

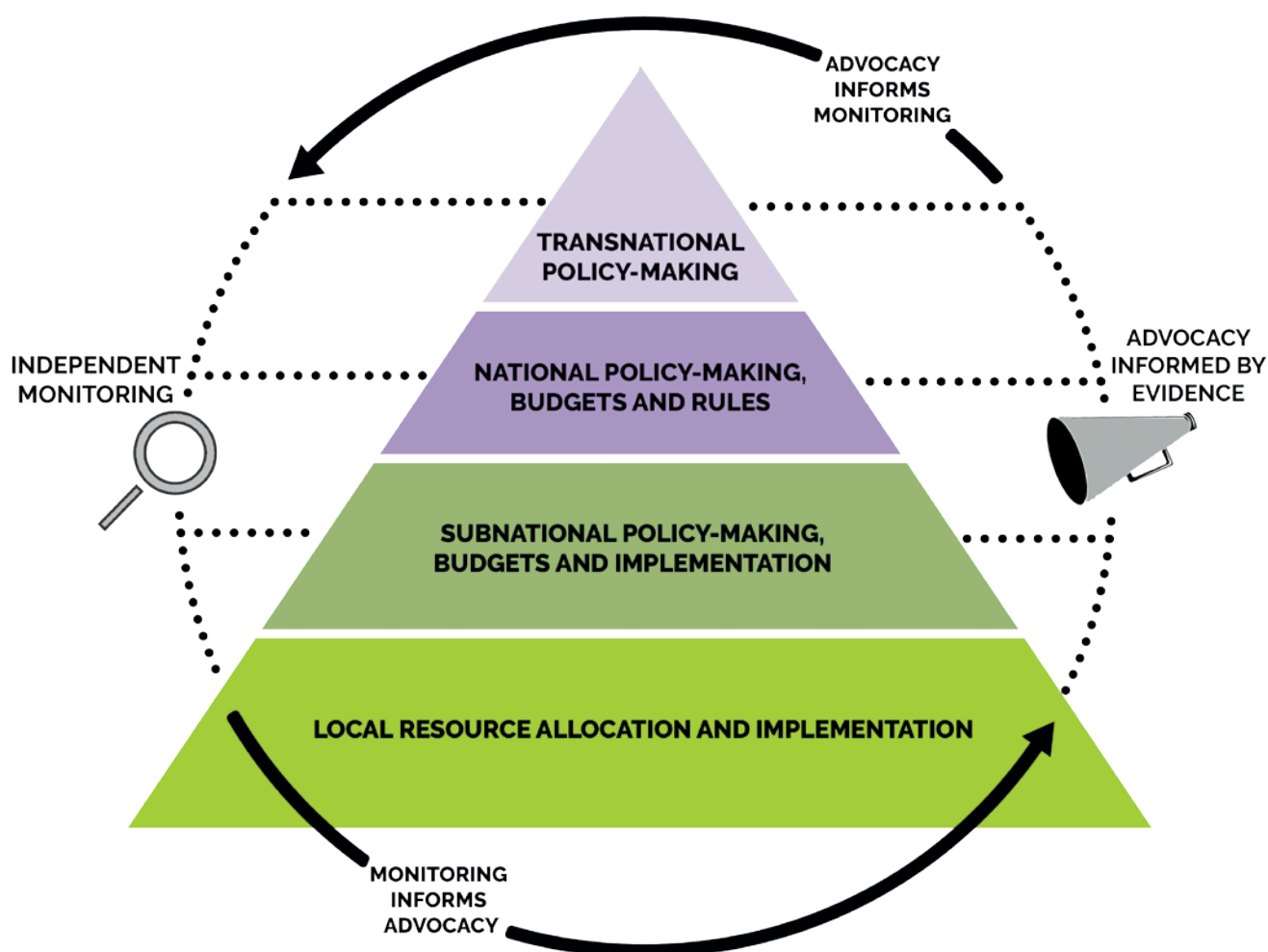
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MAKING ALL  
VOICES COUNT

WORKING PAPER

A GRAND CHALLENGE  
FOR DEVELOPMENT

# Scaling accountability through vertically integrated civil society policy monitoring and advocacy



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# Executive summary

This working paper argues that the growing field of transparency, participation and accountability (TPA) needs a conceptual reboot, to address the limited traction gained so far on the path to accountability. To inform more strategic approaches and to identify the drivers of more sustainable institutional change, fresh analytical work is needed. This paper makes the case for one among several possible strategic approaches by distinguishing between “scaling up” and “taking scale into account”. This proposition grounds an explanation of the vertical integration strategy, which involves multi-level coordination by civil society organisations of policy monitoring and advocacy, grounded in broad pro-accountability constituencies.

To spell out how this strategy can empower pro-accountability actors, the paper contrasts varied terms of engagement between state and society, proposing a focus on collaborative coalitions as an alternative to the conventional dichotomy between confrontation and constructive engagement. The paper grounds this discussion by reviewing the rich empirical terrain of existing multi-level approaches, summarizing nine cases – three each in three countries – to demonstrate what can be revealed when TPA initiatives are seen through the lens of scale. It concludes with a set of broad analytical questions for discussion, followed by testable hypotheses proposed to inform future research agendas.

## 1. Introduction

Civil society initiatives in the new field of transparency, participation and accountability (TPA) are flourishing in the global South, yet governmental responsiveness often falls short of expectations.<sup>1</sup> This limited impact underscores the need for reform initiatives to be rethought, using a lens that distinguishes more clearly between strategies and tactics. In retrospect, many TPA initiatives turn out to have been based on optimistic assumptions about the relationships between public information access, citizen action and institutional change. In response, this working paper is based on the proposition that the causal chain between transparency, participation and accountability is only as strong as its weakest link. This challenge underscores the relevance of developing more systemic approaches that distinguish between the causes and symptoms of accountability failures.

A conceptual reboot is in order, to inform a new generation of strategies that take entrenched institutional obstacles more fully into account. This involves focusing on both pro-citizen power shifts and bolstering the state’s capacity to *respond* to citizen voice as the main goals. One strategy worth more serious consideration involves the vertical integration of coordinated civil society policy monitoring and advocacy. This process seeks sustainable institutional change through the coordination of citizen action across local, subnational, national and transnational levels, while also broadening pro-accountability constituencies to extend their territorial reach and social inclusion.<sup>2</sup> This proposition responds to a missing link in the field: the challenge of how to bolster impact by “taking scale into account”.<sup>3</sup> In other words, how can strategies intended to promote inclusive

governance address the multi-level nature of power structures?

The core rationale for trying to monitor each stage and level of public sector actions is to reveal more precisely not only *where* the main causes of accountability failures are located, but also their *interconnected* nature. After all, the forces of impunity are usually already vertically integrated, often through interlocking links within political machines and protection rackets (e.g. Chayes 2015). Understanding as many links in the chain of public sector decisions and actions as possible can identify more precisely where in the policy process “supply chain” change is most needed.

The term “policy process” is used here to designate the full array of governmental decisions and non-decisions that shape public sector performance, including agenda-setting, policy formulation and implementation. This approach puts coalition-building between social and civic actors with complementary strengths at the centre of the strategy: for example, national capital-based “infomediaries”, plus broad-based, locally grounded civic organisations, plus independent media and insider allies (if available). To contextualise the rationale for vertical integration, this working paper also contrasts different approaches to state–society relations, reviews the empirical landscape by summarising nine cases across three countries, and concludes with a set of testable hypotheses for discussion.<sup>4</sup>

Recent reviews of the evidence of accountability outcomes underscore why new strategic thinking is needed. While TPA efforts differ in terms of whether their main focus is local, national or international, they still tend to share the assumption that “information

is power". In practice, however, information access and citizen voice are often not enough to deliver accountability (Halloran 2015; Joshi 2014; Fox 2007a).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, transparency and accountability initiatives are often poorly articulated, with seemingly related anti-corruption, democratisation and participation agendas (Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014). A now-classic review of transparency and accountability initiatives found that transparency had very uneven and modest impacts on accountability (Joshi 2013; McGee and Gaventa 2010). A meta-analysis of social accountability interventions found that many of them are too superficial and limited in scope to actually leverage accountability (Fox 2014). In addition, numerous "civic-tech" online platforms inspire hope for citizen voice to leverage better public service provision, but so far few have tangibly improved service delivery (Edwards and McGee 2016; Peixoto and Fox 2016a, 2016b; Welle, Williams and Pearce 2016).

In the global arena, a recent review of the evidence from international multi-stakeholder initiatives to promote open government (e.g. the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the Open Government Partnership) finds that while they often manage to encourage the greater disclosure of information, they have reached few accountability gains (Guerzovich and Moses 2016; Brockmyer and Fox 2015).<sup>6</sup> Recently, a remarkable World Bank Policy Research Report questions the depoliticised "social accountability" frame by making a strong case that the most promising transparency initiatives focus directly on bolstering specifically *political* accountability, by informing voters, sanctioning politicians and changing the incentives of non-elected public officials (World Bank 2016a).<sup>7</sup>

On balance, the evidence available indicates that the dominant trend in the TPA field appears to be that "the rock keeps rolling back down the hill".<sup>8</sup> There certainly are success stories, but the broad pattern – in which so many efforts, in such diverse contexts, fall short of achieving tangible accountability gains – points to the relevance of a conceptual reboot.

## Core distinction for empowerment and accountability: strategy and tactics

The relevance of the distinction between tactical and strategic approaches emerged from an inductive review of impact evaluations of social accountability initiatives, which allowed for a reinterpretation of what "mixed results" really means (Fox 2015, 2014). Rather than treat social accountability as a homogeneous category, this two-part review concluded that the umbrella category covered two quite different sets of initiatives: tactical and strategic.<sup>9</sup> The low impact cases studied tended to be locally bound, tool-led and heavily reliant on information provision; higher impact cases

were associated with multiple, multi-level, coordinated tactics, enabling environments for collective action, and coordination with governmental reforms that bolster public sector responsiveness. The review concluded that the key challenge is how to trigger a mutually reinforcing, reciprocal relationship between participation and accountability: "voice needs teeth to have bite, but teeth may not bite without voice" (Fox 2014: 36).

The terms "strategy" and "tactics" are often lumped together, leading one to be conflated with the other (not unlike "monitoring and evaluation"). To recall the distinction, *strategies* start with the overarching change goals and connect them to the action plan to reach them. In contrast, *tactics* are the more specific actions for carrying out the strategy (see box below). Tool-led approaches in the TPA field are tactical. They deploy citizen report cards, community monitoring, social audits, apps or open data, but often not as part of broader, multi-pronged, multi-level strategies. Military strategists have long emphasised the importance of the distinction from tactics, as in a widely cited observation attributed to Sun Tzu: "Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat" (although it turns out that there is no evidence that he actually said this).

## Differentiating tactics and strategies

When applied to contemporary accountability initiatives, tactical approaches have the following characteristics. They are:

- tool-led interventions (often external)
- limited to citizen voice efforts
- information provision (assumed to inspire collective action that can influence public sector performance)
- limited to "local" arenas.

Strategic approaches, in contrast, are:

- multiple, coordinated tactics (can the whole be greater than the sum of the parts?)
- enabling environments for collective action, to reduce perceived risk
- citizen voice coordinated with governmental reforms that bolster public sector responsiveness (voice plus teeth)
- multi-level (linking local, subnational and national actors and targets)
- campaigns rather than interventions (iterative, contested and therefore uneven processes).

Sources: Fox (2015, 2014)



The point of departure here is that strategic approaches are needed to address the underlying *causes* of accountability failures. Not all accountability problems are systemic – some may be the result of the proverbial “few bad apples”.<sup>10</sup> In other words, specific cases may sometimes be the exception to the rule, and they can be addressed by sanctioning individuals or making small changes to rules or institutions, at least in places where the rule of law is applied more or less consistently. Then again, other accountability failures that come to light may reflect just the tip of the iceberg of otherwise invisible systemic issues. The proposition here is that systemic problems call for systemic responses (see box below). By no means does this rule out the potential relevance of incremental, localised or small-scale change, but it does suggest that a convincing theory of change would need to identify the rationale for the links in the causal chain that would plausibly *connect* such incremental changes to more systemic transformation.

Strategies, more than tactics, are designed to take into account the possible *reactions* of both adversaries and allies.<sup>11</sup> Consider the dynamic interactions inherent in chess, or the Chinese strategy game “Go”, rather than the assumed linear predictability of log

### Recent explanations of systemic change question incremental accountability initiatives

A growing body of academic research on the drivers of the institutional changes that address the causes of corruption and impunity suggest that they require mutually reinforcing changes in both state and society. Scholars point to “deep democratization” (Johnston 2014), a “big bang” approach involving multiple, mutually reinforcing policy reforms that overcome collective action problems (Marquette and Peiffer 2015; Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2013; Rothstein 2011), inherently uneven “transitions to accountability” led by state-society coalitions (Fox 2007b), and “transitions to good governance” (Mungia-Pippidi 2015).

These diverse explanations of lasting institutional change share an emphasis on large-scale, nationwide, cumulative power shifts, as well as on windows of opportunity that are notoriously difficult to predict and hard for external allies to promote. This poses a challenge: how can pro-accountability strategists address the need for deep power shifts when windows of opportunity are not open, and dramatic big bang shifts do not seem to be on the agenda – in other words, in most places, most of the time?

frames. Development analysts increasingly emphasise “problem-driven, iterative adaptation” (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock 2013), though the metaphor of “sailboats, not trains” is more evocative of the non-linear approaches often needed to reach difficult goals (Kleinfeld 2015). In spite of this broad rethinking in the field, and the increasing use of terms like “strategic”, in practice many initiatives in the open government and social accountability fields remain profoundly tactical, based on the assumption that “every little bit helps”. Yet that is not a theory of change.

The emphasis here on strategies that seek systemic change is based on the proposition that *anti*-accountability forces, with their strong vested interests and deep pockets, are often quite effective at isolating, neutering and rolling back incremental pro-accountability initiatives or institutional enclaves.<sup>12</sup> The need for systemic change in turn directs attention to accountability *systems*: the constellations of state and societal actors that together can deliver both answerability and enforcement (Halloran 2015, 2014). However, because so many TPA initiatives are tactical, or invest in transparency without clear links to accountability, those initiatives that *do* take entrenched institutional obstacles more fully into account can be described as “doing accountability differently” (Fox and Akeron 2016). This phrase pays homage to an important proposal to rethink conventional approaches known as “doing development differently”.<sup>13</sup>

The point of departure is the challenge of breaking out of self-reinforcing “low accountability traps” in which pro-accountability forces in both state and society are weak (Fox 2007b). The strategic challenge is how to trigger virtuous circles of *mutual empowerment* between these otherwise-weak pro-accountability actors in ways that can offset anti-accountability forces. At the most general level, the underlying analytical puzzle is how the whole can become greater than the sum of the parts, turning the weak into the strong.<sup>14</sup>

### The structure of this paper

This working paper explores the dynamics of one among many possible strategies for accountability-building. Other relevant strategies include focusing more on electoral paths to political accountability, bolstering public oversight agencies, strengthening the rule of law, and base-broadening approaches to constituency-building.<sup>15</sup> The discussion here focuses on four general core questions: (1) Beyond scaling up: what does it mean to take scale into account? (2) What is the rationale for vertical integration? (3) What is the potential synergy between civil society organisation (CSO) policy monitoring and advocacy?<sup>16</sup> and (4) How can we analyse varied state-society terms of engagement with a more three-dimensional approach?

This section focuses on seeking greater alignment between terminology, concepts and strategic approaches. This is based on the proposition that some widely used terms are used so loosely that they can mean all things to all people, which can make strategic pathways less, rather than more, visible. “Scale” is one such term, as will be discussed below. Another notable example in the development field is “intervention”, a term associated with initiatives that are externally driven, locally bound in geographic terms, involve a limited “toolkit” in terms of the action repertoire, and are constrained by a relatively short time frame (often 1–2 years), to align with conventional donor expectations and impact evaluation assumptions. Interventions are associated with treating in-country CSOs as subcontracted “implementing organisations” rather than as partners in agenda-setting.

In contrast, the terminology associated with a strategic approach would be closer to the idea of “campaigns”, which creates more space for the organic involvement of diverse, existing actors closer to the ground, the deployment of multiple TPA actions at the same time, and the possibility of a longer-term approach. Campaigns, whether they are military, electoral, public awareness-oriented or commercial, are almost by definition more strategic than interventions (though campaigns certainly deploy interventions). In the TPA field, campaigns would be informed by conscious power analysis intended to target and weaken accountability bottlenecks while also empowering pro-accountability actors.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the clearest cases of “fully vertical” independent monitoring and advocacy initiatives are electoral campaigns, both partisan competitions for power and citizen vote-monitoring initiatives.<sup>18</sup> Social accountability efforts may have a lot to learn from political accountability initiatives.

To ground the discussion, this paper then reviews nine cases of at least partial vertical integration, to begin to identify patterns of variation and the key questions that emerge.<sup>19</sup> This evidence review focuses on three countries – the Philippines, Mexico and India – exploring three policy monitoring and advocacy initiatives in each.

From the point of view of the Institute of Development Studies’ (IDS) new Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme, with its specific focus on fragile and conflict settings, the fact that these three countries are considered to have stable regimes, with political space for citizen voice and action, raises questions about the relevance of lessons from those experiences.<sup>20</sup> They are relevant for three reasons. First, all three countries include subnational regions that fall into the “fragile and conflict settings” category, where socially grounded armed actors challenge the state’s legitimacy. Second, the “fear factor” is very

relevant for accountability initiatives in those three countries, in spite of their elected regimes. Those three governments do not consistently defend their citizens’ human rights. For example, even in India, which has one of the most robust public information access systems in the world, more than 50 citizen information requesters have been murdered (Pande 2015).

While the understudied fear factor is especially relevant for the challenge of promoting citizen voice in fragile and conflict settings, it is also a systemic problem in what appear to be stable regimes – yet it has not been addressed by studies of social accountability and open government. Third, these nine experiences with at least partial vertical integration all address the gaps between capital city non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social organisations that are closer to the grassroots – a problem that is especially relevant in fragile and conflict settings.

Few of the nine cases profiled have received much scholarly attention, so the brief summaries draw primarily on grey literature and interviews with participants. In the Philippines, the cases are Textbook Count, the reproductive health law and their conditional cash transfer programme (4Ps). In India, the cases involve the right to information campaign, community-based monitoring within the National Rural Health Mission, and the right to food campaign. In Mexico, the cases are the community food councils, the Maternal Mortality Observatory and family planning budget reform. The reason for considering three cases within each country is to illustrate that where there is some political space, national civil societies may generate multiple vertically integrated initiatives.

All nine cases involve multi-level monitoring and advocacy initiatives that target specific national public service delivery policies that directly affect social constituencies, and several involve the monitoring of policy implementation jointly with government counterparts. Because of the limited research base, the cases presented here are illustrations of “proof of concept” rather than definitive evidence.

Another reason for profiling these nine cases is that tactical interventions tend to get more research attention. Indeed, from a methodological point of view, their “boundedness” makes the evaluation of their impact more methodologically tractable. Moreover, externally funded TPA initiatives are more likely to get the resources needed for in-depth research, which further tilts the literature away from addressing more organic, bottom-up efforts.<sup>21</sup> The empirical case discussion here is less of a review of the evidence than it is a review of the need for *more* evidence. The cases summarised show that multi-level CSO initiatives are not so uncommon, though they are rarely studied through the lens of scale. This serves as a reminder of the disconnect between the broad range of “actually

existing” more strategic TPA experiences that should be documented and analysed, and the narrower range of cases that tends to be evaluated in detail.

This working paper concludes by looking ahead to three big questions for future research agendas, including the issue of what drives transitions to vertical integration (i.e. scale shift), how to draw more lessons from existing literature on collective action, and how to get inside the “black box” of the state in order to better understand what motivates state actors.

The annex proposes several preliminary testable hypotheses for discussion. Each suggested question responds to a specific dilemma involved in multi-level strategies, and sketches out a very preliminary suggested method. Because of the central role of territorial variation involved in “scaling accountability”, the subnational comparative method would play a crucial role in testing hypotheses involving vertical integration.

## 2. Unpacking different understandings of scale: from scaling up to “taking scale into account”

To make progress towards the proposed conceptual reboot, this working paper pursues one among several possible missing links: the challenge of how to take scale into account. In the international development field, scaling up usually refers to doing more of something – as in “larger scale”. Instead, the focus here will be on the *nature* of scale, contrasting “scaling” with the notion of “taking scale into account”.<sup>22</sup> Because the term “scale” can have very different meanings across fields and contexts, this section focuses on defining terms as precisely as possible.

The concept of scaling up is widely used, especially in the private sector, where it refers to growing companies and markets for products and services, as well as the social media process of going viral (the term has more than 5.4 million Google hits). The prospect of reducing costs per unit through economies of scale is a major driver, insofar as scaling allows for doing more with less (World Bank 2016b). In the technology business, scaling often refers specifically to an inflection point when linear turns to exponential growth.<sup>23</sup> Yet applying private sector understandings of scaling up to “what works” in the public sector is limited by the very different sets of incentives involved in growing profit-driven markets for private goods, versus the provision of public goods.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of taking scale into account is especially relevant for accountability strategies that attempt to improve the quality of and access to public goods, as well as to reduce social exclusion and corruption. These problems are produced by multi-level systems in which the causes of the problems are often both discontinuous and opaque. From the point of view of strategies for bolstering public sector accountability,

taking scale into account is intended to address the systemic embeddedness of anti-accountability forces across multiple levels and branches of a state apparatus. In other words, at each level of a state apparatus, anti-accountability forces are likely to gain strength from both vertical and horizontal coalitions (including private sector counterparts). Vertically, they may be part of coalitions with counterparts at the higher or lower levels, while horizontally, they may be part of coalitions with counterparts or other branches of the state at the same level (minister-to-minister, governor-to-governor, or mayor-to-mayor, for example), not to mention relevant non-state actors (private sector, illicit actors, etc.).<sup>25</sup>

If this hypothesised structure of links between anti-accountability forces across scales is correct, then scaling up in the sense of doing more numerous – but disconnected – local initiatives may not be sufficient to generate the kind of power shift needed to crack self-reinforcing low accountability traps. This is why it may be useful to explore complementary notions of scale that are oriented to addressing power shifts.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the strategic concept of taking scale into account refers to articulating how different *levels* of development decision-making and practice interact with each other (from the local level to district, provincial, national and transnational arenas), both for the public sector and for civil society.

### Scaling up

In the development field, the most robust discussions of scaling up<sup>27</sup> focus on expanding the reach of a specific innovation, based on a demonstrated pilot or local success (Kohl 2012; Linn 2012; Hartmann and Linn 2008; Simmons, Fajans and Ghiron 2007; Cooley and Kohl 2006).<sup>28</sup> For example:



“... scaling up expands, replicates, adapts and sustains successful policies, programs and projects to reach a greater number of people ... The process generally is not linear, but an iterative and interactive cycle as the experience from scaling up feeds back into new ideas and learning” (Linn 2012: 1).<sup>29</sup>

The development policy literature on scaling up is mainly practitioner-oriented and focuses on how to do more of something in order to impact more people. As important as it is, experts conclude that, on balance:

“... remarkably little is understood about how to design scalable projects, the impediments to reaching scale, and the most appropriate pathways for getting there. Despite its centrality to development, scaling up is rarely studied in its own right and has undergone little scrutiny” (Chandy, Hosono, Kharas and Linn 2013: 3).

Yet some of the literature does focus on distinct pathways to getting more done by addressing the differences between replication, expansion, uptake via collaboration in coalitions or joint ventures, or mainstreaming and transfer to larger institutions. Each pathway has its own dynamics, which involve distinct pros and cons. Cooley and Kohl (2006: 11) observe that the key difference between expansion, replication and collaboration is “the degree to which the originating organization continues to control implementation as the model goes to scale”. Analysts of scaling up tend to agree that it is a stage in the process that leads from ideas and opportunities to development and testing, to making the case, to beginning to deliver, and then to grow / scale / spread (Gabriel 2014).

Yet moving “onwards and upwards” along these pathways is easier said than done. Moreover, this literature has yet to be informed by the recent recognition of problem-driven, iterative adaptation (Andrews et al 2013). Indeed, in practice, many innovations fail to scale – to the point of a World Bank innovation expert proposing the metaphor of a Jeep stuck in deep mud, wheels spinning without moving forward. He concludes “you can’t replicate a solution to a complex problem ... what scales is the approach and the process by which you develop solutions” (Walji 2016: 182, 190–191).<sup>30</sup>

One of the most consistent characteristics of the literature on scaling up in the international development field is its intended audience. Analysis and recommendations are directed almost exclusively towards international bilateral and multilateral donors, to guide what they will propose that governments do. As a result, the pathways to scale are discussed from an external, top-down managerial point of view. This often means a primary focus on how to carry out decisions that have ostensibly already been made, with less attention to how those decisions are made.

Yet this donor-oriented approach can also be seen through the lens of using targeted external funding to incentivise national decision-making about which issues deserve priority attention. This is the case, for example, of “vertical funds”, in which international donor consortia tackle problems (notably specific diseases with measurable outcomes) by providing mainly governments with targeted funding (Gartner and Kharas 2013). In this context, the relationship between scale and accountability involves upwards accountability from governments to donors.

In contrast, if the primary audience for the literature on scaling up were national policy-makers, then the focus would more likely address how to build constituencies and coalitions inside and outside the state (or how to persuade donors). This would lead, in turn, to a different approach to the analysis of pathways – including, for example, more focus on agenda-setting, or horizontal policy diffusion across issue areas or subnational governments. In this paper, the positionality of the analysis is explicit: the discussion of what it means to take scale into account is directed primarily to civil society actors (and their allies) that are interested in influencing the public sector – without the capacity to deploy donor funding as an incentive.

The vertical integration proposition raises the question for CSOs of *what* is to be scaled up, and *why*. The development policy literature defines the “it” that is to be scaled in a very open-ended way; it can be a process or a product, or even a “package of interventions”, including the “managerial processes necessary for successful implementation” (Simmons and Shiffman 2007: 4). The process of independent CSO multi-level monitoring and advocacy pushes the concept of scale further, however. Instead of “managing more to get bigger”, the idea here is to “strategise at multiple levels to get more leverage” over powerful institutions. In other words, insofar as vertical integration involves civic action coordinated across territorial arenas (across districts and provinces) and levels (from local to subnational to national), the innovation already takes scale into account by definition, at least to some degree.

Where vertical integration actually happens, it is often partial – connecting the local to the district level, or the national to the provincial, but falling short of systemic coverage – as will be discussed in more detail later in this paper. This leaves plenty of room for extending two-level strategies such as local-to-district links to reach up to provincial or national levels, or to scale territorially by broadening civic oversight “coverage” from one district to many. This is consistent with one of the conclusions of a recent comparison of US government-funded social accountability interventions: “focus on next-higher levels of government ... financial, political, and

institutional support from officials immediately above those targeted by citizens' social accountability efforts may be most critical" (Wetterberg and Brinkerhoff 2016: 166). This focus on the relevance partial vertical integration is also consistent with an earlier set of robust research findings, which identified the characteristics of local organisations made them most effective at representing their members' interests – and scaling up from local to the next-higher level stood out as key (Fox 1992a; Esman and Uphoff 1984).

The proposition here emphasises the importance of links between national, subnational and local policy monitoring and advocacy to reveal whether and how the public sector is responding to citizen voice. While national policy advocacy gains can certainly be won with either limited or no subnational links, in the absence of broad, bottom-up public oversight capacity, advocates will have great difficulty knowing whether or not their ostensible policy wins are actually being carried out in practice (this will be discussed further later in this paper). This poses the challenge of how can civic oversight strategies cover *more* of the public sector, both in terms of a vertical supply chain of service provision, from national to local, and in terms of its horizontal territorial reach across subnational regions?

The challenge of how to increase the scale of CSO oversight's coverage of public sector performance recalls the concept of the "last mile" (which has over 1.2 million Google hits). This phrase is widely used in the telecommunications industry to refer to the final leg of networks that reach retail end-users. Other kinds of large-scale service provider organisations also use this term to refer to the challenge of reaching more clients, for example in health care.<sup>31</sup> The term implicitly conceptualises scale in terms of distance: the end-users are indeed far away from decision-makers, in so many ways. Yet where one stands depends on where one sits. Like the term "intervention" discussed earlier, last mile implies the outsiders' view from above. In contrast, if one takes a "citizens' eye" view, the last mile of service provision actually looks like the "first mile", since it constitutes citizens' immediate interface with the state (Boydell and Fox 2016). This is an issue insofar as theories of change in the TPA field depend on encouraging a menu of repertoires of action that are *perceived* as making sense to citizens.<sup>32</sup> A citizen-centric approach would therefore look at state–society interfaces as a first mile rather than a last mile.<sup>33</sup>

## ICT and scaling citizen voice

The dramatic spread of social media and mobile telephony has raised hopes for their potential leverage to broaden access to innovations in many other fields, and the TPA field is no exception. Yet this raises the issue of the differences between the more self-propelled nature of profit-making, private services that

go viral, and how initiatives to promote more and better public goods can take off. Citizen use of information and communications technology (ICT) for transparency and accountability has followed diverse pathways, insofar as digital media and mobile telephony have enabled some kinds of TPA initiatives much more than others. ICT has clearly enabled the rapid scale-up of transparency through digital media, especially in the sense of publicising scandals. Bad news travels fast, notably when responsible parties are well known and therefore available targets for naming and shaming.

ICT has also clearly enabled the rapid scale-up in the projection of citizen voice for accountability in a wide range of settings, by facilitating decentred and crowd-sourced approaches to offline, as well as online, collective protest. Yet, at the same time, numerous ICT for development (often referred to as ICT4D) initiatives have not taken off, and well-intentioned but unused "zombie platforms" abound.<sup>34</sup>

One of the main questions involved in the analysis of ICT's potential contribution to scaling voice involves the issue of embeddedness. To what degree are ICT innovations embedded in, or emerge organically in response to, the felt needs of social and civic actors? Here, there is a notable difference between the viral citizen uptake of messages of protest or exposures of abuse on the one hand, and the many well-intentioned platforms and apps in the ICT4D field that have yet to resonate widely. Viral uptake presumably indicates that the innovation or message actually resonates with citizen perceptions and priorities.

This is the distinction between demand-driven and supply-led ICT innovation. Alternatively, one could frame this issue in terms of the distinction between tactics and strategies, in which "app-led" initiatives are one kind of "tool-led" approach, in contrast to strategic initiatives in which specific ICT innovations are designed to enable the *other* moving parts in a multi-pronged campaign to gain more uptake and resonance. Though a strategic, demand-driven approach may be key for defining the problem that an ICT innovation could solve, for campaigners who are not tech specialists it is not obvious what possible ICT solutions are potentially viable. This underscores the need for balanced dialogue between ICT producers and users, so that the producers can see with greater precision how their creativity can enable change strategies, while accountability advocates can appreciate both the strengths and limitations of what ICT innovations can offer.<sup>35</sup>

To understand the interactions between citizen voice, scale and impact on institutions, it is useful to bring in notions of directionality. ICT allows citizens to dramatically broaden the horizontal projection of voice – to each other. Communicating shared grievances, building collective identity and creating virtual communities certainly both constitutes and facilitates

collective action; in other words, bringing many voices together to become louder in order to increase the prospect of being heard.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, ICT both accelerates and aggregates voice. Yet viral messages may be insufficient to scale up the kinds of *shared* meanings that are needed for disparate citizen concerns to come together to form cohesive, collective, social or civic actors (e.g. Joia 2016: 430). Moreover, few social media platforms lend themselves to the nuanced *deliberative* processes that are required to make the transition “from protest to proposal”, as some Latin American public interest groups put it.<sup>37</sup> From the point of view of scaling advocacy, this suggests that ICT may be more relevant for projecting voice to put problems on public agendas than for the “next step” of building constituencies for specific policy alternatives.<sup>38</sup>

Horizontal projection of voice to build broader constituencies is distinct from projecting voice vertically – by targeting the messages in ways that communicate effectively with elites. This distinction raises the question of what kinds of messages and targeting manage to be heard by those in power (this comes up in the discussion of whether and how feedback loops actually close, in Section 3).

A third kind of directionality that can be considered is diagonal, when social media campaigns manage to transcend their original online communities to get the attention of potential allies and convert them from mere third parties into relevant actors that can pressure anti-accountability forces.<sup>39</sup> This dynamic predates ICT; the literature on the US civil rights campaign called them “reference publics” (Lipsky 1968) and the literature on transnational advocacy campaigns emphasises the “boomerang strategy” (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

In principle, the horizontal and diagonal projection of voice may be the key steps on the causal chain towards successful vertical “messaging”; that is, getting authorities to listen. If that is the case, then focusing primarily on institutional responses to voice as the key indicator (as in Peixoto and Fox 2016b) skips over key links in the causal chain. Multiple waves of horizontal and diagonal resonance may be needed in order for citizen voice to influence the calculus of those in power that will shape whether they will listen. This dynamic is usually understood in terms of the capacity of digital messaging to raise the political cost for certain elite actions, and that certainly can produce short-term impacts. A minister might fall in response to a scandal that goes viral, but that does not mean that the systemic problems that might have produced the scandal will change. Insofar as addressing the causes rather than the symptoms of accountability requires a power shift rather than just a wave of embarrassing media hits, the question this poses for ICT4D is whether and how digital media can help to broaden the *constituency* that demands accountability.

ICT’s capacity to shape messages about the *causes* of specific problems is indeed crucial. The literature on policy-making stresses the importance of communicating “causal stories” in order to influence agendas for change (Stone 1989). This idea raises the question of how ICT’s capacity to shape and transmit messages can help to delegitimize the authors of problems, while legitimating solutions? This broadening and deepening of citizen *demand* for accountability is likely to be a medium-term process, which poses challenges for short-term time horizons for measuring impacts.<sup>40</sup>

Both the conceptual frameworks and empirical evidence on the contribution of ICT to scaling voice – specifically for transparency and accountability – still lag behind practitioner effervescence in the field. From the point of view of trying to understand the relationship between citizen voice and empowerment on the one hand, and public accountability on the other, the dynamics of how ICT mediates that relationship remains unclear. The ICT-enabled projection of citizen voice may or may not lead institutions to respond with more accountability, and research on this issue is only just beginning (e.g. Edwards and McGee 2016).

Social media allows millions to speak and can clearly enable collective action, either with evocative hashtags or with “flash mob” style street actions (as well as the corresponding disempowering capacity of the state for surveillance, both perceived and real). The potential for synergy between online and offline collective action is now widely recognised. But the question remains whether and how such actions manage to influence whether those in power actually listen – without even addressing the increasing tendency of authoritarian regimes to close access to digital media. This puzzle will be addressed further in Section 3, in the context of whether and how feedback loops close.

## Scale shift

The concept of “scale shift” is also relevant for analysis of TPA initiatives through the lens of scale. Political sociologists who analyse social movements have long been interested in the processes through which localised collective actions spread and grow to become social forces of national scope, with the capacity to transform state–society relations (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). Historically, mass collective action that scales up from local to national arenas is one of the key pathways through which intensely held citizen voice is projected with sufficient political clout to get the attention of national elites.

The projection of citizen voice from local to transnational arenas – sometimes, though not always, resonating nationally – can also be described as a scale shift (Soule 2013; Tarrow 2010, 2005; Tarrow and McAdam 2005). This view goes beyond the idea that more scale (more mobilisation) means more power for change; it also involves taking scale into account

by recognising greater capacity for that mobilisation to target power-holders at multiple levels. Indeed, movement strategists often respond to blockages in one arena by redeploying efforts to target other arenas that may be more responsive to social movements' rights claims (e.g. Pande 2016). This drives the classic boomerang strategy, in which local movements for rights respond to the closure of national politics by reaching out to international allies to triangulate external pressure on authoritarian elites (Keck and Sikkink 1998), as well as the "sandwich strategy" combining pressure from above and below (Fox 1992b).

In this literature, the process of scale shift is driven by two main mechanisms: brokerage and diffusion (e.g. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). Diffusion refers to a process of horizontal replication of collective action which may or may not be driven by organised actors. What analysts call the "attribution of similarity" may be sufficient for local actors in one area to feel common cause when they learn about actions that pursue shared agendas in another area, especially if grounded in a pre-existing shared collective identity. The concept of "linked fate", drawn from the analysis of the process of racialisation, is very relevant here (Dawson 1994).

Political sociologists recognise that brokers also make key contributions, creating links across the pre-existing social networks that are widely recognised as key for the capacity to mobilise. Brokers can be seen as nodes in networks. They can be cross-cultural interlocutors, "old school" grassroots organisers, local notables ("grasstops") or insider allies within the state. Brokers are especially important for scale shifts that reach upwards, since they can provide local movements with the necessary information to target specific bottlenecks (or potential allies) within the system.<sup>41</sup> In the language of social capital, brokers provide the "bridging social capital" needed to connect existing, more horizontal "bonding social capital" (Woolcock and Narayan 2000).

To sum up, the concept of scale shift is quite compelling: it has the advantage of explicitly addressing the question of how social actors transition from localised to broader scales of action, through "upward scale shift",<sup>42</sup> yet the literature that uses the concept deploys it primarily in an illustrative way. The empirical literature that applies the concept systematically to actual cases, to spell out both its processes and mechanisms, remains limited.<sup>43</sup>

## Accountabilities of scale

New concepts may be needed to apply the concept of scale to the analysis of "accountability production". To take this economic metaphor further, the concept of "economies of scale" is relevant. Economies of scale refers to investments in which the pay-off from each additional increment grows with scale. Put another way, the idea refers to how the increased size or scale of an initiative influences the cost of each unit produced, with the cost

per unit generally decreasing with increasing scale, as fixed costs are spread out over more units of output.

The concept of "accountabilities of scale" is analogous, suggesting three relevant insights. First, as the capacity for demanding accountability grows, the cost of each additional unit of accountability goes down as more accountability is generated. In other words, the more accountability one has, the more one can get. Conversely, the less accountability one has, the more difficult it is to get each additional degree of accountability (as in self-reinforcing low accountability traps). Second, local accountability reforms are not part of a continuous process in which they necessarily "scale up" to influence higher levels, while national accountability reforms do not automatically "scale down" to subnational and local levels (Fox 2007b). Third, the inverse of economies of scale can also apply. That is, "diseconomies of scale" may prevent an accountability initiative that works as a pilot from being effective once scaled up – especially if its success is made possible by local factors that are difficult to replicate. This risk is especially relevant for participatory development initiatives, which may lose their edge in a transition from artisanal to industrial scale (Chambers 2005; Blackburn with Holland 1998). In response, Gaventa (1998: 155) proposed the concept of "scaling out" to refer to participatory processes that both grow in scale (more participants) and in scope (participation over more decisions).

The notion of accountabilities of scale reminds us that the process of scaling accountability is fundamentally discontinuous. This suggests that incremental approaches may not generate expected impacts, while years of toiling to build policy advocacy capacity – apparently fruitlessly – could have significant impact if and when the political context shifts and political elites become more open to policy alternatives.<sup>44</sup>

## Summing up the distinction between scaling up and taking scale into account

Most conventional approaches to social accountability and transparency do not take scale into account in the sense that is suggested here. On the one hand, most social accountability initiatives (such as community scorecards) are locally bounded; on the other, most open government initiatives rely on national agencies to disclose official budget or activity data, which is rarely disaggregated in citizen-friendly or actionable ways.<sup>45</sup> These initiatives are often limited by their approach to scale: local interventions remain localised, rarely spreading horizontally or extending their leverage vertically by influencing higher-level authorities, while national initiatives based in capital cities risk circulating primarily among the already-convinced, or remaining limited to cyberspace and delinked from offline civic action.



In contrast, vertically integrated accountability initiatives attempt to take scale into account by linking citizen action at the grassroots with action at the national level, while seeking to broaden their coverage horizontally in terms of the geographic and social inclusion of excluded citizens. Multi-level citizen oversight initiatives can gain additional traction if the evidence they produce manages to trigger actions by public oversight institutions (also known as checks and balances, or horizontal accountability).<sup>46</sup> The concept of scale shift is especially relevant here because it begins to address the challenge of *transitions* to multi-level approaches. How do campaigns or movements for accountability manage to broaden their coverage, to address systemic bottlenecks by targeting the foundations of anti-accountability coalitions?

To sum up, scaling up usually refers to doing much more of something. Indeed, when a pilot activity is considered to “work”, then replication is certainly called for. Yet replication may not be enough to address the underlying systemic, multi-level causes of accountability failures.<sup>47</sup> *How* to do that depends on the specific context, but taking scale into account involves focusing on how to scale *impact* rather than just seeking scale (growth) per se, as Guerzovich and Poli (2014) suggest. In other words, while scaling an activity often refers to doing more of something, scaling impact requires strategically addressing the causes of accountability failures. In other words, taking scale into account involves more than replication or expansion; it links pro-accountability actors *across* scale in order to promote mutual empowerment and to either target or bypass accountability bottlenecks (see box, right).

### For social accountability initiatives, what would taking scale into account look like?

As an example, consider a social accountability initiative that involves community interface meetings between health clinic workers and communities. In this case, scaling up as replication would mean convening them at more clinics (e.g. from 10 to 50 to 500 villages). Yet the underlying causes of medicine stock-outs or abusive staff may lie far “upstream”. If civil society oversight efforts to address these problems were to do accountability differently and make connections horizontally, they would broaden their territorial reach to *bring together* democratic representatives from those 10, 50 or 500 grassroots communities. Such meetings could then ground a strategy to build a broad-based civic or social process that would not only have significant evidence-generating capacity, but also the civic clout needed to persuade policy-makers to *act* on those findings – especially regarding problems in the health system that are caused by factors located beyond their respective clinics. In this scenario, broadening an initiative’s social and geographic reach horizontally provides the platform from which to project voice “upwards” – vertically – towards power-holders.

## 3. What is vertical integration?

One practical application of this idea of taking scale into account involves the “vertical integration” of civil society policy monitoring and advocacy. Vertical integration tries to address power imbalances by seeking the coordinated, independent oversight of public sector actors at local, subnational, national and transnational levels. The goal is for the whole to be greater than the sum of the parts. The core rationale for monitoring each stage and level of public sector decision-making, non-decision-making and performance is to reveal more precisely not only where the main causes of accountability failures are located, but also their interconnected nature. This focus on understanding as many links in the chain of public sector decisions as possible is relevant, both to inform possible solutions and to empower the coalitions needed to promote them.

Vertical integration of public oversight puts coalition-building between social and civic actors with different but complementary strengths at the centre of the strategy;

for example, CSO policy analysts *plus* membership-based civic organisations to do bottom-up oversight and advocacy, *plus* independent media to disseminate both the findings and the citizen action. If government reformists are also willing to invest their often limited political capital in insider–outsider coalitions, better still.<sup>48</sup>

In principle, government oversight agencies could do what CSO-led vertical integration tries to do: reveal a full X-ray of the entire chain of public sector decisions and performance in any given sector. Very few agencies have the necessary autonomy, capacity and mandate to do so, however.<sup>49</sup> Those rare government agencies that can do it should certainly be the focus of both civil society and international support. Yet often the best that government oversight agencies can do is respond to high-profile scandals with official investigations that may, at best, expose the chain of events behind specific incidents.

But public sector oversight agencies rarely address broader issues about the effectiveness of entire policies,



programmes or institutions; when they do, it is more often in the anti-corruption context than in issues relating to broader governance failures, such as systemic ineffectiveness or social exclusion. Audit bureaus, public prosecutors, ombuds agencies, legislative investigation committees and human rights commissions can sometimes investigate and reveal specific cases of abuse. This can provide some degree of answerability, but actual enforcement usually depends on the autonomy and capacity of the system for administering justice.<sup>50</sup> For the sustainable institutionalisation of public accountability, these horizontal checks-and-balances agencies are crucial. One of the main potential contributions of independent public oversight initiatives involves both triggering and bolstering their autonomy and capacity.

Another set of institutions capable of vertically integrated oversight are donors, yet their primary focus is on “upwards accountability”, from aid-receiving governments to donor agencies. This involves numerous initiatives that treat governments as homogeneous, as in the case of performance indicators associated with the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. In the health field in particular, donor initiatives focused on specific problems involve vertically integrated monitoring and oversight, but they often lack a public-facing dimension. The focus here, in contrast, is on the kind of accountability efforts that not only disclose to citizens general, nationwide government performance trends, but also reveal where bottlenecks are, identify leakage points, show how inequality is expressed, and pinpoint who makes the key decisions that produce accountability failures throughout the supply chain of governance. In other words, while national performance indicators may be “actionable” for donors, much more targeted kinds of information need to be actionable for citizens and national public interest groups.

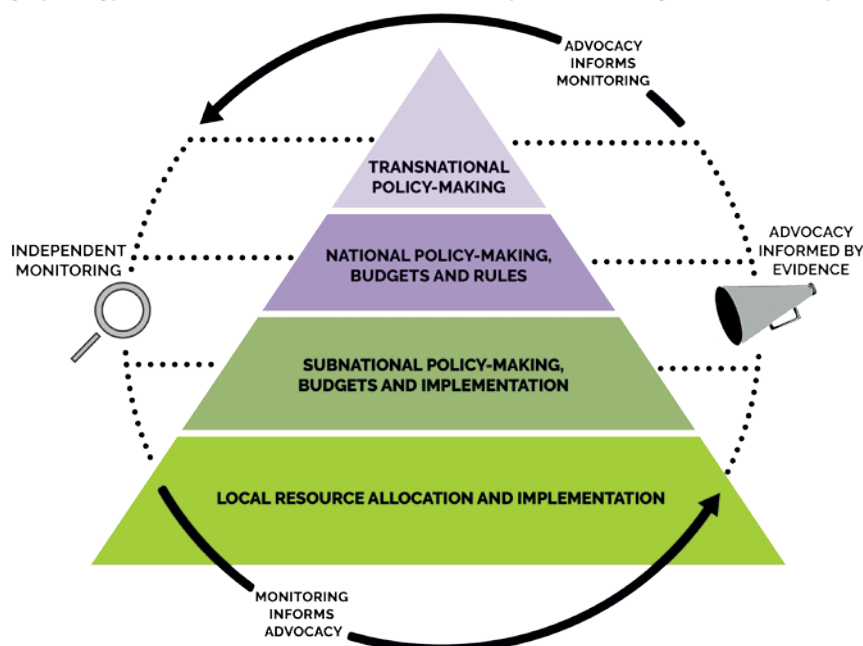
This section unpacks the idea of vertical integration from several different perspectives. Beginning with the term’s origins in political economy, the discussion addresses: the relationship between vertical integration and problem of “squeezing the balloon”; the limits to locally bounded citizen oversight; the significance of different kinds of policy targets; the role of “partial” vertical integration; the relevance of ICT’s potential for scaling multi-directional communication; and the elusive prospect of feedback loops.

## The political economy roots of vertical integration

The term vertical integration originates in early 20th century political economy, where it refers to an enterprise’s control of its own supply chain, including both backward links (inputs, parts) and forward links (distribution, sales and service). In contrast to the business context, where “integration” refers to centralised *control*, in the civil society realm the term points much more loosely towards the *coordination* of independent monitoring and advocacy capacity across as much as possible of the governance process – from policy debate and agenda-setting to the formulation of policy and budget decisions, as well as to their implementation throughout different agencies and levels of government.<sup>51</sup>

Figure 1 illustrates this process of CSO oversight, which runs parallel to the vertical layers and structures of governance. In practice, “full” vertical integration of independent policy monitoring and advocacy is rare, since it involves a relatively high degree of institutional capacity as well as many “moving parts”. Yet, even partial degrees of vertical integration (e.g. from local to district or provincial levels) can generate more comprehensive, and therefore stronger, civil society oversight efforts.

**Figure 1** Seeking synergy: multi-level independent policy monitoring and advocacy



Source: Fox and Halloran (2016); design by Jonathan Fox and Waad Tammaa

## Vertical integration can address the problem of squeezing the balloon

The expression “squeezing the balloon” conveys the way in which authorities and vested interests may resist independent oversight efforts by either deflecting or eluding reform efforts (Fox 2014, 2001). Officials deflect when they point the finger elsewhere in response to CSO monitoring and advocacy efforts, claiming that the actions in question were really decided elsewhere, in a different agency or at a different level of government. For example, municipal authorities may claim the problem lies with the provincial or district government. Those subnational authorities may in turn point the finger either back downwards to the local level, or upwards to the national level. National officials, in turn, may claim that the problem resides at the subnational level, or they blame international actors. International actors, in turn, are quite capable of side-stepping their co-responsibility by shifting blame to national or subnational governments.

The second challenge of the squeezing the balloon problem emerges when the targets of citizen oversight adapt by modifying their corrupt practices. The corrupt are flexible and they are quite capable of shifting their efforts to where opportunities are greatest and oversight is weakest. As funding flows through long chains of official decision-making, and public scrutiny is only able to shine the spotlight on one or two of those stages, then “leakage” is likely to shift to those decision-making processes that remain in the dark.

For example, in some large-scale, government-sponsored rural community development programmes that include citizen oversight mechanisms (e.g. India’s rural employment guarantee programme or Indonesia’s Kecamatan Development Program on rural development), it seems that corrupt officials have responded by inventing new and less visible ways to divert funds, shifting from wage theft to the manipulation of billing practices (e.g. Shankar 2010; Olken 2009).<sup>52</sup> In other words, the squeezing the balloon phenomenon means that programme monitoring that is exclusively local in scope may well manage to change the “shape” of the “corruption market”, but not necessarily the volume of corruption (Zimmerman 2015). In response to this problem, the core rationale for trying to monitor each stage and level of public sector decision-making, non-decision-making and performance is to reveal more precisely not only where the main causes of accountability failures are located, but also their interconnected nature.

## Locally bounded citizen oversight misses upstream governance problems

The World Bank’s 2004 *World Development Report* legitimated citizen voice as a constructive input to

improve the governance of public service delivery. This may have helped to open up bounded yet non-trivial space for freedom of association and expression in very closed societies. Yet this influential conceptual framework did not address the issue of scale for citizen action and accountability. Instead, the report circumscribed the acceptable role of citizen voice exclusively to the local arena and limited the targets of legitimate public oversight to frontline service providers. This worked in some cases, where the combination of community access to information about service provision and the creation of invited spaces for citizen voice improved local service delivery performance, leading to improved social indicators. Still, high impact outcomes have been both rare and difficult to replicate.

Key problems lie beyond reach, even for empowered communities. For example, medicine stock-outs at the clinic level may be caused by diversions further up in the health ministry’s chain of command, or they have been undersupplied because senior health ministry officials overpaid corrupt providers in exchange for kickbacks (e.g. Vian 2008). Even apparently local-level problems may be caused by factors located well upstream, such as when health-care workers demand informal payments from patients because they had to pay to get their job, or are required to pass money from patients up the chain of authorities (Schaaf and Freedman 2015). Similarly, schools may suffer from absent teachers not because of their individual idiosyncrasies, but rather for more systemic reasons. If teachers are absent from the classroom because they are busy working for the ruling party, then the key accountability failures are located upstream, where decisions about hiring and firing are made – and far from the reach of school-level parent committees (e.g. Altschuler 2013).<sup>53</sup>

In retrospect, it appears that the 2004 *World Development Report*’s exclusive focus on local voice led many influential stakeholders to expect that they could achieve tangible, sustained service delivery improvements without investing in the scaled-up civil society base-broadening and capacity-building that would be needed to challenge upstream vested interests effectively. After more than a decade of large-scale international CSO work on social accountability, neither the academic nor the “grey” literature has presented evidence that investments of development aid in localised interventions have generated broad-based, scaled-up power shifts that multiply beyond the immediate area of influence of international funding.<sup>54</sup> For example, in one of the most influential donor-led social accountability interventions (Bjorkman and Svensson 2009), the powerful evidence of impact did not trigger national replication or uptake. This gap underscores the need to rethink how to do accountability differently, including a more sustained

emphasis on constituency-building, which underscores the relevance of the distinction between interventions and campaigns.

## Different policy targets pose different challenges to vertical integration

If broad coalitions are essential to combine independent CSO oversight capacity with civic muscle, even then vertical integration remains very challenging. The nature of the challenge depends on the policy target. For example, the task of monitoring the social and environmental impacts of large, geographically concentrated infrastructure projects is more potentially bounded – and therefore more feasible – than inherently more dispersed health, education, water or agricultural policies. In addition, there is a big difference between services that consist of tangible, measurable goods such as medicines, textbooks or crop loans, versus the delivery of numerous, relatively autonomous “high touch” skill-based providers such as nurses or teachers (World Bank 2004).<sup>55</sup>

Policy targets also vary in terms of whether they involve proposed changes – such as budget planning, community consultations or socio-environmental impact assessments that precede big project decisions – versus policies or programmes that are already well under way. Indeed, two decades of experience with advocacy campaigns targeting World Bank-funded, high-impact infrastructure projects – often vertically integrated – suggests that they can exercise much more leverage before project decisions are made, in contrast to afterwards, when contracts are signed, vested interests have grown and their machinery of power is fully engaged (Clark, Fox and Treackle 2003; Fox and Brown 1998).<sup>56</sup> In this sense, effective policy monitoring can increase CSO reform leverage insofar as it can inform and bolster preventative, rather than just reactive, approaches to abuse and corruption.

## Even partial vertical integration can bolster citizen leverage and voice

Clearly, the vertical integration of CSO oversight is an extremely ambitious goal and few organisations have the institutional capacity needed for the “full coverage” of an entire policy process (from agenda-setting to formulation through implementation), even in a narrow issue area. “Partially integrated” policy monitoring refers, then, to citizen oversight of *some*, but not all, dimensions or levels of a public sector process. The proposition here is that in spite of the challenge posed by squeezing the balloon, public oversight of even some of the links in a chain of public sector decisions

(or non-decisions) can make a significant difference, especially if the monitoring is articulated with problem-solving collective action that can also reach across scale.<sup>57</sup>

The conditions under which partial vertical integration of citizen oversight can make a difference are far from clear. Convincing answers would require extensive subnational comparative research that focused on specific programmes and selected cases on the variance in the scale of citizen oversight (Snyder 2001). Yet the absence of systematic research on partial vertical integration that takes scale into account should not be confused with a lack of relevant participatory pro-accountability experiences that could be analysed. Around the world, local grassroots social and civic initiatives become visible – and influential – precisely when they scale up and come together at regional and subnational levels. Upon investigation, it may turn out that multi-level approaches often emerge in the process of adaptive learning, as accountability defenders respond to opportunities and constraints, rather than as the result of a conscious strategy detailed in advance.<sup>58</sup>

## ICT’s capacity for multi-directional communication can enable vertical integration

In principle, the potential contribution of ICT to independent citizen monitoring of the public sector is straightforward. If citizens can become the eyes and ears of an oversight initiative, then they can now gather and forward information in real time. To counter claims that such citizen reports are “merely anecdotal”, or come from unreliable sources, user-friendly tablet devices can make possible the consistent reporting of key indicators of public sector performance, and allow the real-time aggregation of data. In practice, defining such indicators and ensuring that data-gathering is consistent and user-friendly may require significant experimentation.

In principle, the potential contribution of ICT to advocacy is straightforward, through at least four pathways: (1) by facilitating collective action; (2) by targeting bottlenecks and specific elites through naming and shaming; (3) by aggregating data to reveal patterns of accountability failures; and (4) by getting the attention of potential allies. ICT can project both voice and evidence, and development agencies are exploring the potential for citizens to report a wide range of possible problems with tech tools such as SMS (short message services), or for more trained monitors to use tablets.

Visual communication is also crucial for communicating the results of more technical transparency and accountability initiatives that try

to “squeeze the juice” out of open data. Around the world, clever online platforms make important data available to inform public debate, yet translating that data into accessible visuals and messages that can go viral, or incorporating it into everyday citizen action repertoires through “targeted transparency”, is crucial (Fung, Graham and Weil 2007). What constitutes relevant and actionable information, for whom, and who decides remain major questions for the TPA field. Infomediaries are civic tech organisations that are dedicated to extracting, processing, translating and disseminating otherwise arcane data and converting into information that is meaningful to citizens.<sup>59</sup> Yet the degree to which infomediaries’ agendas are supply-driven versus demand-driven varies widely, and the challenge of how to understand the information needs and interests of their potential constituencies remains widely debated.<sup>60</sup>

Digital media allow for a broadening of the kind of evidence that citizens can project: it is not limited to the kind of “hard data” that has attracted greatest interest in the tech for development field. A review of 23 ICT platforms for projecting citizen voice, targeted to service delivery, found some uptake but less impact: voice without teeth (Peixoto and Fox 2016a; Bayern 2015). In contrast, from an advocacy point of view, pictures are still worth a thousand words, whether they are of human rights abuses, politicians’ private mansions or cash changing hands. Citizen journalists around the world have demonstrated the power of crowdsourced images to generate viral uptake of evidence for accountability. This broader notion of “open evidence” for accountability contrasts with the more focused emphasis of open data on a very specific kind of evidence (big data sets that require substantial investment and a clear advocacy target to be rendered intelligible, relevant and actionable). This suggests that the frame for exploring ICT’s contribution to bolstering the resonance and uptake of pro-accountability messages should emphasise the visual communication and “civic design” as much as the data.

## How does the vertical integration of monitoring and advocacy relate to feedback loops?

The relationship between the concept of feedback loops and citizen voice is less obvious than it may seem. Citizen voice can certainly offer authorities evidence regarding public sector performance based on direct experience, and this can guide problem-solving. Feedback initiatives that are staffed can have the capacity both to respond to specific citizen concerns in a granular way, and to reveal *patterns* of problems to authorities (e.g. channels for reporting specific public service delivery problems, such as the famous 311 city

telephone hotlines in the USA, or Fix My Street).<sup>61</sup>

Other feedback initiatives, by pre-determining a menu of options for soliciting citizen views, may limit citizen voice to specific agendas. Some feedback systems only ask for input after the key decisions have been made, as in the case of customer or “beneficiary” satisfaction surveys, creating only the appearance of input. In other words, the design of citizen feedback initiatives can have either inclusionary and exclusionary implications (see diverse cases in Peixoto and Fox 2016a). Official feedback initiatives may serve to indicate whether the state is doing something right, but not whether the state is doing the right thing. Both citizen-led and state-led feedback loops also face the challenge of whether and how they actually close.<sup>62</sup>

For ICT-enabled feedback loops to connect with the vertical integration strategy, their relationship to pro-accountability advocacy needs to be problematised. Clearly, ICT-enabled voice can play an agenda-setting role, revealing and naming previously unrecognised accountability failures (e.g. police violence against unarmed citizens). Yet crowd-sourced voices have limited capacity to negotiate with authority about what to do about these new agendas. If and when the political space created by voice makes it possible for the excluded to gain a seat at the table, who decides who is going to sit there and negotiate on behalf of those whose voices are trying to be heard?<sup>63</sup>

This raises the issue of which actors control the terms of engagement, an issue addressed in the literature on “invited” versus “claimed” spaces (Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2007). The question then is how can the scaling up of voice transition from aggregation to representation? This process involves not only large numbers of people speaking at once, but the consolidation of organisations that can effectively scale up deliberation and representation as well, most notably, internally democratic mass membership organisations (Fischer 2016; Chen, Jhabvala, Kanbur and Richards 2007; Fox 2007b).<sup>64</sup> This question of the capacity of usually excluded people to build their own representative organisations to set agendas and have a seat at the table is crucial, whether one is looking at invited spaces for issue-specific state-society deliberation or at the formal systems of political representation via parties.<sup>65</sup>

The proposition here is that for the analysis of accountability, feedback loops can contribute to a broader set of channels for expressing citizen voice, which is most usefully understood as involving both the aggregation and the representation of the views of otherwise-excluded citizens. But the question of whether and how feedback loops actually close calls for much more analysis, of how citizen voice interacts with incentives and power within the public institutions that are supposed to respond to citizen voice.



## 4. Unpacking the relationships between policy monitoring and advocacy

Public oversight is understood here as potentially including both monitoring and advocacy, though a preliminary scoping of the civil society landscape suggests that, in practice, relatively few CSOs do both.<sup>66</sup> This working paper also defines policy monitoring broadly, including classic “follow the money” efforts that seek to identify leakages, independent assessments of the performance of public sector agencies, as well as rights-based approaches that document patterns of exclusion, bias and abuse. Public interest advocacy refers here to a spectrum of possible efforts to influence the policy process in favour of the public interest, ranging from agenda-setting to policy-making and implementation. By this definition, advocacy can include a broad menu of possible citizen actions, ranging from the local to the global, and from the more collaborative to the more adversarial.<sup>67</sup>

Policy monitoring and advocacy may in principle need each other, but it turns out that they involve quite different kinds of actors and repertoires of action. Investigative journalists and whistle-blowers play a central role in setting public agendas for change by revealing accountability failures to the public. In national capitals, independent policy analysts and think tanks that dedicate themselves to extracting, processing and disseminating government data – sometimes called infomediaries – are very well positioned to reveal the government’s priorities by monitoring the legislature or analysing the budget. In contrast, partnerships with broad-based membership organisations, with their thousands of eyes and ears on the ground, make it possible to monitor actual government performance and to encourage citizen voice and action.

The potential complementarity between technically skilled CSOs and large, membership-based social or civic organisations puts the challenge of building and sustaining cross-sectoral, multi-level coalitions at the centre of the practice of vertical integration. In the context of such often-delicate processes of building coalitions among very different kinds of organisations, which underscores the need for balanced power-sharing and transparent decision-making, the term “integration” can be interpreted as implying an undue degree of centralisation. The rationale for using the term, however, is to emphasise the goal of creating synergy, to be produced by coordination among multiple CSOs that play different roles and work across scale, for reasons discussed further in this section (see also Figure 1 in Section 3).

The convergence of independent CSO monitoring and advocacy, cutting across different policy arenas, is deeply embedded in the history of transnational civil society (Keck and Sikkink 1998). The roots of the contemporary repertoire include the World Bank advocacy campaigns of the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g. Clark et al 2003; Fox and Brown 1998). These campaigns linked local to global CSOs to draw public attention to large-scale infrastructure and extractive projects that imposed social and environmental costs on stakeholders who were denied free, prior and informed consent.<sup>68</sup> In the absence of public scrutiny of timely and independent assessments of the risks and benefits of such investment decisions, governments and interested parties tend to underestimate their social, environmental and economic costs, while over-estimating the benefits – which tend to be concentrated in social sectors that are not expected to bear the costs.

Large-scale infrastructure and extractive projects are also well-known for creating huge opportunities for corruption. One could hypothesise that the larger the project, the more economies of scale in favour of corruption. Yet the dynamics of such “lumpy” project-level investment decisions present clear targets for CSO monitoring and advocacy, in contrast to entire sector-wide national policies, for example. Indeed, outside of this specific genre of large footprint projects, the strategic coordination of CSO monitoring with advocacy seems less common, especially in the provision of widely dispersed public services or anti-poverty programmes; hence the focus on profiling a wide range of cases in Section 6 of this paper.

The goal of bringing independent monitoring and advocacy together is to find synergy between the evidence-generating potential of policy monitoring and the civic muscle that broad-based advocacy campaigns can bring to bear (as illustrated in Figure 1). Yet combining these approaches requires coalition-building strategies that take into account the diversity among potential participants. CSO policy monitoring and advocacy often involve groups with very different goals, skills, repertoires and theories of change. For example, advocacy goals grounded in the strongly felt needs of organised social constituencies may not involve what evaluation experts would consider “rigorous” policy monitoring. Affected groups may conclude that they already have the



information they need in order to justify their cause. After all, in the eyes of citizens who have long been subjected to corruption, discrimination or abuse, the prospect of making significant efforts to generate “objective” data to demonstrate what is already obvious to them may seem like a poor investment of limited organisational resources.

Furthermore, there may be drawbacks to implying that the legitimacy of their cause depends on producing what constitutes “proof” in the eyes of others. After all, the empirical basis for the assumption that rigorous evidence provides the leverage that will improve policy is not clear (Eyben, Guijt, Roche and Shutt, 2015; Green 2013). A political economy approach suggests that interests as well as ideas drive policy decisions, a point that circles back to the civic muscle needed to harness evidence to move accountability reforms forward.

From a public-interest advocacy logic, independent policy monitoring involves significant costs and is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end, such as exposing and naming previously invisible problems, reframing public debates, garnering mainstream media coverage, identifying “smoking guns” with specific perpetrators, producing a “killer statistic” with the potential to go viral, or influencing national and international politicians or technocrats who are receptive to evidence. These goals involve more than technical monitoring capacity; they also require advocacy strategies that draw on skills such as working with the media, coalition-building and mass citizen action, as well as the knowledge and relationships needed to identify potential insider allies.

Coalition-building involves managing political and cultural differences among allies (Fox 2010). While CSO policy monitoring and advocacy clearly vary in terms of the skill sets and organisational capacities involved, the two approaches may be associated with different political strategies. In practice, policy monitoring is often associated with a “constructive engagement” approach. Yet if the primary goal is to improve policy implementation by plugging leaks and identifying performance problems in partnership with officials, this can discourage the direct questioning of the overall policy or of the key assumptions behind it. Such partnerships may limit CSO policy monitors’ independence, constraining them from publicly revealing the governance problems they encounter, and thereby leaving the question of whether and how to address the problems to their governmental coalition partners.<sup>69</sup>

Advocacy campaigns, in contrast to monitoring, usually focus on agenda-setting and changing policy *formulation*, rather than *just* on improving the implementation of existing policy. Their theories of

change may lead them to want to expose the vested interests that oppose policy reform, insofar as their goal is to address the causes of accountability failures. As a result, CSO policy reform advocates often deploy adversarial pressure politics and may invest less in documenting the details of how implementation works out in practice.

In addition, the institutional geographies of monitoring versus advocacy processes may be quite different, insofar as credible policy monitoring requires broad geographic coverage to document broad patterns of government actions, decisions and non-decisions at subnational and local, as well as at national, levels. In contrast, advocacy campaigns may be able to influence the national government even though their “area of influence” is confined to the capital city.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, some advocacy campaigns are sufficiently adept at insider-outsider networking and media presence that they can create a “Wizard of Oz” effect, effectively projecting the appearance of far greater clout than advocates actually have.<sup>71</sup>

Legislative lobbying power, media access or citizens in the streets of the national capital may certainly be enough to change laws or policies, but the persisting question is whether the *behaviour* of the public sector actually changes, especially where “stateness” may be low.<sup>72</sup> This is the reason for the emphasis here on the role of organised social and civic constituencies, with their thousands of eyes and ears on the ground, to build the countervailing power needed to fulfil the potential of synergy between advocacy and monitoring.

The proposition is that in spite of these differences, monitoring and advocacy each have complementary strengths; each approach can contribute to the other.<sup>73</sup> Independent monitoring efforts generate the kind of evidence of government performance needed to identify specific ways in which policies should change.<sup>74</sup> Most notably, independent policy monitoring can inform possible policy alternatives by seeking to identify the causes of governance problems, rather than just focusing on their symptoms. In addition, independent monitoring capacity can generate the credible evidence that advocacy campaigns may need to reframe debates, to generate positive media coverage, to isolate adversaries and to win over allies.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, if and when advocacy campaigns *do* win policy victories, they need some degree of bottom-up monitoring capacity in order to identify the degree to which new laws and policies are actually put into practice. Participatory policy monitoring, as well as civil society engagement with other kinds of power-sharing institutions like policy councils, can go beyond a “compliance” focus to invest civil society’s political capital in strengthening the actual capacity of state

actors to effectively carry out pro-accountability policies (i.e. strong states need strong societies).

This last challenge underscores the importance of the geographic breadth of policy monitoring coverage. How do advocacy campaigns know, for example, whether and where the legal or health authorities throughout the country will respect policy wins in practice? For such campaigns, independent monitoring capacity can inform future decisions about where and how to target bottlenecks that may block the implementation of their

policy wins. In this potentially virtuous circle, evidence-gathering informs advocacy campaigns, then advocacy wins inform monitoring, which in turn informs future advocacy (as illustrated in Figure 1).<sup>76</sup>

To sum up, this issue of how to generate synergy between monitoring and advocacy raises the specific issue of how to construct and sustain coalitions that bring together socially and politically diverse pro-accountability actors, including reaching across the state–society divide in pursuit of shared goals.

## 5. Varied terms of state–society engagement: from two-dimensional to three-dimensional approaches

Conventional discourse in the TPA field frames state–society “terms of engagement” along a two-dimensional continuum that ranges from “confrontational” to “constructive” engagement. This section spells out the limitations of this widely assumed dichotomy and explains why theories of change for accountability-building need a more three-dimensional approach, which can account for diverse combinations of conflict and collaboration between actors in state and society.

### Outsider protest and advocacy

The multi-level monitoring and advocacy approach developed here, even where civil society-led, often requires some degree of engagement and dialogue with the state. Reviewing the cases of vertical integration that have emerged so far in an ongoing review of the empirical landscape, the evidence of accountability failures produced by monitoring is often deployed in dialogue with government reformers that at least nominally accept the principle of evidence-based policy-making. CSO capacity to gain broad coverage in terms of independent monitoring of the public sector across territories, or upwards through the supply chain of service delivery, often requires some degree of institutional partnership or official access – though public access to information laws can enable more arms-length approaches. Yet collective action that more directly challenges state authority is also relevant for understanding empowerment for accountability.

Purely outsider advocacy for accountability can certainly make a difference, especially when backed by civic muscle through mass protest – though protest movements can also turn out to be ephemeral

or get dismantled by backlash (e.g. Carothers and Youngs 2015). Analysts of social movements have long addressed the question of the motivations and dynamics of collective action, which may involve recognising a productive role for anger that does not fit easily into conventional discussions of accountability initiatives.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, even outside the social movement context, micro-level state–citizen interfaces may involve “rude accountabilities” that have received little research attention in the TPA field (Hossain 2010). Empowerment for accountability may take the form of larger-scale civic resistance, a repertoire that involves a deep scepticism towards engagement with governments (or specific agencies, such as the police) perceived as illegitimate. The research literature on accountability has only barely begun to consider lessons and insights from citizen engagement that takes the form of mass direct action (e.g. Beyerle 2014).

Insofar as purely outsider movements rely on the power of numbers for both disruptive power and broad legitimacy, scale matters greatly. The dynamics of diffusion of mass mobilisation are a major concern for analysts of social movements (e.g. Kolins Givan, Roberts and Soule 2010; McAdam et al 2001; Piven and Cloward 1979). Research on collective action also emphasises tipping points when movements reach a “critical mass” (Marwell and Oliver 1993). This would be analogous to the definition of “scaling up” that focuses on inflection points from linear to exponential growth.

Among purely outsider movements that manage to scale up and become national, some directly reject a regime’s legitimacy.<sup>78</sup> Here, the most clear-cut cases of the relationship between empowerment and accountability involve direct challenges to

authoritarian regimes. The overthrow of dictatorships by mass protest movements are cases of political accountability par excellence, and regime change through non-violent “people power” has become a widely emulated strategy, at least since the fall of Philippines’ dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. Most resistance movements do not get this far, but some manage to hold authoritarian regimes at bay, or even create long-term, de facto subnational dual power situations that include alternative public accountability institutions (e.g. the Zapatista territory in Chiapas, Mexico, or the Kurdish territory in Syria).

Extensive research literatures address puzzles such as when does repression lead to more versus less protest, and under what conditions broad-based civic resistance wins or loses.<sup>79</sup> In the field of transparency, participation and accountability, however, analysis of the relationship between empowerment and accountability has yet to draw relevant lessons from either the very broad, multi-disciplinary literature that addresses motivations for collective action, or the more specialised literature on how social movements take off.<sup>80</sup>

Among outsider protest and advocacy campaigns, the distinction between monitoring and advocacy is still relevant. Policy monitoring can identify where key decisions are really made, as well as more vulnerable pressure points, and is therefore relevant for targeting protest for maximum “efficiency”. If such adversarial approaches manage to extract policy concessions, they are usually uneven and partial at best. Moreover, official promises of institutional change made in negotiations during peak mobilisation are often broken once protesters go home. As a result, even “pure” outsider campaigns need some independent monitoring capacity in order to identify where to concentrate subsequent rounds of protest.

This “monitoring for targeting pressure” involves distinguishing between those elements of the state that oppose accountability reforms most strongly, versus those that have some interest in moving them forward (if any).<sup>81</sup> Even in the absence of explicit insider-outsider coalitions, the influence of protest on the state takes the form of empowering some elements of the state to deliver, while weakening other elements within the state to block concessions.<sup>82</sup> This interactive process, in which external societal pressure shifts the balance of power within the state, can be understood through the lens of the “state-society synergy” framework (Fox 2007b; Evans 1996).

## Framing choices: constructive engagement or collaborative coalitions?

The TPA field includes a wide range of approaches to the terms of engagement between state and society, but the dominant frame in international development

agencies poses a dichotomy between what are termed “constructive engagement” and “confrontational relationships”.<sup>83</sup> In contrast, this paper’s emphasis on seeking analytical leverage on the dynamics of multi-level synergy between monitoring and advocacy questions that dichotomy. In practice, existing accountability initiatives pursue diverse combinations of more versus less collaborative terms of engagement with the state (depending on which part of the state they are dealing with). This is especially the case for participatory accountability initiatives that emerge organically from ongoing state-society accountability debates – as in Brazil, India or Mexico – in contrast to external donor-led interventions, especially in aid-dependent countries, which tend to accept the conventional constructive engagement frame.

In principle, the constructive engagement approach (collaborative partnerships between reformists in government and civil society) can strengthen insider reformists by providing them with civil society backing, as well as with eyes and ears on the ground. However, policy-makers often expect civil society partners to abstain from any public criticism of the government, which in turn might reduce CSO leverage. After all, willingness to consider an exit option increases bargaining power. Indeed, the experience in the Philippines suggests that government participants in these partnerships tend to discourage their CSO partners from publicly targeting anti-accountability forces in government, since an adversarial approach would carry the risk of a political backlash against the insider reformers (Fox and Acheron 2016). Insider allies may also fear that CSO revelations of governance failures will be used against them in the next election, even if they are not responsible for the problems. At the same time, from the CSO point of view, if their allies lose the next election, that could close future doors.

The constructive engagement frame may be most relevant in more closed political contexts. Where there is little-to-no political space for autonomous civil society, freedom of association or the press, subordinated alliances with more enlightened elements within government may be the only avenue open for CSOs to address governance failures. The creation of modest “free spaces” for even very constrained collective deliberation and action could turn out to be significant in the future, if and when authoritarian regimes liberalise (e.g. Ethiopia, Mexico, Rwanda or Zimbabwe, in the 1970s and 1980s).<sup>84</sup>

The term “constructive engagement” may well constrain strategic thinking, insofar as the language conceals the full range of possible collaborations between reformers in state and society. The word “constructive” implies that adversarial approaches are necessarily *not* constructive, yet insider reformists may well *need* external pressure on anti-reform forces to

gain leverage. In other words, strategic state–society coalitions may actually *combine* CSO collaboration with pro-reform forces in government on the one hand, with conflict that is targeted to weaken the vested interests in government that oppose reform on the other. As an alternative, the term “state–society coalitions for change” leaves room for this productive deployment of adversarial approaches and therefore captures a more strategic approach to *collaborative* change than does the term “constructive engagement”.<sup>85</sup>

## Framing choices: confrontational or adversarial?

Turning to the other side of the conventional dichotomy, “confrontational” implies – at least for unsympathetic governments and some international donors – the implicitly illegitimate questioning of authority, often through what are assumed to be extra-institutional means.<sup>86</sup> Setting aside for a moment that in democracies, (non-violent) extra-institutional protest is recognised as a core, legitimate part of the policy process, the question of what counts as confrontation raises the fact that “where you stand depends on where you sit”. For example, when citizens question authorities in official forums in ways that independent observers may consider to be firm but polite, combining evidence to support a critique with proposals for change, those officials who are expected to listen may well experience such questioning as indeed confrontational – especially if these exchanges take place in public. After all, “answerability” – a core element of accountability – may make those authorities who are questioned feel uncomfortable.

Yet this potential for discomfort is the causal mechanism; it is why answerability is a potential dimension of accountability. Without at least the threat of public exposure and discomfort, answerability would be reduced to a mere ritualistic performance rather than an actual dimension of accountability. After all, answerability without tangible consequences is already a “soft” form of accountability (Fox 2007a). Meanwhile, from the point of view of those civic actors who are doing the questioning in such settings, they may feel like they are doing their utmost to be constructive, containing their anger while risking criticism from more radical counterparts for being overly polite.

The rather subjective, imprecise and indeed ideological character of the term “confrontational” in the TPA field indicates that a less charged word would be useful to capture societal efforts to speak the truth to power. “Adversarial” may be more appropriate to convey processes in which societal and state actors clash over answerability and enforcement. “Critical engagement” is another relevant term.<sup>87</sup> Both implicitly recognise the legitimacy of open debate and speaking the truth

to power. They also avoid the implication that such debates are necessarily extra-institutional.

For those interested in analysis that can guide accountability strategies, it may be worth recognising the potentially “productive” nature of specifically adversarial processes, both inside and outside of formal institutions. Indeed, many government institutions are created precisely in order to regulate and bound adversarial processes that are intended to generate accountability. Let us start with the rule of law, in which court systems and lawsuits (under democracies) are intended to produce accountability. In the field of open government, consider the agencies created to adjudicate citizens’ complaints that their information requests have been unjustly rejected by government agencies.<sup>88</sup> In India, the remarkable official public information access system is sometimes perceived as adversarial by both advocates and opponents of accountability. In the social accountability field, consider as well India’s widely recognised social audits, which take the form of widely attended public hearings in which oral and written testimony can expose corruption literally in the presence of the accused – a civil society innovation now enshrined in national legislation.<sup>89</sup>

Formal adversarial accountability claims also play a central role in political democracy. Competitive elections are the political accountability mechanism par excellence, and they are adversarial by definition. In a wide range of formal legal and political arenas, accountability *requires* conflict, often within public institutions created to adjudicate such conflicts. In contrast, the conventional constructive versus confrontational dichotomy both denies the legitimacy of conflict and ignores its potential contribution to the *production* of accountability.

## Reframing state–society terms of engagement: from two-dimensional to three-dimensional

To sum up, the conventional dichotomy between constructive versus confrontational reflects a two-dimensional understanding of state–society relations. The implication is that either societal actors are in effect subordinate partners to the state, or they directly challenge the state in extra-institutional ways considered illegitimate by power-holders, both in the state and in international donor agencies. The approach proposed here offers a three-dimensional approach, insofar as societal actors can collaborate with some state actors while challenging others. Instead of assuming a dichotomy between confrontation and collaboration, this approach envisages seeing citizen questioning of authority as falling more along a continuum: it can be either more or less adversarial, with only an extreme end



of the continuum involving actual extra-institutional confrontation.

One genre of this three-dimensional approach involves sandwich strategies, in which the construction of accountability is driven by coalitions of pro-accountability forces that bridge the state–society divide, acting to offset anti-accountability forces that

are also often embedded both in state and society (Fox 2015, 2014, 2007b). In this scenario, pro-accountability forces in both state and society ally, in an effort to isolate and weaken anti-accountability forces in both state and society. In this three-dimensional theory of change, strategic, targeted conflict turns out to be necessary to produce accountability. Conflict can therefore be constructive.

## 6. Grounding vertical integration in nine cases

The nine cases discussed in this section were chosen because they combine monitoring and advocacy efforts across levels of the state, targeting specific national policies for public service delivery. These policies all directly affect social constituencies that are both potential eyes and ears for monitoring, and potential collective actors to provide civic muscle to bolster pro-accountability reforms. As noted, the rationale for examining three cases in each country is intended to illustrate that within relatively robust national civil societies, multi-level monitoring and advocacy initiatives are not rare. Indeed, they respond to activists' learning by doing.

The three cases in each country certainly do not exhaust each nation's relevant civil society landscape. Probing other issue areas would reveal more multi-level initiatives (e.g. water, forest management, extractives, etc.), while looking deeper into certain subnational territories, where legacies of state–society synergy have managed to produce strong public institutions, would lead to additional cases (e.g. Kerala). The three countries under discussion share a significant degree of stateness, insofar as their regimes are stable, political leadership is determined by well-institutionalised competitive elections (in spite of the persistence of vote-buying), and their nation states manage to actually govern much of their territory.

In the context of growing interest in the TPA field in addressing the challenges that are specific to fragile and conflict settings, one might ask how to draw relevant lessons from this selection of country experiences. The most general response would be to note that the study of the dynamics of existing (or past) vertical integration could inform experimentation in other settings. Three more precise responses to the question of the relevance of these cases to fragile and conflict settings are as follows.

1. Even where national governments appear to have a high degree of state capacity, when it comes to public accountability and oversight, those specific

public institutions are often much weaker than the rest of the state apparatus. Civil society engagement offers one path to strengthen them, and analysis of fragile and conflict settings could concentrate on identifying such opportunities for triggering virtuous circles of mutual empowerment between pro-accountability actors in state and society.

2. All three countries include within them significant subnational territories that could be considered fragile and conflict settings. In all three, the legitimacy of the nation state is contested in significant subnational territories.
  - India has to deal with partial dual power situations in persistently Maoist areas, and it does not govern through normal democratic institutions in Kashmir.
  - The Philippines contends with both an ongoing communist insurgency in some rural areas and the Moro autonomy conflict, which is currently addressed by a temporary autonomous regional governance compromise. Both are the focus of political negotiations.
  - The Mexican state is faced with multiple de facto dual power situations, as organised crime has become a dominant force in several states, including the colonisation of the state apparatus itself at multiple levels.

In terms of posing a challenge to the state's monopoly on the use of force, the long-standing political stalemate in Chiapas, which involves de facto tolerance of indigenous regional self-governance in Zapatista territory, pales by comparison. This shared pattern of incomplete territorial governance indicates that one promising research strategy for drawing lessons from these countries for fragile and conflict settings would be to recognise that such situations persist within those same countries. A next step would be to



explore whether and how existing TPA initiatives in those countries either have tried, or could be extended, to “reach” those regions where nation-state governance is incomplete or contested. Indeed, some of the vertical integration cases outlined here do cover fragile and conflict settings (e.g. Chhattisgarh in India, Guerrero in Mexico and Mindanao in the Philippines).

3. The third reason why more in-depth research in these cases could be relevant to the analysis of accountability initiatives in fragile and conflict settings is that citizens take significant risks by participating. Recognition of the fear factor is notably absent from most research in the TPA field. In India, Mexico and the Philippines, grassroots citizen activists who engage in policy advocacy and monitoring are regularly murdered, as in the notable case of more than 50 information requesters in India (Pande 2015, based on press reports). Though the perpetrators may be non-state actors, they often enjoy the de facto protection of the state. Future research on at least some of these cases may therefore be relevant to inform strategies for addressing the fear factor inherent in the decision to exercise rights.

The capsule summaries of each case that follow do not do justice to the diversity of issues and actors involved; instead, they focus specifically on their multi-level nature and their combination of monitoring and advocacy. Because these cases all serve to illustrate empirical examples of the pursuit of synergy illustrated conceptually in Figure 1, they warrant much more nuanced and in-depth process tracing analysis to better understand their strengths and limitations.

## Philippines

### *Textbook Count*

The Textbook Count campaign is particularly emblematic of vertical integration because its coordinated action – between national CSOs, reformists in government and broad-based civic organisations – made the comprehensive, independent oversight of the textbook system possible. CSOs monitored each link in the supply chain, including contracting, the quality of production, as well as multiple levels of the Department of Education’s book distribution process, from districts to the vast majority of schools in the country. National CSOs collaborated with both the Department of Education and broad-based civic organisations whose citizen monitors managed to cover between 70–80% of the textbook delivery points in the country. Joint CSO–government problem-solving sessions resolved issues identified, and overall corruption was reduced and efficiency increased.<sup>90</sup>

The campaign carried out four rounds of national mobilisation under independent CSO coordination

between 2003 and 2007. Diverse CSOs were closely articulated from the local to provincial and national levels, in most of the country. However, when CSOs handed national coordination to the Department of Education, the quality control of third-party monitoring was lost and it is not clear to what degree the accomplishments survived. Of the many CSO public oversight initiatives that flourished during this period, few survive, but Textbook Count achieved the broadest coverage, in social and territorial terms.

### *Reproductive health law*

Twelve years of multi-level CSO advocacy in the Philippines, together with insider allies, led to a landmark reproductive health law in 2012.<sup>91</sup> Coordinated by the Reproductive Health Alliance Network, the campaign combined extensive public education efforts, diverse bottom-up organising initiatives at local and provincial levels, legal strategies and participation in “invited spaces”. The campaign built momentum for a national law by pursuing a multi-level approach, passing pro-family planning to local government initiatives (a tactic matched by the opposition). The campaign was highly successful at winning over public opinion, which helped to counter entrenched, multi-level opposition (e.g. from Catholic bishops) and win over the president.

Once the law was passed, the campaign focused on implementation, which faced both legal and bureaucratic hurdles. The law’s national implementation team included six elected CSO representatives, including Likhaan, the women’s health organisation that served as the campaign’s secretariat. Before, CSOs had not been included in monitoring the government’s health policy. The government’s monitoring of the law’s implementation was strengthened and broadened with CSO support, though it was still constrained by a reliance on data provided by relatively autonomous local governments. CSO leaders considered this self-reported official data to be less reliable than survey-based information. In contrast to the campaign’s multi-level advocacy campaign to promote the law’s passage, CSOs lacked the technical capacity and territorial reach to vet official government health data, while the government did not allocate any dedicated funding for monitoring and evaluation.<sup>92</sup>

### *Conditional cash transfer programme*

Since 2008, Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government, a provincial civic organisation in the northern Philippines, has been monitoring the government’s flagship anti-poverty conditional programme, known as I-Pantiwid or the 4Ps, which is based on cash transfers (Bhargava and Raha 2015; CCAGG 2015). This multi-stakeholder initiative involves close collaboration between CSOs and both national and local government agencies, with media and audit

agencies acting as observers. The policy monitoring is multi-level insofar as several CSOs collaborate at the regional level, while also partnering with community-level stakeholders, specifically the “parent leaders”, to train them to become advocates for programme beneficiaries.

CSO monitoring focused primarily on helping the programme to meet its goals.<sup>93</sup> The monitoring initiative was triggered by problems with both inclusion and exclusion in the programme, so oversight and problem-solving emphasised the inclusion of more eligible participants and the removal of ineligible subsidy recipients from the roster, as well as improving the payment process. The case-based problem-solving efforts were multi-level, while monitoring focused on the local level, rather than on informing advocacy proposals to address possible issues in the upstream policy process. CSO monitoring found that the anti-poverty programme’s mechanism to redress grievances was operating, but its wheels turned slowly. CSO leaders identified the empowerment of parent leaders as one of the monitoring initiative’s main strengths, insofar as their oversight efforts began to address other government programmes as well.<sup>94</sup>

## India

### *Right to information campaign*

India’s right to information law earned global recognition for both its comprehensive nature and the advocacy campaign that made it possible (Sharma, P. 2015; Sharma, A. 2013; Baviskar 2010; Singh 2007). Launched in 1996, the National Campaign for Right to Information became a broad-based, multi-level and unusually cross-sectoral network that brought together grassroots organisations, issue-based campaigns, media leaders, lawyers, and extensive networks of current and retired senior civil servants.

The passage of the national law in 2005 was preceded by numerous, diverse state-level campaigns, and eight of those states passed right-to-information laws. Though these state laws tended to be weak, they provided a focus for state-level CSO action and coalition-building. Indeed, in Rajasthan, the state with the most vigorous, agenda-setting grassroots right-to-information campaign, known as Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, opposition from state bureaucrats blocked the passage of a state law (Pande 2014; Roy and Dey 2002; Jenkins and Goetz 1999). Yet the grassroots and state-level organisation energised the national advocacy work to raise the bar with a comprehensive federal law, and campaigners’ access to a victorious centre-left national electoral coalition helped to tip the balance.

Once the national law was passed, advocates used direct-action protests to block efforts by senior bureaucrats to water down the law, followed by

public awareness campaigns and monitoring and advocacy to promote its implementation. Monitoring capacity varies widely across India’s states, but the challenges of implementing the law have been monitored regularly from a national perspective (RaaG 2014, 2009). Persistent issues include the weakness of appeals mechanisms at state and federal levels, limited proactive disclosure by government agencies, and violent reprisals against information requesters, especially grassroots leaders of campaigns to resist displacement (Pande 2015).

### *Right to food campaign*

The Indian state carries out numerous food-related social programmes, but in much of the country the institutions for public oversight are weak. Diverse civil society advocacy, monitoring and legal rights initiatives have long attempted to improve policy implementation, and they came together to support public interest litigation, an action commonly known as the right to food campaign, which began in 2001. This national campaign involves state-level actors with links to grassroots organisations, while the involvement of the Supreme Court has led to the appointment of commissioners who have become allies for national and state-level advocates. The federal government’s passage of a new food security law in 2013 created a framework that encouraged CSO advocates to work with state governments to contain leakage of resources and improve pro-poor targeting, with some notable progress so far.<sup>95</sup> These reforms of anti-poverty programmes via institutional change are currently in open political competition with tech-led targeting initiatives, such as the Aadhaar biometric card.<sup>96</sup>

State governments are mandated to monitor the implementation of public distribution systems, through inspectors, hotlines, and ICT and phone reporting tools, but their efforts have been very uneven.<sup>97</sup> CSO monitoring has concentrated on India’s primary food security programme, the Public Distribution System, addressing local diversion from retail outlets (selling subsidised food to non-poor people) or occasional larger scandals. Grassroots public hearings, pioneered with the right to information movement, also serve to expose accountability failures at food shops, but without the systematic monitoring of upstream leakages.

Increasingly, action-researchers are using consumer surveys to assess the public distribution system’s performance. The uneven performance of the system appears to be related, at least in part, to variation in distribution channels. Some states rely on private sector shops, which have a strong incentive to divert subsidised food to better-off customers who can pay the full price. Other states market the subsidised food through shops managed by local governments and social organisations, which are more likely to be accountable to low-income consumers.

### ***Community monitoring in the National Rural Health Mission***

Like the right-to-information and food campaigns, the inclusion of officially recognised community monitoring in the National Rural Health Mission is a government programme created in response to a multi-level advocacy coalition – the People’s Health Movement – that reaches across many Indian states. Unlike the previous case studies, the National Rural Health Mission is a national programme rather than a law. Launched in nine states, it promotes partnerships between health service providers, citizens, local governments and civic organisations, including an official national oversight committee, the Advisory Group on Community Action, that includes CSO participation. This process emphasises partnerships with state-level CSOs and governments, supporting village health committees, developing monitoring methods for village-level health report cards, and promoting a repertoire of grassroots public dialogues and hearings to disseminate and address monitoring findings.<sup>98</sup>

The community-based monitoring (CBM) process was launched in nine Indian states in 2007, and has continued with successive expansions in the state of Maharashtra. The CSO SATHI, together with the state government and 50 partners, has coordinated intensive community monitoring, which now covers over 800 villages.<sup>99</sup> In addition, 405 public dialogues between 2007 and 2014 encouraged local governments to focus more, and service providers improved the construction and maintenance of facilities while beginning to offer mandated laboratory and indoor services. Structural problems persisted, such as understaffing and problems with using tied funds for outreach. State-level authorities were relatively more supportive of locally focused accountability efforts compared to middle-level health system managers.

Some aspects of health-provider functioning have significantly improved in CBM areas, such as stopping illegal fees, more regular staff attendance, improved behaviour towards patients and public display of information, such issues being labelled “CBM-sensitive”.<sup>100</sup> The CBM process also identified some problems as “CBM-resistant” and pursued “creative conflict” and “people reclaiming health services” approaches.<sup>101</sup>

The broader health policy context currently appears unfavourable, with low spending and staff shortages for public services, which leads some to conclude that the government might instead favour private health provision. Though its future is uncertain, this CBM process in Maharashtra is still one of the largest and most comprehensive multi-level coordination monitoring and advocacy initiatives focused specifically on health policy in India.<sup>102</sup>

## **Mexico**

### ***Community food councils***

This longstanding, national-level, rural food marketing programme encouraged citizen oversight at both community and regional levels, and is therefore an example of partial integration of citizen oversight. The programme was launched in 1979 and still delivers staple foods to more than 27,000 village stores, which are supplied by 300 warehouses. The architects of this social accountability process created multi-level invited spaces, and some became autonomous claimed spaces in practice.<sup>103</sup> Elected village committees – known as community food councils – oversaw the management of the local stores, but what made the programme design especially distinctive was that those committees were represented on the elected regional warehouse oversight councils.

The regional warehouse oversight councils had an anti-corruption mission: to ensure that the subsidised staple food was delivered from the warehouses to remote villages. They were also nominally networked at state and national levels, but the councils only exercised sufficient autonomy to play an oversight role at the regional level.

Community food council leaders faced the challenge of fending off attempts by the ruling party to use the programme for political control: a persistent problem in Mexico. The councils’ approach to anti-corruption was primarily preventative, since they had little formal recourse when food supplies were diverted. Reformist national policy-makers in charge of the programme knew that if this oversight system was to work, the regional warehouse oversight councils had to be autonomous from the bureaucracy, the ruling party and local elites; this led them to recruit hundreds of non-partisan community organisers to create regional free spaces that allowed village representatives to exercise freedom of association and expression.<sup>104</sup>

This approach set a precedent back in the early 1980s, when Mexico was under an authoritarian one-party political system. About one third of these regional councils managed to act as autonomous countervailing powers, according to field research carried out in 1985–1986 and again in 2005–2006 (Fox 2007b, 1992b). By the late 1990s, networks of regional food councils had gained sufficient national clout to roll back an attempt by national technocrats to dismantle the programme, briefly reaching full vertical integration of policy oversight and advocacy. By 2016, however, few autonomous councils had survived the many years of a hostile policy environment, combined with the lack of allies in both state and society.<sup>105</sup>

### ***Maternal Mortality Observatory***

Mexican civil society actors have been undertaking policy monitoring and advocacy work to reduce

maternal mortality for more than 25 years.<sup>106</sup> In one example, CSOs, academics, women's organisations, international agencies and government officials partnered in the multi-stakeholder Committee to Promote Safe Motherhood to discuss trends, causes, consequences and strategies. Behind Mexico's national average for maternal mortality are high degrees of social and territorial inequality, so this effort focused on health services for indigenous women in the southern states of Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca.

Two autonomous federal agencies – the National Women's Institute and the National Commission for Evaluation of Social Policy – were especially supportive, requesting joint health policy evaluations.<sup>107</sup> The national multi-stakeholder network helped to create space for state-level CSOs and researchers to encourage agreements with state health authorities, which are primarily responsible for service delivery.<sup>108</sup> This collaborative problem-solving campaign then bolstered its capacity for autonomous monitoring by launching the Maternal Mortality Observatory, with technical support from the United Nations and the Pan American Health Organization. Non-governmental participants valued its technical independence from governmental data sources.

Monitoring goals included tracking national trends, highlighting good practices for mortality reduction and documenting whether government agencies meet their commitments. The Maternal Mortality Observatory began monitoring the government's key maternal and perinatal health program in 2011. It discovered that funding earmarked to support specific mortality prevention programmes disappeared when the funds reached state governments. They also learned that state government health staff did not know the procedures for spending resources appropriately, in part because of high staff turnover. The Observatory also detailed problems with federal-to-state disbursement processes.

The multi-stakeholder problem-solving process persuaded health authorities to respond to these issues. In spite of the risk of violent reprisals, independent state- and municipal-level monitoring of health policy implementation also revealed extensive corruption, though their reports appear to have been ignored by authorities.<sup>109</sup> In 2015, the Observatory's evidence informed a new law that mandated health services to strengthen their emergency obstetric services (Argüello 2016). It now monitors the implementation of this new policy, which is a key indicator of implementation of broader reforms that promise the “universalisation” of health services.

### ***Family planning budgets***

Mexico's advocacy campaigners for reproductive rights won a significant victory when, in 2011, the government launched a plan to address teenage

pregnancy that included a specific budget earmarked for adolescent sexual and reproductive health. In order to identify possible implementation bottlenecks, one of the participants in the CSO advocacy coalition – the Mexican Family Planning Foundation, an affiliate of International Planned Parenthood Federation – launched a public budget-monitoring initiative in 2010 that including the tracking of state governments' implementation of the federal policy.

The Foundation spent three years learning to use the government's public information request system to track both budget allocations and spending in the states with the highest teenage pregnancy rates. It found that federal funds often did not reach the states in time to be spent during the annual budget cycle, so that much of the funding was either spent inappropriately or had to be returned. Also, contraceptive stock-outs were pervasive. This multi-level monitoring informed the Foundation's problem-solving advocacy at the federal level, which led to two key policy changes after seven years: the disbursement of programme funds much earlier in the budget year, and central government procurement of contraceptive purchases (Delgado 2016).<sup>110</sup> This case shows that technical budget analysis can identify subtle institutional weaknesses, which can be addressed with external oversight when entrenched vested interests are not directly involved.

## **Comparative reflections**

These summaries indicate that participatory accountability initiatives that both work across scale and seek synergy between monitoring and advocacy are not rare. Future research that looks across issue silos through the lens of scale is likely to discover numerous other relevant, comparable cases. A larger base of documented cases of scale shift and vertical integration would serve as a basis for much more systematic comparative analysis, which may in turn generate more fine-tuned research hypotheses suitable for more rigorous testing.

These nine cases include diverse patterns of state-society engagement, all within the broad category of critical collaboration (see Table 1). Most involve multi-stakeholder initiatives that cut across the state-society divide; the only case that was purely government-led (Mexico's community food councils) dated from decades before such partnerships became a central part of the governance reform repertoire. Most of the nine cases involved multiple levels (at least more than two) of coordinated monitoring and advocacy, though only one (Textbook Count) involved “full CSO coverage” of an entire policy supply chain. The cases also varied widely in terms of their approach to citizen voice, ranging from seeking broad policy



change to more narrow problem-solving limited to addressing specific implementation problems (see Table 2). While the closest to a “paradigm case” of vertical integration – Textbook Count – involved a

clear division of labour between national advocacy / problem-solving and local citizen voice largely limited to monitoring, most of the initiatives summarised here avoided that dichotomy.

**Table 1** Patterns of CSO–government engagement in multi-level monitoring and advocacy cases

	Monitoring		Advocacy / problem-solving	
	Local / subnational level	National level (government-led or CSO-led)	Local / subnational level (breadth of coverage)	National level (government-led, or CSO-led)
<b>Philippines</b>				
<b>Textbook Count</b>	CSO-led	Government–CSO partnership; invited space		Government–CSO partnership; invited space
<b>Reproductive health law</b>	CSO-led	CSO role in government-invited space to monitor implementation	CSO-led	CSO-led advocacy for new law, with legislative allies; claimed space
<b>Conditional cash transfer programme</b>	CSO-led, in partnership with local government	Invited space with CSO participation	CSO-led	Invited space with CSO participation; invited space
<b>India</b>				
<b>Right to information campaign</b>	CSO-led	CSO-led	CSO-led	CSO-led; claimed space
<b>Right to food campaign</b>	Some CSO-led, some state-led	CSO-led, with litigation allies	CSO-led advocacy; state-led problem-solving	CSO-led, reinforced by Supreme Court decision; claimed space
<b>National Rural Health Mission</b>	CSO–state government partnership	CSO–health programme advisory committee	CSO–state government partnership	Government-led, CSO invited space
<b>Mexico</b>				
<b>Community food councils</b>	Government-sponsored; council-led; invited space	Government-sponsored national committee of councils; invited space	Autonomous council-led; invited spaces once claimed	No autonomous national coordination
<b>Maternal Mortality Observatory</b>	CSO-led; government participation	CSO-led; government participation; joint evaluations in invited spaces	CSO-led; government participation	CSO-led, with government participation
<b>Family planning budgets</b>	CSO-led	CSO-led	CSO-led	CSO-led



**Table 2** Mapping the geographic reach of multi-level monitoring and advocacy cases

	Multi-level CSO policy oversight				
	Monitoring		Advocacy / problem-solving		
	Local / subnational	National	Local / subnational (breadth of coverage)	National	Subnational presence of citizen oversight efforts
Philippines					
Textbook Count	X	X	X	X	Up to 80% of delivery points
Reproductive health law	X	X	X	X	Very broad during advocacy for the law
Conditional cash transfer programme	X		X		Abra province and Northern Luzon region
India					
Right to information campaign	X	X	X	X	Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh
Right to food campaign	X	X	X		Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal
National Rural Health Mission	X	X	X	X	Maharashtra
Mexico					
Community food councils	X		X		One third of councils nationwide in low-income rural areas; 1980–2006 (approximately)
Maternal Mortality Observatory	X	X	X	X	States of Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca; federal level
Family planning budgets	X	X	X	X	State of Queretaro; federal level

## 7. Looking forward: concluding questions

Looking ahead, this discussion of the research challenges involved in multi-level CSO monitoring and advocacy initiatives suggests some broad directions for future analysis. The first involves more systematic case documentation, to broaden and deepen the evidence base needed for more robust analysis of the dynamics and impact of multi-level monitoring and advocacy. This would involve follow-up on the previous empirical discussion, which offered nine examples of relevant cases and began to review the broader patterns that emerged. The next agenda-setting challenge will be explored in this concluding section, through three analytical questions that have yet to receive significant attention. Finally, the annex proposes a series of more focused preliminary hypotheses, in order to stimulate discussion about how researchers might go about applying more systematic empirical tests of this paper's core propositions.

### **If scale shift matters, then how and why does it happen?**

In the context of this discussion, scale shift includes both transitions to multi-level CSO links and the broadening of the territorial reach of citizen-led monitoring and advocacy. If scale shift looks especially promising, then how are the opportunities and constraints perceived by relevant actors? Looking from the bottom up, how and why do socially grounded civic initiatives spread from 10 to 50 to 500 communities? How can this process avoid the traps that have held back previous top-down efforts to scale up participatory approaches, such as bureaucratic neutering (Blackburn with Holland 1998) or elite capture (Mansuri and Rao 2013)? How do those communities, in turn, project oversight capacity and the power to advocate for themselves upstream in the policy process? This involves building the capacity to aggregate voice, to engage in collective action at scale, and to construct representative organisations that embody both legitimacy and authenticity.

In contrast, looking from the national level towards the subnational and local, how do campaigns led from the capital sink roots more broadly and deeply within existing, organised civil society that is closer to the ground? This often involves cross-sectoral coalition-building, which is not often treated as a focus of research. Moreover, campaigns often shift scale in response to changing opportunities and constraints at different levels of the state, which are caused by the changing balance of forces in the political system (e.g.

Pande 2016). In the process, how do policy advocacy campaigns collaborate with some levels and branches of the state, while also challenging others? Cutting across these processes is the question of how ICT can play the role of enabler and accelerant (most of the cases summarised in Section 6 used, at most, mobile phones).

### **Which analytical findings from the broader social science literature on collective action are relevant for understanding the citizen-action process in the field of transparency, participation and accountability?**

In the past decade, the literature on TPA has come a long way towards bringing citizen action closer to the top of the agenda.<sup>11</sup> Yet research in this field has only just begun to tap into relevant insights from the vast, pre-existing, multi-disciplinary social science literature that has been addressing the motivations, repertoires and impacts of collective action since at least the 1970s. This literature suggests that enabling factors – such as political opportunity structures, pre-existing social networks, bridge-building interlocutors, the framing of causes in the eyes of public opinion, and processes of collective identity formation and political culture-making – will be especially relevant for understanding how pro-accountability actors can broaden both their social inclusion and territorial reach.

### **How can the black box of the state be unpacked to determine the mix of incentives and motivations that influences whether and how state actors respond to citizen voice?**

How can voice trigger “teeth”? The social science literature's response to the question of when citizen action leads to pro-accountability institutional responses is limited by its bifurcation into the study of the policy process on the one hand, and citizen action on the other (with the notable exception of key works in the social movement literature). Much of the literature on TPA interventions tends to rely on deductive assumptions to impute the motivations of public sector workers and their managers, rather than treating

motivations as a focus for research. The experimental literature, in particular, tends to treat frontline public sector workers as a homogeneous but unopened black box and then attempts to influence their behaviour based on combinations of external carrots and sticks.<sup>112</sup>

If one goal of accountability-building is to influence the behaviour of front-line service providers, then research that documents – rather than assumes – what motivates them would be very useful. Institutional ethnography can reveal both what goes on inside the state and the dynamics of state–society interfaces, and therefore has great potential to reveal both obstacles and opportunities for change. For example, there are many possible explanations for staff absenteeism; which ones hold, and in which contexts? This kind of research could inform testable hypotheses involving both institutional changes and alternative incentives.

Another promising line of research addresses the dual roles of (some) lower- and lower-middle-level state officials as both functionaries and citizens, as well as broader processes in which civic engagement can empower and enable those functionaries who want to be public servants. In some times and places, public sector workers consider themselves to be citizens as well, and have a stake in improving public services (e.g. Abers and Keck 2009). What difference could a sense of mission, professionalisation and esprit de corps make? Existing, innovative institutional political economy research on these issues, involving front-line public sector workers, has received remarkably little follow-up (e.g. Tendler 1997). What are the conditions under which their roles can be transformed from the last cog in a bureaucratic machine into responsible service providers?<sup>113</sup>

To sum up, the vertical integration proposition suggests new empirical and analytical agendas, which will hopefully contribute to the broader reboot that the TPA field needs to inform more effective strategies.

# Annex 1. A menu of testable hypotheses for discussion

These research questions and propositions focus on dynamics and pathways of change. This leads to a central concern for measuring and explaining the inherent variation in patterns of citizen action and institutional change, across societies, territories and states. These questions lead directly to questions about appropriate indicators of change. Such indicators can be both quantitative and qualitative, and with a sufficiently large number of respondents / cases, qualitative data can be translated into quantitative data.

The two analytical methods that appear to be most promising for these questions are the subnational comparative method (Snyder 2001) and process tracing (Punton and Welle 2015; Collier 2011). These two approaches for identifying causal patterns are distinct, yet highly complementary. All of the hypotheses outlined here involve the subnational comparative method, thereby holding the national political context constant. Cross-national comparison is less compelling, because extreme variation in the national context would weaken the analytical leverage of the comparative method.

This approach is not framed primarily in terms of the conventional “what works” question. It has several implications that may complicate a focus on the dynamics and pathways towards change.

- First, the phrasing of the question implies that the answer takes the form of “yes or no” when, in practice, progress towards accountability is likely to be uneven and incomplete. When breaking out of low accountability traps, achieving partial change in a minority of subnational territories may constitute a huge breakthrough, even though the initiative did not work in most of the countries. In this scenario, seeking a yes or no answer for whether an initiative works could render significant progress invisible.
- Second, embedded in the question is the implication that there is a clearly bounded “it” (read “intervention”) that either works or does not work, which reinforces the yes or no subtext.
- Third, the question implies that there is one clear, objective measure of success. Yet the definition of pro-accountability may be contested, with answers varying depending on the positionality of each stakeholder. For example, advocacy campaigners in a capital city may be very pleased with major media coverage of their cause, which could build political momentum towards future policy changes,

while citizens outside of the capital, who are directly affected by past accountability failures, may see no benefit at all.

- Fourth, the what works question can imply a relatively short time horizon, as is characterised by numerous semi-experimental interventions. This may obscure the possibility of discontinuous change in the medium term.

Insofar as the research agenda on multi-level monitoring and advocacy initiatives is still incipient, the implication is that a focus on more basic “what happened and why” should guide the documentation and analysis of a much wider range of cases, to inform more systematic, deductive hypothesis-testing in the future, once a broader empirical foundation has been built. That said, the research behind the nine case study summaries introduced in this paper suggest a series of potentially testable hypotheses, with a focus on civil society engagement for public sector accountability.

To avoid a tool-led approach to research strategy, the definition of specific indicators of action repertoires and institutional change will await feedback on the overall agenda and the specific questions proposed (e.g. what specific combinations of tactics and strategies may provide greater leverage). Another notable gap in this menu of deductive approaches is that it does not address *how* multi-level initiatives are constructed, though challenges to coalition-building across levels and sectors have been broadly addressed in previous work (Fox and Aceron 2016; Fox 2010).

## Menu of options: questions and hypotheses

### Q1) What difference does vertical integration make?

H1) CSO policy monitoring and advocacy that addresses more than one level or stage of the policy process can leverage more improvements in public service delivery than exclusively local and / or exclusively national citizen monitoring and policy dialogue.

*Method:* Compare multi-level with locally bounded monitoring and exclusively national initiatives, focused on the same accountability failures in similar constituencies in the same country.

*Potential problem:* Multi-level initiatives may not be comparable to locally bounded initiatives; they may be the product of more influential CSO coalitions, which would over-determine the institutional impact.



**Q2) Multi-level civic or social monitoring and advocacy initiatives may or may not partner with counterparts within the state. Can hybrid state–society coalitions drive sandwich strategies that strengthen pro-accountability actors?**

H2) Multi-level civic or social monitoring and advocacy initiatives that partner with pro-accountability actors within the state can generate more institutional responsiveness than civil society initiatives that lack such partnerships.

*Method:* Hold multi-level monitoring and advocacy campaigns that broadly share change goals constant, and compare those with and without collaborative coalition for change, either in different subnational territories, across issue areas, or both.

*Potential problem:* One reason why otherwise comparable accountability initiatives lack coalitions with pro-accountability state counterparts may be that such potential partners do not exist, or lack influence in their respective subnational territories or issue areas.

**Q2.1) Can partnerships with public oversight agencies bolster the leverage of vertical integration initiatives?**

H2.1) Multi-level monitoring and advocacy that partners with governmental oversight agencies can trigger mutual empowerment and leverage more answerability from public sector agencies than initiatives that do not engage with these oversight agencies.

*Method:* Compare multi-level CSO initiatives, with and without partnerships, with ombuds agencies, audit bureaus, human rights commissions and legislative oversight, and assess the impact of public oversight agencies on the rest of the state.

*Potential problem:* Some public oversight agencies may be captured by vested interests, and therefore unwilling to partner with CSOs to hold other parts of the state accountable.

**Q3) Can large international donors bolster multi-level CSO monitoring and advocacy initiatives?**

H3.1) External actors provide more added value when they target accountability initiatives that focus on specific sectors, and where both public sector and civil society actors are aligned.

*Method:* Compare external pro-accountability initiatives in sectors with and without consolidated state–society collaborative coalitions for change. Focus specifically on the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and / or World Bank citizen engagement projects.

H3.2) External actors provide more added value when they target accountability initiatives that focus on

specific subnational territories, where both public sector and civil society actors are aligned.

*Method:* Compare external pro-accountability initiatives in regions with and without consolidated state–society collaborative coalitions for change. Focus specifically on DFID and / or World Bank citizen engagement projects.

*Potential problem:* International donors may have already prioritised sectors or regions with alignment between state–society coalitions for change, which may rule out null cases for comparison

**Q4) What are the entry points to begin to bolster multi-level monitoring and advocacy initiatives in fragile / conflict settings? Would bolstering local–subnational links be most promising, or local–national links, or subnational–national links?**

H4.1) In fragile / conflict settings, to expand the breadth and depth of vertically integrated initiatives in contexts with low stateness is to strengthen CSO capacity to link local- and subnational-level oversight.

H4.2) To expand the breadth and depth of vertically integrated initiatives in contexts with low stateness is to strengthen CSO capacity to link local- and national-level oversight.

H4.3) To expand the breadth and depth of vertically integrated initiatives in contexts with low stateness is to strengthen CSO capacity to links between subnational- and national-level oversight.

*Method:* Attempt each of these three approaches, in the same country, in the same issue area, in different subnational territories.

*Potential problem:* This approach leans more towards an intervention than a campaign approach, which – if organic – would pursue an adaptive learning approach to determine which kinds of links are most important to strengthen.

**Q5) How can international donor assistance in pro-accountable governance reform be more effective?**

H5) International donor assistance to organic, bottom-up accountability campaigns will leverage greater institutional change than donor interventions that lack locally grounded, subnational counterparts.

*Method:* Here, a cross-national comparison is more viable. Compare donor investments in governance reforms in settings with and without CSO accountability campaigns. Consider controlling for issue area or scale of investment.

*Potential problem:* The very existence of accountability campaigns might indicate that conditions are already more favourable than in other settings, where “civil society failure” would support the case for more of an interventionist approach.

**Q6) What role does ICT play in improving vertical integration strategies?**

H6) Multi-level monitoring and advocacy strategies that use ICT tools to provide open government feedback about the performance of target agencies (e.g. citizen feedback portals, proactive disclosure of relevant and actionable official data, etc.) are more likely to leverage more / faster improvements in service delivery than similar multi-level initiatives that share information solely through more conventional means (e.g. community meetings, letter-writing campaigns, paper-based monitoring, etc.).

*Method:* Compare accountability initiatives that do and do not use ICT for open government / proactive disclosure about agency performance, both within and across issue areas and subnational territories.

*Potential problem:* The capacity of an accountability initiative to use strategically deploy ICT and proactive disclosure may be an indicator of greater underlying institutional capacity and political clout; this would complicate efforts to determine the specific value added of the ICT / open government dimension.

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# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For almost a decade, this field has been called transparency and accountability, or T&A. Some working in this field recognise the role of participation explicitly with the acronym TAP, but the sequence embedded in TAP implies that participation *follows* accountability, whereas the primary theory of change suggests that transparency informs participation, which in turn enables accountability. Recently, some large donors are more explicitly recognising the key role of citizen participation, as in the case of the large-scale Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme supported by UK aid from the UK government, and the Hewlett Foundation's new Global Development programme strategy (<http://hewlett.org/programs/global-development-and-population/amplifying-voices/transparency-participation-and-accountability>).

<sup>2</sup> This working paper focuses primarily on the first of these two dimensions – the multi-level links – and it will conclude by identifying the dynamics of expanding the horizontal territorial reach of pro-accountability social and civic actors as a major gap in the field. To preview this recommendation, and to understand these processes of diffusion and replication, the TPA field should draw much more systematically on both the scholarly and the practitioner literatures on social movements, with examples cited throughout this paper.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph and the next draw from Fox (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Vertical integration can be an organisational strategy, a goal for coalitions or a tool for analysis (Fox and Halloran 2016; Fox 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Consider the difference between “opaque” and “clear” transparency (Fox 2007a). Clear transparency makes accessible information that is relevant to citizens, for example about who gets what and how the powerful make decisions, both of which are key for information to be actionable for citizens. In contrast, opaque transparency discloses official data that is either unreliable, incomplete, difficult to access or process, and / or irrelevant to inform citizen action. Note as well that the “right to know” is a broader concept of transparency, insofar as it is often limited to data that the government decides to collect. For more on what is involved in citizen perceptions of the accessibility and relevance of information, embodied in the concept of targeted transparency, see Fung et al (2007).

<sup>6</sup> For example, while the Open Government Partnership has grown to 70 member countries from its original eight in 2011, the Independent Reporting Mechanism's review of the founding countries' *second* National Action Plans indicates that from the total of 185 commitments, only 11 are potentially transformational, and of those only nine made substantial progress in implementation (author's data analysis). Indeed, AidData's recent study of international efforts to promote institutional change underscored the capacity of vested interests to resist change (Parks, Rice and Custer 2015). As a result, the transparency field's vocabulary now includes “open-washing” – governmental use of open government measures to distract from persistent accountability failures. For the first scholarly work to define and document open-washing, see Brockmyer (2016).

<sup>7</sup> This new World Bank study, in effect, turns the agenda-setting 2004 *World Development Report* on its head. Recall that the 2004 *World Development Report* famously emphasised the “short route” of citizen voice to influence service delivery directly at the state–society interface. This was based on the proposition that the “long route” of citizen voice expressed through political representation, which is in principle supposed to govern public administration, is too messy, with too many bottlenecks in a long causal chain. In contrast, the 2016 *Policy Research Report* makes a strong case that, without addressing the long route to accountability, the short route won't get very far (World Bank 2016a). The 2016 report also goes beyond political accountability to focus more broadly on the importance of strategies for using information to encourage more evidence-based citizen action, to incentivise better policies more generally. For a recent practitioner-oriented analysis that makes a parallel argument about the central role of electoral engagement, see NDI (2016).

<sup>8</sup> If one looks beyond formal evidence reviews, one striking example is the current situation in Mexico, which combines one of the most robust public information access systems in the world with obvious, persistent and systemic accountability failures. For another notable national example, long-standing participant-observers in the TPA field have been puzzling over the significance of Brazil's recent political crisis. This is the country with perhaps the longest-standing, most broad-based and deeply rooted set of participatory democracy and public oversight innovations, especially at the municipal level and covering multiple issue areas, yet it turned out that these breakthroughs coexisted with more than a decade of systemic political corruption at the national level. The disconnect between participatory innovations and systemic impunity was not limited to the national government; state and municipal police also retained impunity for violence against young Afro-Brazilian men, resulting in more murders by police than during the dictatorship (e.g. Ahnen 2007).

<sup>9</sup> This proposition underscores a classic distinction, made earlier by Joshi and Houtzager (2012), between “widgets” and “watchdogs”.

<sup>10</sup> One problem with this metaphor – which is often used to claim that rights violations or accountability problems are the exception rather than the rule, and therefore not systemic – is that there is powerful counter-metaphor: “a few bad apples can spoil the whole barrel”. Commentator John Oliver makes this argument about the power of impunity in his video report on the lack of police accountability in the USA, made on 2 October 2016. See: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaD84DTGULo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaD84DTGULo)

<sup>11</sup> Thanks to Rosie McGee of Making All Voices Count for encouragement to make this point more explicit.

<sup>12</sup> This is the conclusion of Chayes' compelling analysis (2015) of “acute kleptocracies” and what she calls the vertical integration of power elites across scale. She demonstrates links between corruption, impunity and the abuse of citizens at the local level, and national political elites whose model of governance is based on a system-wide network of upwards resource extraction.

<sup>13</sup> See: <http://doingdevelopmentdifferently.com>

<sup>14</sup> Relevant metaphors include Jiu-Jitsu, as well as the David and Goliath story. One could read both Gladwell (2013) and Ganz (2009) as interpreting David as using a strategy that combined various tactics that played to his strengths, while effectively exploiting Goliath's weaknesses.

<sup>15</sup> For example, the strategy of activating and empowering public accountability agencies involves audit bureaus, human rights commissions, ombuds agencies, legislative oversight committees, etc. See, for example, Cornejo, Lavin and Mendiburu (2015a, 2015b); Cornejo, Guillán Montero and Lavin (2013); and Effective Institutions Platform (2014). Another promising set of strategically relevant issues that has not been studied in depth in the TPA context involves the incentives and motivations that influence policy-makers, programme managers and frontline service providers. In addition, more research attention should focus on how both media strategies and citizen action can influence public opinion to more effectively expose and delegitimize anti-accountability forces, while activating broader pro-accountability constituencies.

<sup>16</sup> The abbreviation CSO, which refers to civil society organisations, is intended to go beyond conventional understandings of professionalised NGOs to include the full range of formal associations in a given socio-cultural context. This is not intended to be a synonym for social movements, which usually include CSOs but often are grounded more broadly in informal associations. The focus here is on CSOs, because the focus on coordinated monitoring and advocacy suggests some degree of formal organisation, cross-sector coalition-building and capacity for deliberative strategising, in contrast to more ephemeral genres of protest and dissent.

<sup>17</sup> In spite of its wide and intuitive usage, the term "campaign" is conceptually underdeveloped, at least in the TPA field. The term is used here more broadly than in its conventional application to specific units within large international NGOs, where campaigns may be given a predetermined time frame, after which the glass is found to be half full, victory is declared and it is time to move on to the next campaign. For analyses of national change campaigns in the global South, see Brown and Fox (1998), Dalton (2007) and Gaventa and McGee (2010), among others.

<sup>18</sup> Among the many independent election oversight campaigns around the world, few have pursued "crossover" to broaden their agenda to address accountability failures in other governance arenas, such as development policy. Exceptions include National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections in the Philippines, which joined in a textbook monitoring coalition and monitored pharmaceutical procurement. Research on accountability and development has not yet addressed the relevant lessons from electoral oversight experiences.

<sup>19</sup> Note: vertical integration and multi-level will be used as synonyms.

<sup>20</sup> For extensive treatment of social accountability in fragile settings, see Grandvoinnet, Aslam and Raha (2015).

<sup>21</sup> Thanks to Brendan Halloran of the International Budget Partnership for pointing this out.

<sup>22</sup> This discussion of scale will not address the notion of time as a scale. However, this will be crucial for addressing both transitions toward strategic approaches and discontinuous institutional change (e.g. Woolcock 2013). Thanks to Duncan Edwards of Making All Voices Count for pointing out this gap.

<sup>23</sup> Thanks to Michael Fox for this observation.

<sup>24</sup> A prominent collection of development donor-oriented essays on scaling up focuses heavily on private sector business models, limiting the recognition of the differences with public goods provision to the question of financing, and whether they require subsidies to "prime the pump" (Chandy et al 2013).

<sup>25</sup> In the Philippines, Francis Isaac is currently working with the Accountability Research Center on a study that broadens the multi-level frame to include the role of diverse non-state actors at each level, using the case of the Bondoc peninsula agrarian reform campaign.

<sup>26</sup> Power is an inherently relational concept, with multiple dimensions. "Power shift" refers here to changes in the balance and distribution of power between actors. This is not a zero-sum relationship, insofar as strong (responsive) states need strong societies. The literature on power analysis is central to understanding possible pathways from empowerment to accountability. The distinctions between invisible, hidden and visible power are crucial for understanding how disparate, subordinated individuals can overcome diverse obstacles to collective action. The emphasis in this paper is on social and civic actors who have already overcome obstacles to invisible power, but more focus on that process is necessary to understand the drivers of what is called here the "expanded territorial reach" of social and civic actors involved in policy advocacy and monitoring. For notable examples of analysis of cases that build pro-accountability constituencies by addressing invisible power, see Essof and Kahn (2015) and Zulminarni and Miller (2015). For reader-friendly explanations of these concepts, see Gaventa (2006) and VeneKlasen and Miller (2008). See also the very relevant conceptual work for practitioners at: [www.powercube.net](http://www.powercube.net) and [www.justassociates.org](http://www.justassociates.org)

<sup>27</sup> The concept of scaling up is widely used, particularly in the private sector, where it refers to growing companies and markets for products and services, as well as the social media process of "going viral" (the term has more than 5 million Google hits). The prospect of reducing costs per unit through economies of scale is a major driver, insofar as scaling allows for doing more with less (World Bank 2016b). In Silicon Valley, "scaling" often refers specifically to seeking an inflection point when linear growth turns to exponential growth (thanks to Michael Fox for this observation). This approach is very compatible with the key challenge of broadening the geographic reach of an accountability initiative, from one to many localities, districts, cities or provinces. Yet identifying the factors that enable discontinuous institutional change is a challenge.

<sup>28</sup> Whether or not the hoped-for iterative learning process actually feeds back in the process is an open, empirical question, since the literature recognises that innovations that are successful at the pilot level may end up being significantly simplified or otherwise changed in order

to facilitate replication or increased uptake. This is an especially serious challenge when the idea is to scale up institutionalised forms of citizen participation in development. For diverse experiences, see Blackburn with Holland (1998).

<sup>29</sup> The literature on how innovations are taken up highlights several enabling characteristics: (1) They should address a felt need; (2) Credibility evidence and advocates help; (3) They should be testable without committing the potential constituency to making a full investment; (4) The results should be observable; (5) There should be a clear advantage over existing practices; (6) They should be easy to adopt – and “compatible with the potential users’ established values, norms and facilities” (Simmons and Shiffman 2007: 7). Notably, several of these characteristics are not associated with the vertical integration proposition, which poses a challenge for uptake and suggests the need for first-movers to “prime the pump”.

<sup>30</sup> Walji (2016: 184) points out that in order to get uptake for innovations in a large, slow-moving institution like the World Bank, serving as a platform to promote already existing innovations may be more effective than incubating new ideas.

<sup>31</sup> For an application of the last mile concept, applied to analysis of efforts by senior-level policy reformers to improve frontline public sector performance in the context of social audits in Andhra Pradesh, India, see Veeraraghavan (2015).

<sup>32</sup> This focus on perceptions of the actionability and relevance of information underscores the relevance of the remarkably underused concept of targeted transparency (Fung et al 2007).

<sup>33</sup> The concept of state–society interfaces comes from development sociology (Long 1984).

<sup>34</sup> This is not their term, but see the discussion in Polk and Knox (2015). Indeed, researchers in the ICT4D field have identified the need for more research on how ICT can be more relevant for excluded populations (Harris 2016). See also Nicholson, Nugroho and Rangaswamy (2016).

<sup>35</sup> Thanks to Duncan Edwards for discussions about this issue.

<sup>36</sup> While ICT lifts the constraints of the scope for the horizontal projection of voice, this may be limited to relatively simple declarative messages. Citizen voice that attempts to scale up deliberative processes need more institutional structure, and ICT can facilitate such initiatives. This would be the case for state-wide participatory budgeting, for example (Peixoto and Fox 2016a).

<sup>37</sup> For diverse studies of deliberative citizen engagement processes, see Heller and Rao (2015).

<sup>38</sup> Awareness and mobilisation in defensive response to perceived injustices or threats appear to spread much more rapidly than the capacity for the same constituencies to deliberate, develop proposals and create the coalitions needed to move them forward.

<sup>39</sup> For more on “hybrid” accountability, see Goetz and Jenkins (2001) and Ackerman (2004).

<sup>40</sup> Keep in mind, however, that the goal of promoting citizen demand for accountability can be perverted when political

entrepreneurs who disseminate *disinformation* manage to outflank the purveyors of evidence-based approaches, twisting the demand for public accountability into governmental stigmatisation and criminalisation of “others” (e.g. the mass incarceration of non-violent drug offenders in the USA; the “stop and frisk” policy in New York City, USA; police murders of low-level drug consumers in the Philippines; attacks on immigrants and refugees around the globe, etc.).

<sup>41</sup> Tarrow (2005) calls such multi-level bridge-builders “rooted cosmopolitans” in his study of transnational civil society. The contribution of those actors whose social locations and cultural capital allow them to link otherwise disconnected social actors is also embedded in the important conceptual distinction between bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 2000; Woolcock and Narayan 2000), a notion that in turn reaches back to the classic “strength of weak ties” (Granovetter 1973). That idea refers to the central role played by even modest external connections, to prevent the isolation of local social actors from allowing elites to crush them with impunity.

<sup>42</sup> This paper does not attempt to address the dynamics of such a transition, though Fox and Acheron (2016) address many of the coalitional challenges involved in building bridges between broad-based membership organisations and more technical or national capital city-oriented CSOs.

<sup>43</sup> For important exceptions, see the cases in Silva (2013), especially the work of Spalding (2013, 2015) and von Bülow (2013). The Silva collection is especially strong on the dynamics of scale shift from the national to transnational arenas, though the local–subnational–national links tend to be subsumed under the generic category of “domestic” politics. For a recent analysis of scale shifts, both up and down, between local, state and national political arenas, see Pande’s analysis of India’s right to information campaign (2016).

<sup>44</sup> On processes of discontinuous institutional change, see Woolcock (2013).

<sup>45</sup> Consider the case of the South African government. It ranks at the top of the International Budget Partnership’s global transparency index but its disclosures are too aggregated to provide civil society with the tools needed to address citizen about public sector problems – a challenge recognised by the International Budget Partnership (Van Zyl and Kruuse 2015).

<sup>46</sup> For more on the potential for collaboration and mutual empowerment between government audit institutions and citizen action, see Cornejo et al (2013) and UN (2013).

<sup>47</sup> The distinction between scaling up as more quantity of “X” versus a more qualitative emphasis on the *nature* of scale or scaling impact (as in taking scale into account) may have analogy in the open data movement. Anna Levy suggests that some open data advocates share an assumption that more is better, which elides a focus on what *kind* of openness may have the most impact (e.g. targeted transparency) (email communication, 25 September 2016).

<sup>48</sup> This application of the concept originated in a CSO effort to monitor World Bank projects in Mexico in the second half of the 1990s; see Fox (2001) and Fox and Acheron (2016). Since then, explicit discussion of multi-level citizen oversight has been rare in the TPA field; see Garza (2013) for an exception.

<sup>49</sup> One analyst (Kuris 2015) distinguishes between oversight agencies whose mandate is to shed a spotlight, versus those (few) that have some prosecutorial powers, in terms of “watchdogs” versus “guard dogs”.

<sup>50</sup> Answerability without enforcement can be called a “soft” form of accountability, in contrast to the “hard” version, which combines the two (Fox 2007a).

<sup>51</sup> In other words, the question of how the coordination of multi-level monitoring and oversight is governed (more versus less centralisation, more versus less participation) is distinct from *whether* there is coordination.

<sup>52</sup> In her comments on this paper, Joy Acheron of G-Watch in the Philippines responded: “This concept of ‘squeezing the balloon’ can capture how the problem of corruption and impunity in procurement evolved in the Philippines. Initially, the leakage was in the execution. When this was being addressed through monitoring efforts, such as Textbook Count, Bayanihang Eskwela [Cooperation in Schools], [and] Bantay Lansangan [Road Watch], corrupt activities shifted to pre-bidding activities, such as in the designing of the bid and the negotiation among bidders. Then, even before this was addressed, corruption shifted to payment, where even without completing expected outputs, payments were already being given to suppliers. There were also anecdotal cases of collusion among bidders and government officials to circumvent the monitoring process. In one set of cases, for example, corrupt bidders would avoid a locality where monitoring was being done; and go to another locality where no monitoring was going on. There were also allegations that local government officials who own companies that bid for government projects would not take part in the bidding process in their own localities. Instead, they would simply go to a neighbouring locality where they could bid. Since the monitoring that [was] being done in different localities did not necessarily coordinate or interface, the corrupt could usually get away with it, often by coordinating with the official in the other locality.” (Email communication, 3 October 2016).

<sup>53</sup> The *World Development Report* also declined to address the frequent tendency for local citizen voice initiatives to be captured by local elites and turned into instruments of clientelism (e.g. in the case of “community-managed” schools; see Altschuler 2013). World Bank researchers later showed that this pattern was a widespread problem with “induced” (i.e. top-down) community participation efforts (Mansuri and Rao 2013).

<sup>54</sup> CARE is the NGO with the longest international track record in social accountability, having pioneered Community Scorecards in Malawi in 2002 (before the 2004 *World Development Report*), and has produced the most robust international CSO literature. A thorough political economy analysis of its work in four African countries found that it had greater impact when local efforts were combined with high-level coalitions with policy-makers to encourage responsiveness (Wild, Wales and Chambers 2015). One of their key findings, however, is that “impacts are often ‘stuck’ at the local level and have only translated into national level impacts where they have plugged into existing reform processes” (involving upwards accountability), and that there is “little evidence of purely ‘institutional’ impacts, such as significant changes in power relations” (Wild et al 2015: 7). The study does not show evidence that CARE

supported any efforts for its community engagement processes to monitor the chain of governmental decisions about service provision beyond the local level. In the case of CARE’s extensive, sustained work in Malawi, a recent bulletin reports that even after so many years, the “disconnect between government levels” is a “disabling factor” in its social accountability work (CARE no date: 4). CARE’s most vertically-integrated accountability work has been in Peru, where it supported grassroots citizen monitoring of health policy in coordination with ForoSalud, the national advocacy coalition, and the regional ombudsman office in the province of Puno (Aston 2015; Frisancho 2015). Aston (2015) concludes by emphasising the need for “multi-tiered engagement”. For more information on CARE’s work in this area, see: <http://governance.care2share.wikispaces.net/CSC+Case+Studies,+Briefs,+Reports,+Videos>

<sup>55</sup> The term “high touch” refers to relationships between service providers and clients that involve close relationships.

<sup>56</sup> There are several CSO campaigns to hold the World Bank accountable to its commitment to ostensibly mandatory “safeguard” policies. Many of the concerns raised by these campaigns involve non-compliance with enlightened official provisions intended to assess, avoid and mitigate social and environmental harm before irreversible decisions are made. For example, in the case of World Bank compliance with its own involuntary resettlement policy, its own pioneering 1994 internal review found that one of its main problems involved a pattern of underestimating the size of the population that was projected to be displaced.

<sup>57</sup> See Fox and Acheron (2016) and Fox and Halloran (2016) for summaries of several cases of partial vertical integration.

<sup>58</sup> This is one of the findings from a multi-case comparative analysis of integrated issue campaigns in the Philippines (Acheron and Isaac 2016, forthcoming).

<sup>59</sup> For discussions of the roles of infomediaries, see Magalhaes, Roseira and Strover (2013) and van Schalkwyk, Cañares, Chattapadhyay and Andrason (2015).

<sup>60</sup> Thanks to Duncan Edwards for encouraging this point to be explicit.

<sup>61</sup> See: [www.fixmystreet.com](http://www.fixmystreet.com)

<sup>62</sup> Studies of feedback loops sometimes assume – rather than demonstrate – that they close. Consider a major World Bank book on feedback loops (Gigler and Bailur 2014). While many of the citizen voice platforms cited have generated uptake, in none of these do feedback loops actually close, in the sense of effective government responsiveness (e.g. that collection concludes with an emphasis on the metaphor of the Loch Ness monster, which implies – quite unintentionally – that the closing of feedback loops is something widely believed to exist, but there is little reliable evidence for this).

<sup>63</sup> The second half of this paragraph draws from Fox (2014).

<sup>64</sup> This raises the issue of how to address the challenge of what Mansuri and Rao (2013) call “civil society failure”, i.e. social contexts with limited capacity for autonomous, pro-accountability collective action. Where traditions of scaled-up self-organisation are weak, freedom of association is limited or cultural and linguistic differences complicate the projection of voice, the role of interlocutors becomes central



(Fowler 2014; Tembo 2013). Interlocutors are facilitators of two-way communication and their role is often crucial for bridging cultural and power gaps. In contrast to tactical approaches that assume that information will by itself motivate action among subordinated people, strategies that emphasise interlocutors recognise that for the voiceless to exercise voice effectively requires support, as well as cross-cultural translation and bridge-building (Fox 2014).

<sup>65</sup> This recalls the issues addressed in the recent World Bank *Policy Research Report* (2016a), and at the beginning of this paper, on the importance of public information strategies that can help citizens to influence policy-makers. Yet this approach treats the potential for action as narrowly limited to individuals casting ballots, rather than as collective social, civic or political actors who may need intermediary associations to represent their interests and ideas to both the state and political parties.

<sup>66</sup> The following section draws from Fox and Acheron (2016). See Acheron and Isaac (2016, forthcoming) for a comparison of issue campaigns, which analyses them through this lens to document how they articulate policy advocacy and monitoring.

<sup>67</sup> Practitioner-oriented advocacy strategists have produced sophisticated frameworks that draw on power analysis; see Cohen, de la Vega and Watson (2001), Unsicker (2013) and VeneKlasen and Miller (2008). Mainstream scholarly analyses of advocacy, which also includes the study of lobbying, tends to define the concept narrowly, not necessarily articulated with broader campaigning and collective action. See Manheim (2011) for a notable exception.

<sup>68</sup> At local levels, these campaigns against displacement and devastation were struggles for survival and resistance. For global advocacy campaigns challenging the World Bank, they were “case studies” of systemic flaws in both policy and project decision-making.

<sup>69</sup> In response to this proposition, Joy Acheron reported an example from the Philippines: “A CSO coalition formed for a national monitoring initiative included both national capital NGOs focused on advocacy and local-regional civic organisations focused on monitoring. Yet when the bottom-up monitoring discovered irregularities, the national capital NGOs opted to be ‘constructive’ – which meant raising the issue privately with senior officials. From the point of view of the local-regional civic organisation, this meant that the problem was not adequately addressed, since they saw no official action.” (Email communication, 24 September 2016).

<sup>70</sup> On the relevance of broad coalitions for bolstering the credibility of policy advocacy, see, for example, Larsen (2016). See also Brown and Fox (1998) on the importance of “national problem coalitions” in the context of policy advocacy campaigns.

<sup>71</sup> Thanks to Chad Dobson for sharing the “Wizard of Oz” phrase in 1996.

<sup>72</sup> Among many discussions of the territorial unevenness of state capacity, see O'Donnell (1993).

<sup>73</sup> See the five cases sketched out in Fox and Halloran (2016).

<sup>74</sup> This underscores the distinction between a narrow definition of transparency (limited to public access to

official documents and data) and the broader notion of the public's *right to know*, which goes further to include access to information about who are the winners and losers of government decisions, and about how those decisions (and non-decisions) were made.

<sup>75</sup> Stone (1989) spells out the crucial agenda-setting power of framing in her discussion of the importance of causal stories for targeting and weakening obstacles to change.

<sup>76</sup> Examples of broad-based, multi-level advocacy and monitoring campaigns that followed this pattern include Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PeKka) in Indonesia, which won legal standing for women-headed households, and Malawi's “Our Bodies, Our Lives” movement of HIV-positive women, which won a commitment from the national health system to provide appropriate anti-retroviral medicines. See Essof and Kahn (2015) and Zulminarni and Miller (2015).

<sup>77</sup> For analytical and conceptual debates in what could be called the “mainstream” of the (mainly Northern) political sociology literature on social movements, see, among others: Rossi and von Bulow (2015); Tilly and Tarrow (2015); von Stekelenburg, Roggeband and Klandermans (2013); Maney, Kutz-Flamenbaum, Rohlinger and Goodwin (2012); Tarrow (2010); Van Dyke and McCammon (2010); Davenport, Johnston and Mueller (2005); Tarrow and McAdam (2005); Goodwin and Jasper (2004); McAdam et al (2001); Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly (1999); McAdam (1982 / 1999). These approaches focus on identifying mechanisms and processes, and attempt to reconcile the roles of ideas, interests and institutions. These framework-building efforts are distinct from, yet potentially complementary to, more ethnographic or embedded research methods. See also the *Journal of Social Movement Studies* and *Mobilization*, among others. For an emerging practitioner-oriented literature, addressed in part to donors, see, among others: Keseru (2016); Halloran (2015, 2014); Halloran and Flores (2015); Joyce (2015); Joyce and Walker (2015); Stephan, Lakhani and Naviwala (2015).

<sup>78</sup> A regime's political legitimacy can be defined as “just the suspension of the withdrawal of consent” (Przeworski 1985: 146).

<sup>79</sup> On the relationship between mobilisation and repression, see Davenport et al (2005). On social movement and advocacy campaign impacts on the state, see Giugni et al (1999) and Gaventa and McGee (2010). There is also a rich literature specifically on broad-based, non-violent resistance movements, for example Chenoweth and Stephan (2011), Erikson Nepstad (2011) and Zunes, Kurtz and Asher (1999).

<sup>80</sup> Gaventa and McGee (2010) move in this direction. More often in the TPA literature, the link between information and motivations for collective action is assumed rather than problematised. Joshi (2015) takes this on with a causal chain approach.

<sup>81</sup> This draws from the classic “political opportunity structure” approach (McAdam 1982 / 1999).

<sup>82</sup> While studies of protest movements often emphasise their outsider nature, in practice many also include elements of insider-outsider coalitions that are either clandestine or ideologically inconvenient to recognise (especially for international sympathisers). Consider the international literature on Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, most of

which has downplayed its significant degree of penetration by the state, especially in the administration of agrarian reform and rural public education. For example, on the movement's long-term "co-production" of rural public education, see Tarlau (2013).

<sup>83</sup> Though constructive engagement, partnerships are quite common; they are justified more often on the grounds of short-term political expediency (allies in government) or institutional constraints (e.g. the World Bank) than on extensive empirical evidence that identifies the conditions under which such partnerships actually lead to lasting institutional change. Indeed, it would be useful to apply a political economy analysis to a wide range of cases, in order to identify the interests and incentives that make successful state-society collaborative problem-solving possible.

<sup>84</sup> Recall that the political science literature on regime change distinguishes between liberalisation and democratisation. The former involves increased space for freedom of expression and association, while the latter involves space for actual contestation of the power to govern.

<sup>85</sup> Public analysis of how development agencies in the global North can direct politically and culturally appropriate support to grassroots accountability movements in the global South, while avoiding unintended consequences, is in its early stages. See, for example, Joyce (2015) and Stephan et al (2015). Guillán Montero (2016) explicitly addresses the implications of the vertical integration proposal for donors.

<sup>86</sup> This interpretation draws from the author's active participation in the 2015 and 2016 Global Partners Forums of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, hosted by the World Bank.

<sup>87</sup> Thanks to Brendan Halloran for this suggestion.

<sup>88</sup> For example, Mexico's high-profile public information agency's adjudication board rules primarily in favour of citizens (Fox, Haight and Palmer-Rubin 2011). Mexico's national information access law was recently ranked number one in the world (see: [www.rti-rating.org](http://www.rti-rating.org)). For context, see Fox and Haight (2010), among others. This public information access system, combined with persistent systemic impunity for abuse and corruption, has turned Mexico into a striking paradigm case of a disconnect between transparency and accountability.

<sup>89</sup> India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act recognises that social audits contribute to accountability by mandating their implementation in the programme (Pande 2016, 2014). Social audits have been carried out on a massive scale in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (Veeraraghavan 2015; Maiorano 2014), as well as to an increasing degree in Madhya Pradesh (Halloran 2016a).

<sup>90</sup> See Acheron (2016), as well as Guerzovich and Rosenzweig (2013), Arugay (2012), Gregorio (2006) and Parafina (no date).

<sup>91</sup> On the campaign for the reproductive health law, see: Cornelio (2016, forthcoming); Estrada-Claudio (2015); Melgar (2014); Ocampo (2014); Parmaland (2014); Cabral (2013) and Estrada-Claudio and Ibarra (2012); Research on the implementation of the law has mainly involved official policy evaluations (e.g. DOH 2015).

<sup>92</sup> From email communication with Dr Junice Demeterio Melgar, Likhana, 12 September 2016: "Before the RPRH [Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health] Law ... the main system and indicators for what was called the MNCHN [maternal, neonatal, child health and nutrition] programme of the DOH [Department of Health] was based on reports of the 1,600 plus Local Government Units [LGUs] collated by the DOH regional offices and vetted by the DOH's Field Health Statistics and Information System (FHSIS), which is lodged in the Bureau of Epidemiology. The monitoring covered mainly service delivery, and only service delivery by LGUs, from the municipal to the city and provincial levels. It did not include service delivery by government hospitals (primary to tertiary), by private and NGO facilities (all levels). It did not include input indicators, e.g. human resources, budget, logistics, service delivery organisation and governance."

<sup>93</sup> The monitoring did not address, for example, the possibility that political bosses managed to use the programme for clientelistic control. Considering the persistence of regional bosses and vote buying in the Philippines, this may have been related to the (recognised) problems of inclusion and exclusion. In principle, clientelistic control over access to the programme could be quite consistent with apparent compliance with official conditionalities (e.g. low income levels, participation in health and education programmes). For broader discussion of the persistence of clientelistic manipulation within social programmes, see Fox (2012). One possible explanation for why this risk was not on the monitoring agenda might be the lack of political space in this region; another would be the issue's lack of fit with donor and / or national government priorities. National government partners reportedly claimed that the programme design would render it immune from political manipulation; independent monitoring would have tested that hypothesis.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Aniceta C. Baltar, Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance, by Joy Acheron, 15 September 2016 (email communication).

<sup>95</sup> For overviews of the right to food campaign, see Hertel (2016, 2015) and Pande and Houtzager (2016). On efforts to reform public distribution systems and the challenge of measuring leakages, see: Dreze and Khera (2015, 2013); Pritchard and Choitani (2015); Balani (2013); Khera (2011a, 2011b); and Masiero (2015). See Pande and Houtzager (2016) and Pande (2008) for a focus on reform efforts and the limitations of public distribution systems, both nationally and in Delhi. For the historical context and details on the operation of public distribution systems in south India, see Goetz and Jenkins (2002) and Mooji (1996). For a creative research experiment that shows the potential anti-corruption power of information requests, see Peisakin and Pinto (2010).

<sup>96</sup> See Gulati and Saini (2015) and Kotwa, Ramaswami and Murugkhar (2011), among others. The federal government intends to replace the public distribution systems system with individual payments through a biometric card system, but the limited reach of the banking system and denial of access because of problems with the fingerprint-based access system are provoking resistance; see, for example: Bhatnagar (2016); Yadav (2016); Sharma, P. (2015).

<sup>97</sup> See Joshi, Sinha and Patnaik (2016), Parakesh and Masiero (2015) and Puri (2012). The state of Chhattisgarh

stands out as relatively successful, after more than a decade of CSO advocacy and state-led problem-solving to greatly improve the food programme's efficiency and coverage, which now reaches 80% of the population. The state's 11,000 public distribution system shops are managed by local governments, and agricultural and consumer cooperatives. "Panchayats are definitely easier while asserting demand for accountability from them. Agriculture cooperatives are under direct government control and are also amenable to community oversight. Consumer cooperatives are more difficult as they are almost private sector. There are no studies comparing the performance of consumer cooperatives with rest. Corruption issues persist, but involving procurement more than distribution." (Email communication from Samir Garg, right to food campaign, Chhattisgarh, to Suchi Pande, Accountability Research Center, 6 September 2016). Grassroots monitoring of the food programme in this state is also strengthened by its incorporation into a robust, broad-based grassroots community of health workers and public health committees (Binaj Patnaik, email communication to J. Fox, 26 August 2016).

<sup>98</sup> On CSO participation and community monitoring in the National Rural Health Mission, see: Das (2015); Khanna (2015, 2013); Shukla, Sinha and Jadhav (2015); Shukla and Sinha (2014); See also: [www.cbmpmaharashtra.org](http://www.cbmpmaharashtra.org) and [www.nrhmccommunityaction.org/agcasecretariatteam.html](http://www.nrhmccommunityaction.org/agcasecretariatteam.html), among others.

<sup>99</sup> On SATHI, see: Halloran (2016a), Khanna (2013) and [www.sathicehat.org](http://www.sathicehat.org)

<sup>100</sup> Abhay Shukla (SATHI), email communication, 20 November 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Shukla, Scott and Kakde (2011) and Abhay Shukla (SATHI), email communication, 2 September 2016.

<sup>102</sup> Other state government-sponsored participatory health monitoring initiatives include the notable Mitani programme in Chhattisgarh (e.g. Nambiar and Sheikh 2016; Vir, Kalita, Mondal and Malik 2014).

<sup>103</sup> Invited spaces are arenas for dialogue between authorities and citizens in which the terms of engagement are set by the authorities. Claimed or created spaces, in contrast, are spaces which have been "claimed by less powerful actors from or against the power holders, or created more autonomously by them" (Gaventa 2006: 27; see also Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2007). The community food council experience shows that invited spaces can be claimed from below and gain autonomy in spite of official resistance: in this case, thanks in part to a sandwich strategy (Fox 2015). As one director of Diconsa exhorted in a national meeting of the more autonomous food councils: "You push below, and I will squeeze from above" (Fox 1992b).

<sup>104</sup> Free spaces are enabling environments for autonomous collective action by members of subordinated social groups (Polletta 1999).

<sup>105</sup> A new, ongoing research project is attempting to assess which enclaves of regional-level citizen-oversight power remain.

<sup>106</sup> See: Díaz Echeverría and Gruenberg (2016); Freyermuth, Carrasco-Gómez, Romero-Martínez (2016); Freyermuth,

Arguello Avendaño and Zarco Mera (2014); Freyermuth, Sánchez, and Argüello (2014); Freyermuth and Sesia (2013); Layton, Campillo Carrete, Ablanado Terrazas and Sanchez Rodriguez (2010); Díaz Echeverría (2006). The last of these explicitly refers to this policy advocacy effort as a "vertical alliance". For a nuanced analysis of monitoring and advocacy in the state of Guerrero, see Berrío Palomo (2016) For analysis of one of the regional affiliates of the Oaxaca state branch of the campaign, see Ocejo (2011); see also: [www.omm.org.mx](http://www.omm.org.mx). This case also stands out because much of the TPA field has lacked a gender perspective. For exceptions, see the work of Just Associates and Sneeringer, Canfield Hurd and Cox Mehling (2015).

<sup>107</sup> Extensive joint evaluations include Freyermuth, Argüello and Zarco Mera (2014), INM (2011) and the higher profile CONEVAL (2012). The evaluation in CONEVAL (2012) reveals government control over agenda-setting.

<sup>108</sup> Note that all Mexican health policy monitoring and advocacy initiatives strategically linked federal- and state-level work; one project concentrated just on creating new, more precise federal budget categories, based on the assumption that this would facilitate monitoring by others, but this did not happen (Ocejo 2013). In retrospect, this was a tactical initiative focused on just one level of government, in contrast to the Maternal Mortality Observatory's strategic combination of tactics, at multiple levels.

<sup>109</sup> The Guerrero Women's Health Network's monitoring of and protest against the government's failure to complete the promised women's hospitals in Atoyac and Tecpan is a notable example: it was sustained in spite of ongoing state-sanctioned repression in the region. See: Magaña and Escobar (2016); Rodríguez Flores (2016); Valadez Luviano (2016a, 2016b).

<sup>110</sup> For the results of a strategic use by a CSO of public information requests to monitor government reproductive health policy more generally, see GIRE (2016, 2013). For brief case studies of family planning advocacy in other countries, see IPPF (2012). For a review of accountability initiatives related to reproductive choice, see Boydell and Fox (2016) and Boydell and Keesbury (2014).

<sup>111</sup> The term "citizen action" is used in its broadest sense and is not intended to be limited to those who are formally ascribed to the nation state in which they live. For conceptual discussion of different definitions of citizenship, see Fox (2005).

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Bannerjee, Glennerster and Duflo (2008).

<sup>113</sup> See Boydell and Fox (2016) for references to relevant literature specifically on health workers.

## About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. It focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

The programme's Research, Evidence and Learning component, managed by IDS, contributes to improving performance and practice, and builds an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and technology for T&A (Tech4T&A).

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## About the Accountability Research Center

The Accountability Research Center is an action-research incubator that partners with public interest groups and policymakers, based in the School of International Service at American University.

## About the Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme

In a world shaped by rapid change, the Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme focuses on situations of fragility and conflict to ask how progressive social and political action for empowerment and accountability emerges in these contexts, what pathways it takes, and what impacts it has.

The Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme is supported by UK aid from the UK government. It is implemented by a consortium consisting of: the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the Accountability Research Center (ARC), the Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR), the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), ITAD, Oxfam GB, and the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR).

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