymmetries to increase citizen engagement. In addition, the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP) in Cambodia highlighted the importance of promoting government openness to optimise the political system's response to unpredictability, as well as increasing actors' awareness of the system's complexity to encourage collaboration and innovation, rather than following linear solutions to address local public service challenges. The analysis of the case studies showed that each case study aligned with the three key features of the complex political system, supporting their success on multiple levels. However, this alignment does not imply that the programmes fully succeeded in fostering sustainable changes in citizens' participation or in enhancing the responsiveness of public authorities. However, they remain credible examples showing that development programmes, when better structured around self-organisation, positive feedback loops, and openness, could produce more significant and impactful results.

CONCLUSION

As a citizen-led approach to demand accountability, social accountability promotes a collaborative relationship between the supply and demand sides of public service delivery. Following the failure of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), social accountability was popularised by the World Bank as an alternative to traditional state-centred strategies aimed at reinforcing political institutions. This new approach emerged from the challenge of aligning economic growth with human development in developing countries. The Bank attributed this challenge to governments' lack of accountability vis-à-vis their citizens, particularly the most marginalised. Many developing countries supported by the Bank have experienced rapid economic growth; however, this progress has not significantly improved the quality of life for their populations. Initially, the Bank avoided incorporating political factors into its financial aid projects to maintain neutrality. However, beginning in the 1980s, the Bank's perspective on governance evolved, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable development that extends beyond mere economic growth. As outlined in various World Development Reports, the endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals and discussions on improving accountability in domestic governance prompted the World Bank to adopt and implement social accountability programmes. These initiatives aim to strengthen active citizen participation, enhance involvement in public decision-making, and improve access to public information. Social accountability programmes seek to improve local public services across various sectors, employing a diagonal, collaborative approach that combines top-down support with bottom-up participation for greater success.

The existing literature on the implementation of social accountability highlights that these programmes are context-dependent. Social, political, and economic circumstances can lead to mixed results. When implemented in various political contexts, social accountability programmes have shown positive outcomes in improving the quality of local public services and empowering local populations. However, these programmes are often constrained by various local factors, which have led the literature to present a more pessimistic viewpoint on their overall effectiveness. Many social accountability programmes were challenging to trace over time, making it hard to determine their tangible impact. The overall negative view of this practice suggests that it would be impossible for the World Bank to create a template for successful programmes. This

thesis examined the factors that contribute to the success of some social accountability programs over others within the domestic political system.

Disagreeing with the negative reading of the literature, this thesis highlighted the need for a deeper understanding of the political system to comprehend why some programs are more successful despite contextual disparities. The thesis emphasised the significance of understanding the political system through the lens of complexity theory. This perspective challenges the traditional cause-and-effect reasoning, supporting the fact that the context-dependent nature of social accountability renders it inherently ineffective within the political system. The thesis hypothesised that the more successful social accountability programmes align with the understanding and acknowledgement of three specific features of the complex political system: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms and openness. Just like natural and other social systems, the political system is an open system with a large number of actors who self-organise in ways that cannot be accurately predicted and who use feedback mechanisms to coevolve and stabilise the system without falling into anarchy. These three fundamental features enhance the resilience and adaptability of those systems.

This thesis utilised complexity theory to enhance the World Bank's approach to social accountability, addressing a significant gap in the current literature that overlooks the intricate dynamics of political systems. Investigating this gap is crucial for understanding how social accountability programmes can succeed more within domestic political contexts, by aligning them with the three features of complex systems mentioned. This is the thesis' original contribution to knowledge. The study found that: Successful social accountability initiatives promote citizens' self-organisation for effective participation, ensure positive feedback mechanisms to increase citizen engagement, and support governments' openness to making the system more flexible and resilient to instability. Based on these findings, we can glean more comprehensive insights into the factors that facilitate the success of social accountability programmes in domestic political systems, allowing the World Bank to formulate a template for effective social accountability programmes. This will help the programmes better assist populations by managing uncertainties and contextual constraints more effectively.

This thesis was divided into five chapters.

Chapter 0, the Introduction, set out the purpose of this thesis, placing it within its academic context and outlining its methodology. This chapter was essential as it explained the theoretical framework, research design, methodology, and the limitations faced by the researcher. The first section introduced the context of the thesis, emphasising the Bank's social accountability while clarifying the research objectives, including the research question and the central hypothesis. This provided a clear understanding of the thesis' contribution to knowledge and its claim to originality. The second section detailed the methodology, emphasising the applied philosophy approach that defines the thesis' epistemological and ontological stance. It began by discussing the theoretical framework based on complexity theory, specifying the three features of complex systems examined: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness. The next part of the chapter described the research design, focusing on the rationale for selecting case studies and the methodology used to choose the three specific examples included in the thesis. The third part highlighted the primary methodology adopted by the thesis: document analysis. It also addressed the limitations of the chosen methodology, and how the author attempted to mitigate these issues. Finally, the last section summarised the methodological framework of the thesis within its broader context.

Chapter 1 introduced social accountability as perceived by the World Bank, which is the main actor that popularised this approach in governance. While shedding light on the meaning of social accountability and its implementation, this chapter provided a general description of the World Bank, its approach to governance, and how it ultimately led to the creation of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA). The chapter highlighted some important critiques related to the evolution of the Bank's perspective on governance, introduced social accountability actors and explained in the World Development Reports. This part of the chapter described some mechanisms of social accountability programmes used for citizen participation, citizen feedback and citizen access to information. The last section of the chapter described the key themes identified in social accountability programmes: citizen participation, citizen engagement in decision-making and citizen access to information, as well as examples illustrating these themes.

To provide a holistic analysis of social accountability programmes, chapter 2 was dedicated to a literature review assessing the effectiveness of the World Bank's practice of social accountability. The chapter highlighted the factors that make the programmes

effective, grouping them into social, economic and political factors. The literature review explained that social accountability programmes are context-dependent, and received mixed results due to social, economic and political circumstances in each country. These insights led the researcher to draw some significant lessons from the literature: the pessimistic view on social accountability programmes due to their context-dependence, and the discrepancies in the definition of 'success' of these programmes. To address these gaps in the literature, the thesis argued that it is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the domestic system and its dynamics from a holistic or macro-level perspective, rather than analysing isolated cases. This led the researcher to propose the use of complexity theory as an approach to better understand the dynamics of complex systems such as the political system. The literature review of complexity and aid highlighted the characteristics of the linear thinking prevalent among international organisations in this field. It also exposed the limitations of linear thinking in development aid, the relevance of complexity theory in this field, as well as the benefits of viewing development aid initiatives as operating within complex systems with unique features, which were described more extensively in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 introduced complexity theory, its evolution in the literature and its fundamental mechanisms applied to biological, social and political systems. While defining the political system as a complex system, complexity theory does not agree with the fact that we are doomed to reside in an anarchic world that we cannot control, and neither does it agree with attempts to perfectly predict behaviours in a political system whose internal dynamics and interdependence with other systems, make it volatile. Complexity theory recognises the interdependence of systems, which increases the complexity of their behaviour and challenges traditional cause-and-effect thinking in politics that seeks perfect solutions to unpredictable issues. The first part of this chapter gave an overview of the background of complexity theory and its evolution from natural sciences to social sciences, starting with a section on autopoiesis, as it represents a major theory that opposes complexity theory. Then, the chapter analysed the features of complex systems, focusing on three critical features: self-organisation, feedback mechanisms, and openness. These three features effectively highlight the dynamics of a complex system and encompass the essential characteristics that make complex systems resilient.

The fifth chapter assessed the implementation and outcomes of three social accountability programmes: The Send Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme, the White Ribbon

Alliance Nigeria's Initiative in Niger State and the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project (CSHSP) in Cambodia, to find out whether their success aligned with the insights of complexity theory. These examples experienced different contextual issues, typically described in the literature as obstacles to success. The sources selected to support the analysis of the case studies were chosen based on whether they provided an adequate interpretation of the results, thorough assessments, and a cohesive analysis backed by reliable data. The chapter summarised the conclusions of chapters 1 and 2, highlighting the purpose of social accountability as understood by the World Bank and the limitations to its effectiveness found within the literature. The second part of the chapter applied the insights of complexity theory to the three examples mentioned, starting with a summary of each feature of the complex political system. The chapter provided background on the three examples and analysed whether their outcomes aligned with the three features of complexity theory. Although each case study demonstrated an alignment with the three features of the complex system to some degree, they each had one particular feature that was most prominent throughout the implementation of the programme. SEND Ghana's initiative reinforced citizens' self-organisation by facilitating their mobilisation and diversifying their networks. White Ribbon Nigeria's initiative reinforced positive feedback mechanisms by involving citizens in policy-making and reducing power asymmetries at the local and national levels. Additionally, the Community Scorecards for Health Services Project increased government openness to optimise local actors' responses to unpredictability and develop actors' awareness of the complexity of the political system.

Although the selected examples were imperfect, this thesis argues that their alignment with a deeper understanding of political systems makes them valuable in demonstrating the effectiveness of social accountability programmes. The thesis showed that social accountability programmes do not need to yield immediate or perfect results; instead, they should enhance long-term positive feedback mechanisms within the political system. These positive feedback mechanisms could subsequently foster citizen participation, increase engagement in decision-making, and improve access to information throughout the entire political system over time. The time and budget constraints of the programmes necessitate that they are designed to extend their impact beyond their conclusion, instilling hope in citizens to create tangible change in their countries. International organisations, such as the World Bank, could effectively make social accountability a

fundamental requirement for funding in developing nations, basing their approach on the insights of complexity theory to adapt their programmes to local realities. This approach would enhance the effectiveness of the programmes and bolster citizens' and civil society's efforts to demand greater accountability from their governments. A key recommendation for future research is to identify sustainable programme indicators that can comprehensively monitor the outcomes of social accountability mechanisms, using insights from isolated contexts to recognise patterns and develop innovative global strategies based on lessons learned.

Bibliography

BOOKS

Açıkalın Şuay Nilhan and Artun Erbil Can , 'Chapter 7 The Concept of Self-Organized Criticality: The Case Study of the Arab Uprising' in Erçetin Şefika Şule and Potas Nihan (eds) *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2017, Explorations of Chaos and Complexity Theory* (Springer Nature, 2017)

Anderson Colin, 'Understanding accountability in practice: Obligations, scrutiny, and consequences' in the Author (ed) Development Policy Review (John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2023)

Andres Matthew and Shah Anwar, Citizen-Centred Governance: A New Approach To Public Sector Reform in Shah Anwar (ed) *Bringing Civility in Governance* (World Bank, 2003)

Barrat Alain, Barthélemy Marc and Vespignani Alessandro, Dynamical Processes on Complex Networks (Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Bentley Alexander and Maschner Herbert D. G., 'Complexity Theory' in Bentley R. Alexander, Maschner Herbert D. G. and Chippendale Christopher (eds) *Handbook of Archaeological Theories* (Altamira Press, 2007)

Boräng Frida and Grimes Marcia, 'Social Accountability and Quality of Government: Effectiveness and Recursive Effects', in Bågenholm Andreas, Bauhr Monika, Grimes Marcia and Rothstein Bo (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government* (OUP, 2021)

Brooke-Smith Robin and Fullan Michael G., 'Old Paradigm, New Paradigm' in Robin Brooke-Smith (ed) *Leading Learners, Leading Schools* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2003)

Cairney Paul and Geyer Robert , 'Introduction: A New Direction In Policymaking Theory and Practice?' in the Authors (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015)

Camargo Claudia Baez and Jacobs Eelco, 'Social Accountability and its Conceptual Challenges', in the Authors (eds) Accountable Governance for Development Setting an Agenda Beyond 2015 (Institute of Governance Studies and ANSA-SAR, 2013)

Colander David and Kupers Roland, Complexity and the Art of Public Policy: Solving Society's Problems from the Bottom Up (Princeton University Press, 2014)

Dias Jose and Tomé Tassiana, 'Inverted State and Citizens' Roles in the Mozambican Health Sector' in Nelson Erica, Bloom Gerald and Shankland Alex (eds) *Accountability for Health Equity: Galvanising a Movement for Universal Health Coverage* (IDS Bulletin, 2018)

Dittbrenner Heather and The World Bank, Results and Performance of the World Bank Group 2012 (World Bank Publications, 2013)

Gallagher Julia, 'Chopping the world into bits: Africa, the World Bank, and the good governance norm' in Aradau Claudia and Welch David (eds) *International Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2014)

Garud Raghu and Karnoe Peter, Path Dependence and Creation (Psychology Press, 2001)

Gigler Björn-Sören and Bailur Savita, Closing the Feedback Loop: Can Technology Bridge the Accountability Gap (World Bank, 2014)

Givel Michael, 'What's the big deal?': complexity versus traditional US policy approaches' in Geyer Robert and Cairney Paul (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edwrad Elgar, 2015)

Glennie Jonathan, The Trouble with Aid: Why Less Could Mean More for Africa (1st Edition Zed Books, 2008)

Gupta Deepak, Corporate Social Accountability: Disclosures and Practices (1st edition Mittal Publications, 1995)

Halloran Brendan and Stephenson Patrick, 'Chapter 4: Smallholder farmers, food security and COVID-19 in Ghana: Civil society navigating fiscal governance and service delivery during crisis' in Nannette Abrahams et al (eds) *Shrinking or Opening? Civic Space in Africa during COVID-19* (GiZ, 2022)

Hertz Jane C., 'Social Accountability in Cross-Sectoral Service Delivery: the Kinerja Public Service Delivery Program in Indonesia' in Wetterberg Anna , Brinkerhoff Derick W. and HertzJana C. (eds) *Governance and Service Delivery: Practical Applications of Social Accountability* (RTI Press, 2016)

Holla Alaka, Koziol Margaret and Srinivasan Santhosh, Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in human development sectors (World Bank Publications, 2011)

Holland John H., Complexity: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford University Press, 2014)

Hunt Charles T., 'Complexity theory' in Professor Sir Cooper Cary L. (ed) Wiley Encyclopaedia of Management (John Wiley & Sons, 2015)

Jha Anil B. Deolalikar Shikha and Quising Pilipinas F., Governance in Developing Asia: Public Service Delivery and Empowerment (The Asian Development Bank And Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015)

Johnson Neil, Simply Complexity: A Clear Guide to Complexity Theory (Oneworld Publications, 2009)

Kauffman Stuart, 'Foreword: Statable and Non–prestatable Fitness Landscapes' in Richter Hendrik and Andries P. (eds), *Recent Advances in the Theory and Application of Fitness Landscapes* (Springer, 2014)

Kavalski Emilian, World Politics at the Edge of Chaos: Reflections on Complexity and Global Life (State University of New York Press, 2015)

Khan Qaiser M., Faguet Jean-Paul , Gaukler Christopher , and Mekasha Wendmsyamregne , Improving Basic Services for the Bottom Forty Percent: Lessons from Ethiopia (World Bank Publications, 2014)

Kherigi Intissar and Chirchi Tasnim, 'Social Accountability in Tunisia: Processes of Learning in Civic Innovation Between 2011 and 2021' in Vloeberghs Ward and Bergh Sylvia I. (eds.) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2024)

Koliba Christopher, Gerrits Lasse, Rhodes Mary Lee and Meek Jack W., Complexity theory and systems analysis in Ansell Christopher and Torfing Jacob (eds*) Handbook on Theories of Governance* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016)

Little Adrian, 'Complexity and real politics' in Geyer Robert and Cairney Paul (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015)

Mansuri Ghazala and Rao Vijayendra, Localizing Development: Does Participation Work? (1st Edition World Bank Publications, 2012)

Marion Russ, The Edge of Organization: Chaos and Complexity Theories of Formal Social Systems (SAGE, 1999)

Mitchell Melanie, Complexity: A Guided Tour (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Morçöl Göktuğ, A Complexity Theory for Public Policy (Taylor & Francis Group, 2012)

Moyo Dambisa, Dead Aid: Why Aid is not working and how there is a Better Way for Africa (1st Edition Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009)

Murray Jamie, Webb Thomas E. and Wheatley Steven, 'Encountering Law's complexity' in the Authors (eds) *Complexity Theory and Law: Mapping and emergent jurisprudence'* (1st Edition Routledge, 2018)

Otto-Sano Hans, Social Accountability in the World Bank: Does it overlap with Human Rights? in Haglund Ladawn and Stryker Robin (eds), *Closing the Rights Gap: From Human Rights to Social Transformation* (University of California Press, 2015)

Ramalingam Ben, Aid on the edge of chaos: Rethinking international cooperation in a complex world (Oxford University Press, 2013)

Rihani Samir, Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice (Zed Books, 2002)

Ringold Dena, Holla Alaka, Koziol Margaret and Srinivasan Santhosh, Citizens and Service Delivery: Assessing the Use of Social Accountability Approaches in the Human Development Sector (The World Bank, 2012)

Room Graham, 'Complexity, power and policy' in Geyer Robert and Cairney Paul (eds) *Handbook on Complexity and Public Policy* (Edward Elgar, 2015)

Schneider Volker, 'Governance and Complexity' in David Levi-Faur (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Governance* (Oxford University Press, 2012)

Simons Helen, Case study Research in Practice (SAGE, 2009)

Tokody Dániel et al., 'Complex, Resilient and Smart Systems' in Flammini Francesco (ed) *Resilience of Cyber-Physical Systems* (Springer, 2019)

Van Meerkerk Ingmar, 'Top-down versus bottom-up pathways to collaboration between governments and citizens: reflecting on different participation traps' in Kekez Anka, Howlett Michael and Ramesh M. (eds.) *Collaboration and Public Service Delivery: Promise and Pitfalls* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019)

Vloeberghs Ward and Bergh Sylvia I. , 'Conclusion: Social Accountability Initiatives as Sites of Relational Power' in the Authors (eds) *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon* (EADI Global Development Series, 2024)

Waddington Hugh et al., 'Citizen engagement in public services in low-and middle-income countries: A mixed-methods systematic review of participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability (PITA) initiatives' in the Authors (eds) *Campbell Systematic Reviews* (John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2019)

Webb E. Thomas, 'Asylum and Complexity: The Vulnerable Identity of Law as a Complex System' in Murray Jamie, Webb E. Thomas and Wheatley Steven (eds) *Complexity Theory and Law* (1st Edition Routledge, 2018)

Wheatley Steven, The Idea of International Human Rights Law (Oxford University Press, 2019)

Wight Colin, 'Theorizing International Relations Emergence, Organized Complexity, and Integrative Pluralism' in Kavalski Emilian (ed) *World Politics at the Edge of Chaos* (State University of New York Press, 2015)

World Bank Group, World Bank Group A to Z (World Bank Publications, 2014)

World Bank, A Guide to the World Bank (3rd Edition World Bank Publications, 2011)

World Bank, The Effectiveness of World Bank Support for Community-based and -driven Development (World Bank, 2005)

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Abbas Muhammad Hamza and Ahmed Vaqar, 'Challenges to Social Accountability and Service Delivery in Pakistan' (2016) 46 (4) Social Change 560

Abuga Malkia M., Tenambergen Wanja and Njoroge Kezia, 'Strengthening Social Accountability Process in Community Health Systems: Exploring the Role of Community Actors in Africa and South Asia: Systematic Review' (2022) 12 (4) International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 409

Accard Philippe, 'Criticality: How Changes Preserve Stability in Self-Organizing Systems' (2019) 40 (11) Organization Studies 1613

Acikalin Şuay Nilhan, 'Rethinking Actor and Order with Complexity Theory: A Novel Approach to Diplomacy' (2022) 27 (2) Perceptions 177

Alawattage Chandana and Azure John De-Clerk, 'Behind the World Bank's ringing declarations of "social accountability": Ghana's public financial management reform' (2021) 78 Critical Perspectives on Accounting 1

Allen Peter M., 'Coherence, Chaos and Evolution' (1994) 26(6) Futures 583

Allen Peter M., 'Evolution: Complexity, Uncertainty and Innovation' (2014) 24 (2) Journal of Evolutionary Economics 265

Allen Peter M., Varga Liz and Strathern Mark, 'The Evolutionary Complexity of Social and Economic Systems: The Inevitability of Uncertainty and Surprise' (2010) 12 Risk Management 9

Alves Mário Aquino, 'Social Accountability as an Innovative Frame in Civic Action: The Case of Rede Nossa São Paulo' (2014) 25 (3) Voluntas 818

Anderson Philip, 'Complexity Theory and Organization Science' (1999) 10 (3) Organization Science 216

Ashraf Tariq, 'Empowering People Through Information: A Case Study of India's Right to Information Act' (2008) 40 (3) International Information & Library Review 148

Asomah Joseph Yaw et al., 'What Influences the Propensity to Report Corruption to Relevant State Authorities? Evidence From Ghana' (2024) 00 Journal of Asian and African Studies 1

Austin Diana M., Ferkins Lesley, Jennie Swann and Elizabeth Smythe, 'Being "nice": A complex activity among health professionals following a critical incident' (2019) 37 (2) Systems Research and Behavioural Science 199 .

Babajanian Babken, 'Promoting empowerment? The World Bank's Village Investment Project in Kyrgyzstan' (2015) 34 (4) Central Asian Survey 499

Bizzarri Mariano, Palombo Alessandro and Cucina Alessandra, 'Theoretical Aspects of Systems Biology' (2013) 112 (1-2) Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology 33

Boonstra Beitske and Boelens Luuk, 'Self-organization in urban development: towards a new perspective on spatial planning' (2011) 4 (2) Urban Research & Practice 99

Braman Sandra, 'The Autopoietic State: Communication and Democratic Potential in the Net' (1994) 45 (6) Journal of the American Society for Information Science 358

Brinkerhoff Derick W. and Wetterbeg Anna, 'Gauging the Effects of Social Accountability on Services, Governance and Citizen Empowerment' (2015) 76 (2) Public Administration Review 274

Bristow Gillian and Healy Adrian, 'Building Resilient Regions: Complex Adaptive Systems and the Role of Policy Intervention' (2014) 72 Raumforsch Raumordn 93

Brodbeck Peter W., 'Complexity Theory and Organization Procedure Design' (2002) 8 (4) Business Process Management Journal 377

Brummel Lars, 'Social Accountability Between Consensus and Confrontation: Developing a Theoretical Framework for Social Accountability Relationships of Public Sector Organizations' (2021) 53 (7) Sage Journals 1046

Burnes Bernard, 'Complexity theories and organizational change' (2005) 7 (2) International Journal of Management Reviews 73

Bustamante-Ubilla Miguel and Arenas-Torres Felipe, 'Epistemological Foundations of Complexity Theory' (2022) 14 (20) Sustainability 1

Cairney Paul and Geyer Robert, 'A Critical Discussion of Complexity Theory: How Does "Complexity Thinking" Improve Our Understanding of Politics and Policymaking?' (2017) 3 (2) Complexity, Governance & Networks 1

Chapura Mitch, 'Scale, Causality, Complexity and Emergence: Rethinking Scale's Ontological Significance' (2009) 34 (4) Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 462

Chettiparamb Angelique, 'Autopoietic interaction systems: micro-dynamics of participation and its limits' (2020) 25 (4) International Planning Studies 427

Chick Victoria, 'On Open Systems' (2004) 24 (1) Brazilian Journal of Political Economy 3

Chinen Mark, 'Complexity Theory and the Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of State Responsibility' (2014) 25 (3) The European Journal of International Law 703

Cinquin Olivier and Demongeot Jacques, 'Roles of Positive and Negative Feedback in Biological Systems' (2002) 325 Comptes Rendus Biologies 1085

Clarke Matthew and Missingham Bruce, ‘‘Guest Editors’ Introduction: Active Citizenship and Social Accountability’ (2009) 19 (8) Development in Practice 955

Cole Blaise J., ‘Evolution of Self-Organized Systems’ (2002) 202 (3) The Biological Bulletin 256

Cole Ken, ‘Globalization: Understanding Complexity’ (2003) 3 (4) Progress in Development Studies 323

Corning Peter A., ‘The Re-Emergence of “Emergence”: A Venerable Concept in Search of a Theory’ (2002) 7 (6) Complexity 18

Damayanti Retno Wulan, Hartono Budi and Wijaya Andi Rahadiyan, ‘Clarifying Megaproject Complexity in Developing Countries: A Literature Review and Conceptual Study’ (2021) 13 International Journal of Engineering Business Management 1

Dams Dennis, Gerth Rob and Grumberg Orna, ‘Abstract Interpretation of Reactive Systems’ (1997) 19 (2) ACM Transactions on Programming Languages and Systems 254

Danhoundo Georges, Nasiri Khalidha and Wiktorowicz Mary E., ‘Improving Social Accountability Processes in the Health Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review’ (2018) 18 BMC Public Health 1

Day Adam and Hunt Charles T., ‘A Perturbed Peace: Applying Complexity Theory to UN Peacekeeping’ (2022) 29 (1) International Peacekeeping 1

Dekker Sidney et al., ‘The Complexity of Failure: Implications of Complexity Theory for Safety Investigations’ (2011) 49 (6) Safety Science 939

Devarajan Shantayanan and Reinikka Ritva, ‘Making Services Work for Poor People’ (2004) 13(1) Journal of African Economies 142

Dhaktode Nitin and Kumar Ashwani, ‘Social Accountability in MGNREGA: Institutionalised Social Audit in United Andhra Pradesh of India’ (2020) 2 (1) International Journal of Governance and Public Policy Analysis 122

Dhungana Nimesh, ‘Doing Civil Society-Driven Social Accountability in a Disaster Context: Evidence from Post-Earthquake Nepal’ (2020) 8 (4) The Politics of Disaster Governance 395

Dias Jose and Tomé Tassiana, ‘Inverted State and Citizens’ Roles in the Mozambican Health Sector’ in Erica Nelson, Gerald Bloom and Alex Shankland (eds) *Accountability for Health Equity: Galvanising a Movement for Universal Health Coverage* (2018) 49 (2) IDS Bulletin 35

Donald Kate and Way Sally-Anne, ‘Accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals: A Lost Opportunity?’ (2016) 30 (2) Ethics and International Affairs 201

Dr Massingham Peter, Catherine Fritz-Kalish and Ian McAuley, ‘Emergent Communities of Practice: A complexity theory lens’ (2020) 2 (1) Journal of Behavioural Economics and Social Systems 17

Dr Netra Eng, ‘Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia’ (2015) 19 Cambodia Development Review 1

Duit Andreas and Galaz Victor, ‘Governance and Complexity—Emerging Issues for Governance Theory’ (2008) 21 (3) Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions 311 Edelenbos Jurian, Van Meerkerk Ingmar and Schenk Todd, ‘The Evolution of Community Self-Organization in Interaction With Government Institutions: Cross-Case Insights From Three Countries’ (2018) 48 (1) American Review of Public Administration 52

Eppel Elizabeth, ‘Complexity thinking in public administration’s theories-in-use’ (2016) 19 (6) Public Management Review 1

Falisse Jean-Benoit and Nkengurutse Hugues, 'Citizens Committees and Local Elites: Elite Capture, Captured Elites, and Absent Elites in Health Facility Committees' (2022) 34 The European Journal of Development Research 1662

Feruglio Francesca and Nisbett Nicholas, 'The challenges of institutionalizing community-level social accountability mechanisms for health and nutrition: a qualitative study in Odisha, India' (2018) 18 BMC Health Services Research 1

Fox Jonathan A., 'Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?' (2015) 72 World Development 346

Fuchs Christian, Hofkirchner Wolfgang and Klauninger Bert, 'The Dialectic of Bottom-up and Top-down Emergence in Social Systems' (2005) 3 (2) Triple C 28

Gadinger Frank and Peters Dirk, 'Feedback loops in a world of complexity: a cybernetic approach at the interface of foreign policy analysis and international relations theory' (2014) 29 (1) Cambridge Review of International Affairs 251

Geyer Robert, 'Beyond the Third Way: The Science of Complexity and the Politics of Choice' (2003) 5 (2) British Journal of Politics and International Relations 237

Gilbert Christopher, 'Powell Andrew and Vines David, 'Positioning the World Bank' (1999) 109 The Economic Journal 598

Goldstein Jeffrey, 'Emergence as a Construct: History and Issues' (1999) 1 (1) Emergence 49

Gonzales Martinez Rolando, 'Apocalypse Unleashed: A Critical Perspective on Complexity Science, Catastrophes, and Black Swan Events in International Business' (2024) 20 (1) Critical Perspective on Complexity Science in International Business 94

Grimes Marcia, 'The Contingencies of Societal Accountability: Examining the Link Between Civil Society and Good Government' (2013) 48 Studies in Comparative International Development 380

Guhan Subramanian, 'World Bank on Governance: A Critique' (1998) 33 (4) Economic and Political Weekly 185

Hanger-Kopp Susanne et al., 'Defining and Operationalizing Path Dependency for the Development and Monitoring of Adaptation Pathways' (2022) 72 Global Environmental Change 1

Hale Ben, 'The Methods of Applied Philosophy and the Tools of the Policy Sciences' (2011) 25 (2) International Journal of Applied Philosophy 215

Harland Tony, 'Learning about case study methodology to research higher education' (2014) 33 (6) Higher Education Research & Development 1113

Hickey Sam and King Sophie, 'Understanding Social Accountability: Politics, Power and Building New Social Contracts' (2016) 52 (8) The Journal of Development 1225

Houssou Nazaire et al., 'How Can African Governments Reach Poor Farmers with Fertiliser Subsidies? Exploring a Targeting Approach in Ghana' (2018) 55 (9) The Journal of Development Studies 1983

Houston Renée, 'Participation as Chaos: Lessons from the Principles of Complexity Theory for Democracy' (2000) 57 (4) World Futures 315

Ibitomi Taiwo et al., 'Test of Good Governance in Nigeria Using World Bank Indicators' (2024) 3 (1) Global Sustainability Research 25

Igalla Malika, Edelenbos Jurian and Van Meerkerk Ingmar, 'Citizens in Action, What Do They Accomplish? A Systematic Literature Review of Citizen Initiatives, Their Main Characteristics, Outcomes, and Factors' (2019) 30 Voluntas 1176

Isaeva Valeria V., 'Self-Organization in Biological Systems' (2012) 39 (2) Biology Bulletin 110 .

Jacobs Bart et al., 'From public to private and back again: sustaining a high service-delivery level during transition of management authority: a Cambodia case study' Health and Policy Planning (2010) 25(3) 197

Jacobs Bart and Price Neil, 'Community participation in externally funded health projects: lessons from Cambodia' (2003)18 (4) Health and Policy Planning 399

Jacobson Arthur J., 'Review: Autopoietic Law: The New Science of Niklas Luhmann' (1989) 87 (6) The Michigan Law Review Association 1647

Jahan Miskat, 'Understanding Social Accountability at Rural Local Governance in Bangladesh and the Way Forward: In the Case of Union Parishad' (2023) 17 (4) South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics 36

Janson Natalia B., 'Non-linear dynamics of biological systems' (2012) 53 (2) Contemporary Physics 137

Jervis Robert, 'Complexity and the Analysis of Political and Social Life' (1997) 112 (4) Political Science Quarterly 569

Jones Andrew, 'Aid on the edge of chaos: rethinking international cooperation in a complex world' (2015) 68 (4) The Economic History Review 1487

Joshi Anuradha and Houtzager Peter P., 'Widgets or Watchdogs? Conceptual Explorations in Social Accountability' (2012) 14 (2) Public Management Review 145

Joshi Anuradha, 'Do They Work? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives in Service Delivery' (2013) 31 (1) Development Policy Review 29

Joshi Anuradha, 'Reading the Local Context: A Causal Chain Approach to Social Accountability' (2014) 45 (5) IDS 23

Kanyane Modimowabarwa, Mutema Edson P. and Zikhali Thobekile, 'Social Accountability in Local Government: Lessons From Vuwani (South Africa) and Gweru (Zimbabwe)' (2020) 22 (3) Journal of Public Affairs 1

Karmakar Rupa S, 'A Thematic Review of Social Audit in India' (2017) 6 (4) International Journal of Social Science 227

Kast Fremont E. and Rosenzweig James E., 'General Systems Theory: Applications for Organization and Management' (1972) 15 (4) The Academy of Management Journal 447

Kernick David, 'Can Complexity Theory Provide Better Understanding of Integrated Care?' (2003) 11 (5) Journal of Integrated Care 22

Kinder Tony, Six Frédérique, Stenvall Jari and Memon Ally, 'Governance-as-Legitimacy: Are Ecosystems Replacing Networks?' (2022) 24 (1) Public Management Review 8

King Michael, 'The "Truth" About Autopoiesis' (1993) 20(2) Journal of Law and Society 218

Klijn Erik-Hans, 'Complexity Theory and Public Administration: what's new?' (2008) (3) Public Management Review 299

Kok Kristiaan P. W., Loeber Anne M. C. and Grin John, 'Politics of Complexity: Conceptualizing Agency, Power and Powering in the Transitional Dynamics of Complex Adaptive Systems' (2021) 50 (3) Research Policy 1

Korosteleva A. Elena and Petrova Irina, 'What makes communities resilient in times of complexity and change?' (2022) 35 (2) Cambridge Review of International Affairs 137

Kunnuji et al., 'Variable Implementation of Sexuality Education in Three Nigerian States' Studies in Family Planning (2017) 48 (4) 307

Lansing J. Stephen, 'Complex Adaptive System' (2003) 32v(1) Annual Review of Anthropology 183

Larsen-Freeman Diane, 'Chaos I Complexity Science and Second Language Acquisition' (1997) 18v(2) Applied Linguistics 141

Ledoux Stephen F., 'Defining Natural Sciences' (2002) 5 (1) Behaviorology Today 34

Levchenko Anhelina, 'Financing of projects of civil society organisations by donor funds of international financial institutions' (2021) 6 (1) Economics & Education 72

Levin Simon A., 'Ecosystems and the Biosphere as Complex Adaptive Systems' (1998) 1 431

Levin Simon A., 'Self-Organization and the Emergence of Complexity in Ecological Systems' (2005) 55 (12) BioScience 1075

Lieberman Evan S., Posner Daniel N. and Tsai Lily L.,' Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya' (2013) 60 World Development 69

Lodenstein Elsbet et al., '"We come as friends": approaches to social accountability by health committees in Northern Malawi' (2019) 19 BMC Health Services Research 1

Luisi Pier Luigi, 'Autopoiesis: A Review and a Reappraisal' (2003) 90 (2) Naturwissenschaften 49

Maiss Ahmad and Wilkins Stephen, 'Purposive sampling in qualitative research: a framework for the entire journey' (2025) 59 Quality & Quantity 1461

Ma Jun, 'The Rise of Social Accountability in China' (2012) 71 (2) The Australian Journal of Public Administration 111

Ma'ayan Avi, 'Complex systems biology' 2017 (14) Journal of the Royal Society Interface 1

Macintosh Andrew and Wilkinson Debra, 'Complexity Theory and the Constraints on Environmental Policymaking' (2016) 28 (1) Journal of Environmental Law 65

MacLachlan Malcolm et al., 'Intersections Between Systems Thinking and Market Shaping for Assistive Technology: The SMART (Systems-Market for Assistive and Related Technologies) Thinking Matrix' (2018) 15 (12) International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 1

Mallows David, 'Non-linearity and the observed lesson' (2002) 56 (1) ELT Journal 3

Manicka Santosh, Johnson Kathleen, Levin Michael and Murrugarra David, 'The Nonlinearity of Regulation in Biological Networks' (2023) 9 Systems Biology and Applications 1

Manson Steven M., 'Simplifying Complexity: A Review of Complexity Theory' (2001) 32 (3) Geoforum 405

Mathews K. Michael, White Michael C. and Long Rebecca G., 'Why Study the Complexity Sciences in the Social Sciences?' (1999) 52 Human Relations 439

Mazzocchi Fulvio, 'Complexity and the Reductionism–Holism Debate in Systems Biology' (2012) 4 (5) WIREs Mechanisms of Disease 413

Mbengue Papa et al., 'Management and Chaos Theory, Complexity Theory, and Self-Organizing Systems Theory' (2018) 9 Asia Pacific Journal of Research in Business Management 1

Meesseen Bruno et al, 'Can public hospitals be pro-poor? The health equity fund experience in Cambodia' in the authors (eds) *Health and Social Protection: Experiences from Cambodia, China and Lao* (2008) 23 Studies in Health Services Organisation and Policy 469

Meissner Richard and Jacobs Inga, 'Theorising Complex Water Governance in Africa: The Case of the Proposed Epupa Dam on the Kunene River' (2016) 16 (1) International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics 21

Mele Cristina, Pels Jacqueline and Polese Francesco, 'A Brief Review of Systems Theories and Their Managerial Applications' (2010) 2 (1-2) Service Science 126

Melton Dan, 'A Public Policymaker's Dilemma: Economic Development Meets Complexity Theory' (2003) 6 Oeconomicus 86

Mingers John, 'The Problem of Social Autopoiesis' (1992) 21 (2) International Journal of General Systems 229

Minto Andrea and Trincanato Edoardo, 'The Policy and Regulatory Engagement with Corruption: Insights from Complexity Theory' (2022) 13 (1) European Journal of Risk Regulation 21

Morgan Hani, 'Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis' (2022) 27 (1) The Qualitative Report 64

Muchadenyika Davison, 'Civil society, social accountability and service delivery in Zimbabwe' Development Policy Review (2017) 35(2) Institute for Social Development 178-195.

Naher Nahitun et al., 'Do Social Accountability Approaches Work? A Review of the Literature From Selected Low- and Middle-Income Countries in the WHO South-East Asia Region' (2020) 35 Health Policy and Planning 76

Nederhand José et al. 'The governance of self-organization: Which governance strategy do policy officials and citizens prefer?' (2018) 52 Policy Sciences 233

Nijhout H. Frederik et al. 'Systems biology of robustness and homeostatic mechanisms' (2018) 11 (3) WIREs Systems Biology and Medicine 1

Nkyabonaki Jason, 'Youths' Engagement in Social Accountability: A Case of Toangoma Ward in Temeke Municipal Council, Dar es Salaam' (2019) 00 (0) Journal of Asian and African Studies 1

Norman David J., 'From shouting to counting: civil society and good governance reform in Cambodia' (2014) 27 (2) The Pacific Review 241

Opiyo Sophia et al., 'Role of Feedback Mechanism as a Public Participation Pillar in Enhancing Performance of Devolved Governance Systems in Kenya' (2017) 5 (1) International Journal of Innovative Development & Policy Studies 1

Orsini Amandine et al. 'Forum: Complex Systems and International Governance' (2020) 22n(4) International Studies Review 1008

Owen Gregory T., 'Qualitative Methods in Higher Education Policy Analysis: Using Interviews and Document Analysis' (2014) 19 (26) The Qualitative Report 1

Page Scott E., 'A Complexity Perspective on Institutional Design' (2012) 11(1) Sage Publications 5-25.

Panthi Giri Prasad, 'Social Accountability for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health' (2016) 7 Himalayan Journal of Sociology & Anthropology 13

Papp Susan A., Gogoi Aparajita and Campbell Catherine, 'Improving Maternal Health Through Social Accountability: A Case Study from Orissa, India' (2013) 8(4) Global Public Health 449

Paradisi Paolo, Kaniadakis Giorgio and Scarfone Antonio Maria, 'The Emergence of Self-Organization in Complex Systems – Preface' (2015) 81 Chaos, Solitons and Fractals 407

Pearce Neil and Merletti Franco, 'Complexity, simplicity, and epidemiology' (2006) 35 (3) International Journal of Epidemiology 515 .

Pereira Diogo and Figueira Ariane Roder, 'Effects of citizen participation in the social accountability of budget amendments' (2020) 27 (1) The Journal of Legislative Studies 30

Periyasamy Sathish et al., 'The Bottom–Up Approach to Defining Life: Deciphering the Functional Organization of Biological Cells via Multi-Objective Representation of Biological Complexity from Molecules to Cells' (2013) 4 Frontiers of Physiology 1

Phelan Steven E., 'A Note on the Correspondence Between Complexity and Systems Theory' (1999) 12 Systemic Practice and Action Research 237

Philippe Pierre and Mansi Omaima, 'Nonlinearity in the Epidemiology of Complex Health and Disease Processes' (1998) 19 (6) Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics 591

Pieterse Pieternella, 'Citizen Feedback in a Fragile Setting: Social Accountability Interventions in the Primary Healthcare Sector in Sierra Leone' in Disaster, Special Issue: Humanitarian Governance (2019) 43 (2) 132

Pitasi Andrea, 'The Sociological Semantics of Complex Systems' (2014) 5(1) Journal of Sociological Research 203

Quinones Andrés Hernández, Schommer Paula Chies and De Vilchez Diana Cuadros, 'Incidence of Social Accountability in Local Governance: The Case of the Network for Fair, Democratic and Sustainable Cities and Territories in Latin America' (2021) 32 (3) VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations 650

Radde Nicole, 'The role of feedback mechanisms in biological network models—A tutorial' (2011) 13 (5) Asian Journal of Control 597

Rakšnys Adomas Vincas and Valickas Andrius, 'The Application of Complexity Theory in the Context of Public Governance Challenges' (2022) 21(4) Public Policy and Administration 526-536.Ramos Renato T., Sassi Roberto B. and Piqueira Jose R.C., 'Self-Organized Criticality and the Predictability of Human Behaviour' (2011) 29 (1) New Ideas in Psychology 38

Reed Michael and Harvey David L., 'The New Science and the Old: Complexity and Realism in the Social Sciences' (1992) 22 (4) Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 353

Reinitz John et al., 'Adaptation, Fitness Landscape Learning and Fast Evolution' (2019) 8 (358) F1000Research 1

Ridout Martin S., 'Reviewed Work(s): Self-Organization' in Camazine S. et al. (eds), *Biological Systems* (2002) 58 Biometrics 478

Robinson Rachel Sullivan and Adams Tariah, 'Building Social Accountability to Improve Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health in Nigeria' (2022) 21 International Journal for Equity in Health 2

Rodriguez-Gonzalez Pablo T., Rico-Martinez Ramiro and Rico-Ramirez Vicente, 'Effect of Feedback Loops on the Sustainability and Resilience of Human-Ecosystems' (2020) 426 Ecological Modelling 1

Rubenfeld Sy, 'Group Therapy and Complexity Theory' (2001) 51 (4) International Journal of Group Psychotherapy 449

Ruhl James B., 'The Fitness of Law: Using Complexity Theory to Describe the Evolution of Law and Society and Its Practical Meaning for Democracy' (1996) 49 (6) The Vanderbilt Law Review 1406

Ruppen Désirée and Brugger Fritz, ‘‘‘I will sample until things get better – or until I die.” Potential and limits of citizen science to promote social accountability for environmental pollution’ (2022) 157 World Development 1

Samuel Paul, ‘Community Participation in World Bank Projects’ (1987) 24 Finance and Development 20

Sangiovanni Mette Eilstrup and Westerwinter Oliver, ‘The Global Governance Complexity Cube: Varieties of Institutional Complexity in Global Governance’ (2022) 17 The Review of International Organizations 233

Sarker Abu Elias and Hassan Mostafa Kamal, ‘Civic Engagement and Public Accountability: An Analysis with articular reference to Developing Countries’ (2010) 15 (2) Public Administration & Management 381

Sarker Abu Elias and Rahman Mohammad Habibur, ‘The Role of Social Accountability in Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Developing Countries: An Analysis with Reference to Bangladesh’ (2014) 15 Public Organization Review: A Global Journal 317

Schatz Florian, ‘Fighting Corruption with Social Accountability: A Comparative Analysis of Social Accountability Mechanisms’ Potential To Reduce Corruption in Public Administration’ (2013) 33 (3) Public Administration and Development 161

Scholten Peter et al., ‘Bottom-Up Initiatives Toward Climate Change Adaptation in Cases in the Netherlands and the UK: A Complexity Leadership Perspective’ (2015) 33 (5) Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy 1024

Seeley Thomas D., ‘When Is Self-Organization Used in Biological Systems?’ (2002) 202 (3) The Biological Bulletin 314

Shava Elvin and Mubangizi Betty C., ‘Social Accountability Mechanisms in a Decentralised State: Exploring Implementation Challenges’ (2019) 8 (2) African Journal of Governance and Development 74

Shrestha Manoj K., ‘Internal Versus External Social Capital and the Success of Community Initiatives: A Case of Self-Organizing Collaborative Governance in Nepal’ (2013) 73 (1) Public Administration Review 154

Siphiwe D. Ndou, ‘The Complexity of State- Civil Society Relations: Reflections on Practice and Theory’ (2016) 13(2) Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology 16

Smulovitz Catalina and Peruzotti Enrique, ‘Societal accountability in Latin America’ (2000) 11 (4) Journal of Democracy 147

Stehr Nico Stehr and Grundmann Reiner, ‘The authority of complexity’ (2001) 52 (2) British Journal of Sociology 313

Sturmberg Joachim P., Martin Carmel M. and Katerndahl David A., ‘It Is Complicated!–Misunderstanding the Complexities of “Complex”’ (2017) 23 (2) Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice 426

Sullivan Rachel Robinson and Adams Tariah, ‘Building social accountability to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria’ (2022) 21 (1) International Journal for Equity in Health 1

Sun Zhanli et al., ‘Simple or Complicated Agent-Based Models? A Complicated Issue’ (2016) 86 Environmental Modelling & Software 56

Svyantek Daniel J. and Brown Linda L., ‘A Complex-Systems Approach to Organizations’ (2000) 9 (2) American Psychological Society 69

Tan Joseph, Wen H. Joseph and Awad Neveen, ‘Health Care and Services Delivery Systems as Complex Adaptive Systems’ (2005) 48 (5) Communications of the ACM 36

Theile Madeleine and Jansen Thomas, 'Stability in the Self-Organized Evolution of Networks' (2010) 57 Algorithmica 147

Tirivanhu Precious, 'A Realist Assessment of the Facilitation Process for Improving Social Accountability by Community-Based Organizations' (2020) 37 (6) Development Southern Africa 953

Tisdall E. Kay M., 'Conceptualising children and young people's participation: examining vulnerability, social accountability and co-production' (2017) 21 (1) The International Journal of Human Rights 59

Trandafir Mihai-Cristian, 'A Critical Review of Autopoietic Systems in Economic Discipline' (2017) 36 (2) EuroEconomica 91

Tsiboe Francis et al., 'Effect of fertiliser subsidy on household level cereal production in Ghana' (2021) 13 Scientific African 1

Turner John R. and Baker Rose M., 'Complexity Theory: An Overview with Potential Applications for the Social Sciences' (2019) 7 (1) Systems 1

Ugbudu Martin, 'Citizen Initiatives and Social Accountability in the Nigerian Local Government System: A Study of Benue State' (2013) 8 (1) Socialscientia Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities 85

Vetterlein Antje, 'Economic growth, poverty reduction, and the role of social policies: the evolution of the World Bank's social development approach' (2007) 13 (4) Global Governance 513

Vong Mun, 'What Makes Local Authorities Responsive? Lessons from Two Social Accountability Projects in Cambodia' (2017) 21 (3) Cambodia Development Review 8

Waddington Hugh, Sonnenfeld Adrienne, Kleiner Brian and Gaarder Marie, 'Citizen Engagement in Public Services in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review of Participation, Inclusion, Transparency, and Accountability (PITA) Initiatives' (2019) 15 (1-2) Campbell Systematic Reviews 1

Wagenaar Hendrik, 'Governance, Complexity, and Democratic Participation: How Citizens and Public Officials Harness the Complexities of Neighbourhood Decline' (2007) 37 (1) The American Review of Public Administration 17

Waldherr Steffen, Eissing Thomas and Allgöwer Frank, 'Analysis of Feedback Mechanisms in Cell-Biological Systems' (2008) 41 (2) IFAC Proceedings Volumes 15861

Waliszewski Przemyslaw, Molski Marcin and Konarski Jerzy, 'On the Holistic Approach in Cellular and Cancer Biology: Nonlinearity, Complexity, and Quasi-Determinism of the Dynamic Cellular Network' (1998) 68 (2) Journal of Surgical Oncology 70 .

Wedlich-Söldner Roland and Betz Timo, 'Self-Organization: The Fundament of Cell Biology' (2018) 373 Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society 1

Weiss Thomas G., 'Governance, Good Governance and Global Governance: Conceptual and Actual Challenges' (2000) 21 (5) Third World Quarterly 795

Wertheimer Max and Riezler Kurt, 'Gestalt Theory' (1944) 11 (1) Social Research 78

Wheatley Steven, 'The Emergence of New States in International Law: The Insights from Complexity Theory' (2016) 15(3) Chinese Journal of International Law 579

Wichowsky Amber and Moynihan Donald P., 'Measuring How Administration Shapes Citizenship: A Policy Feedback Perspective on Performance Management' (2008) 68 (5) Public Administration Review 908

Wisor Scott, 'Reviewed Work: Aid on the Edge of Chaos: Rethinking International Cooperation in a Complex World' (2014) 20 (3) Global Governance 487

Yang Yi, 'Critical Realism and Complexity Theory: Building a Nonconstructivist Systems Research Framework for Effective Governance Analysis' (2021) 38 (1) Systems Research Behavioural Science 177

Zeleny Milan and Hufford Kevin D., 'The Application of Autopoiesis in Systems Analysis: Are Autopoietic Systems Also Social Systems?' (1992) 21 (2) International Journal of General Systems 145

WEBSITE ARTICLES AND WORKING PAPERS

Agarwal Sanjay, Heltberg Rasmus and Diachok Myrtle, 'Scaling-up social accountability in World Bank operations' (World Bank, May 01 2009) < https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/423211468164948681/scaling-up-socialaccountability-in-world-bank-operations > accessed 26/06/2025.

Agyemang Harriet Nuamah, 'SEND Ghana: Experiences from giving Ghana's Government a Place in the Driver's Seat of our Social Accountability Project' (GPSA, December 2018) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/342401607318887998/pdf/SEND-Ghana-Experiences-from-Giving-Ghana-s-Government-a-place-in-the-Driver-s-Seat-of-our-Social-Accountability-Project.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Asante Kofi Takyi and Mullard Saul, 'Social accountability and anticorruption in Ghana's Fertiliser Subsidy Programme' (CMR CHR Michelsen Institute, 2021) < https://www.u4.no/publications/social-accountability-and-anti-corruption-in-ghanas-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Aston Tom and Santos Grazielli Faria Zimmer, 'Social Accountability and Service Delivery Effectiveness: What is the Evidence for the Role of Sanctions?' (World Bank, August 2022) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099534209302293819/pdf/IDU0aff7666c06b8804bc00a9170ce2d26867056.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Babovic Marija and Vukovic Danilo, 'Social Accountability in Cambodia' (JSRP, August 2014) < https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a089e0ed915d622c00043d/JSRP19-BabovicVukovic.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Barder Owen, 'The implications of complexity for development' (Center for Global Development in Europe, 2012) <https://www.cgdev.org/media/implications-comlexity-development-owen-barder> accessed 26/06/2025.

Bousquet Frank et al., 'Supporting Social Accountability in the Middle East and North Africa: Lessons from Transitions' (World Bank, January 1 2012) < https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/678031468275940310/677290bri00pub0ocial0accountability > accessed 26/06/2025.

Camargo Claudia Baez and Jacobs Elco, 'Social Accountability and its Conceptual Challenges' in the Authors (eds) *Accountable Governance for Development Setting an Agenda Beyond 2015* (Institute of Governance Studies ANSA-SAR, June 2013) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341509318_Social_Accountability_and_its_Conceptual_Challenges#fullTextFileContent > accessed 26/06/2025.

Dogbe Tony and Kwabena-Adade Joana, 'Ghana: Budget Monitoring by SEND-Ghana and its Partners Helps Improve Nutrition for Children and Support Local Farmers' (International Budget Partnership

Impact Case Study, September 2012) < https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2333672 > accessed 26/06/2025.

Dr Netra Eng, MunVong and Navy Hort, 'Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia' (Cambodia Development Resource Institute, June 2015) < https://cdri.org.kh/storage/pdf/wp102e_1617792667.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Eberlei Walter, 'Accountability in Poverty Reduction Strategies: The Role of Empowerment and Participation' (World Bank, May 1 2007) < https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/965221468778785322/accountability-in-poverty-reduction-strategies-the-role-of-empowerment-and-participation > accessed 26/06/2025.

Friis-Hansen Esbern and Ravnkilde Signe Marie Cold, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms and Access to Public Service Delivery in Rural Africa' (Danish Institute For International Studies December 2013) < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265300089_Social_Accountability_Mechanisms_and_Access_to_Public_Service_Delivery_in_Rural_Africa > accessed 26/06/2025.

Gildemyn Marie, 'From Signposting to Straightening Crooked Paths' (Doctor in Development Studies Thesis, University of Antwerp 2015).

Global Partnership for Social Accountability, 'GPSA Operational Manual' (World Bank, January 31 2013) World Bank < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/438531483708114727/pdf/Global-Partnership-for-Social-Accountability-GPSA-Operation-Manual.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Guerzovich Florencia, Fokkelman Emilie and Poli Maria, ' The learning Crisis and its Solutions: Lessons from Social Accountability for Education' (The World Bank, January 1 2019) < https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/468311606905286817/the-learning-crisis-and-its-solutions-lessons-from-social-accountability-for-education > accessed 26/06/2025.

Guerzovich Florencia and Poli Maria, ' How Social Accountability strengthens Cross-sector Initiatives to Deliver Quality Health Services?' (GPSA, 2019) < https://collaboration.worldbank.org/content/usergenerated/asi/cloud/attachments/sites/collaboration-for-development/en/groups/healthsystemsflagship/documents1/_jcr_content/content/primary/blog/how_social_accountabilitystrengthenscross-sector-VHoh/HOW%20SOCIAL%20ACCOUNTABILITY%20STRENGTHENS%20cross-sector%20intiatives%20to%20deliver%20quality%20health%20services.pdf > accessed 26/05/2025.

Grabowski Franciszek and Strzałka Dominik, 'Simple, Complicated and Complex Systems - The Brief Introduction' (IEEE Explore, July 2008) < https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/4581503 > accessed 26/06/2025.

Grandvoinnet Helene, Aslam Ghazia and Raha Shomikho , 'Opening the Black Box: the Contextual Drivers of Social Accountability' (The World Bank, April 11 2015) < https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/235561468321545065/opening-the-black-box-the-contextual-drivers-of-social-accountability > accessed 26/06/2025.

Halloran Brent and Stephenson Patrick, 'Chapter 4: Smallholder farmers, food security and COVID-19 in Ghana: Civil society navigating fiscal governance and service delivery during crisis' in Nannette Abrahams et al (eds) 'Shrinking or Opening? Civic Space in Africa during COVID-19' (GiZ, 2022) <https://d-nb.info/126701010X/34#page=48> accessed 26/06/2025.

Independent Evaluation Group, 'Project Performance Assessment Report: Cambodia Demand for Good Governance' Report No.: 116799 (World Bank, June 26 2017) <

https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/sites/default/files/Data/reports/ppar-cambodiagoodgovernance-07212017.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

King Sophie, Bukenya Badru and Hikey Sam, 'Understanding the role of context in shaping social accountability interventions: towards an evidence-based approach' (World Bank, June 2012) < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220388.2015.1134778 > accessed 26/06/2025.

Kyando Doreen Nico, 'Social accountability initiatives in the Delivery of public services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic literature review' (Institute of Development Policy, June 2022) < https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/ad52f6/195405.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Lateef K. Sarwar, 'Evolution of The World Bank's Thinking on Governance' (World Bank, January 2016) < https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/433301485539630301-0050022017/original/WDR17BPEvolutionofWBThinkingonGovernance.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Malena Carmen, Forster Reiner and Singh Janmejay, 'Social Accountability: an introduction to the concept and emerging practice' (World Bank, 01 December 2004) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/327691468779445304/pdf/310420PAPER0So1ity0SDP0Civic0no1076.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Manuel-Navarrete David, 'Approaches and Implications of using Complexity Theory for dealing with Social Systems'(2001) Workshop on Conservation and Sustainable Development- Comparative Perspectives (Yale University, August 2001) < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242403867_Approaches_and_Implications_of_using_Complexity_Theory_for_dealing_with_Social_Systems > accessed 26/06/2025.

Mendel Toby, 'Right to Information: Recent Spread of RTI Legislation' (World Bank, 2014) < https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/3c976183-b0a3-5b15-87a9-3a3bc86e0a4f > accessed 26/06/2025.

Mills Linnea and Thindwa Jeff, 'Social Accountability For a Strong Covid-19 Recovery A Review and Analysis of the Role of Civil Society' (GPSA, September 30 2022) < https://documents.banquemondiale.org/fr/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099545209302225981/idu04a5e75580e593044b10bfff054c9280410d5 > accessed 26/06/2025.

Mun Vong, 'Responsiveness without Accountability: The Case of Social Accountability in Cambodia' (ICoDA, 10 November 2015) < https://repository.unair.ac.id/97685/7/11A_DEVELOPMENT%20SOFT%20SKILL_OK.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Nigeria Health Watch, 'Accessing Quality Maternal Health Care in Niger State: Women's Voices for Action' (Medium, April 5 2023) https://nigeriahealthwatch.medium.com/womens-voices-for-action-and-access-to-quality-maternal-health-care-in-niger-state-a-baseline-6ce2f46aefa accessed 26/06/2025.

Potgieter Anet et al., 'Temporality in Link Prediction: Understanding Social Complexity' (University of Amsterdam, 2007) < https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=f533e85c28b6921075d82369182bfbeaeac0ff95 > accessed 26/06/2025.

Ramalingam Ben et al., 'Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts' Working paper 285 (Overseas Development Institute, October 2008) <https://media.odi.org/documents/833.pdf> accessed 26/06/2025.

Reuben William, 'The Role of Civic Engagement and Social Accountability in the Governance Equation' (World Bank, March 2003) <

https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/327691468779445304/pdf/310420PAPER0So1ity0SDP0Civic0no1076.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Right to Information Rating, 'Global Right to Information Rating By Country' (Access Info Europe (AIE) and the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), 2022) < https://www.rti-rating.org/country-data/ > accessed 26/06/2025.

Santi Kusumaningrum, Siagian Clara, Bennouna Cyril and Laugen Chris, 'Social Accountability in Health in Indonesia: an Overview of Legislation' (The World Bank, May 2018) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/789741538765771215/pdf/Social-Accountability-in-Health-in-Indonesia-An-Overview-of-Legislation.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

SEND Ghana, 'About Us' (SEND Ghana) < https://sendwestafrica.org/nu/gh/about-us/ > accessed 26/06/2025.

SEND Ghana, 'Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation Send's Approach to Promoting Social Accountability: Implementation Manual' (Send Ghana, 2016) <https://sendwestafrica.org/nu/gh/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/Participatory_Monitoring_and_Evaluation_PME_Framework_2016.pdf> accessed 26/06/2025.

SEND West Africa, 'Who We Are' (SEND West Africa) < https://www.sendwestafrica.org/nu/who-we-are/#1634564118153-4c869471-67dd > accessed 26/06/2025.

Sinaga Grace, Delicia Nagia and Thindwa Jeffrey M., ' GPSA in Review: Collaborative Social Accountability for Development – 2021-2022' (World Bank Group, January 10 2023) < https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099511001102315321/idu0e11381d2000170499e08ccf02c68a41d3578 > accessed 26/06/2025.

Sullivan Robinson Rachel, 'Setting the Stage for Increased Accountability: The White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria Campaign to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Niger State' (Accountability Research Center, May 2019) Accountability Note Number 6 <https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccountabilityNote-6-Nigeria-WRA-web-May-22-2019.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

Vloeberghs Ward and Bergh Sylvia I., 'Weapons Of Discontent? Sketching a research agenda on social accountability in the Arab Middle East and North Africa' (International Institute of Social Studies working, 10 march 2021) < https://repub.eur.nl/pub/135292/wp671.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

White Ribbon Alliance, 'Building a Movement: A history of White Ribbon Alliance' (White Ribbon Alliance) < https://whiteribbonalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/WRA-Book-of-Wins_10.10.22.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.

White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria, 'More than 35 health facilities in Niger State upgraded with improved water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities' (White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria) <https://whiteribbonalliance.org/stories/more-than-35-health-facilities-in-niger-state-upgraded-with-improved-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-facilities/> accessed 26/06/2025.

White Ribbon Alliance, 'Niger State hired hundreds of health workers in response to women's childbirth experiences' (White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria) <https://whiteribbonalliance.org/stories/niger-state-hired-hundreds-of-health-workers/ > accessed 26/06/2025.

World Bank Institute, 'Social Accountability in the Public Sector, A Conceptual Discussion and Learning Module' (World Bank, January 1 2005) < https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/859141468135312999/social-accountability-in-the-public-sector-a-conceptual-discussion-and-learning-module > accessed 26/06/2025.

World Bank, 'Getting to Know the World Bank' (World Bank, July 26th 2016) < https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/07/26/getting_to_know_theworldbank> accessed 26/06/2025.

World Bank, 'Project Appraisal Document' Report No: 42366-KH P 4 (World Bank, October 23 2008) <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/854641468216605838/pdf/423660PAD0P1011LY10IDA1R20081029711.pdf> accessed 26/06/2025.

World Bank, 'Project Performance Assessment Report: Cambodia—Demand for Good Governance Project' (World Bank, June 26 2017) < https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/987321500652281850/pdf/116799-PPAR-P101156-PUBLIC.pdf > accessed 26/06/2025.