Understanding the role of context in shaping social accountability interventions: towards an evidence-based approach

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Executive summary

That ‘context’ and ‘politics’ matter has become increasingly axiomatic within development theory and practice over the past decade. These new mantras are increasingly well-supported by evidence-based reviews of good governance initiatives, including social accountability, which have repeatedly found that the political context is critical in shaping the success or failure of such interventions. What is less clear are which specific context factors matter most and how thinking and action around social accountability (SAcc) interventions can be re-framed accordingly. This report systematically reviews what over 90 studies of SAcc (with a particular focus on transparency, contentious action and participatory governance interventions), found regarding the influence of context. The main conclusions drawn are as follows:

- The political context shapes social accountability interventions in multiple and often complex ways, particularly in terms of the incentives and capacities of key actors involved in promoting and enforcing SAcc. Of particular importance here are the two institutional spheres of civil and political society and their interactions, as located within the broader fields of power relations between states and societies and within society:
  
  - **Political society:** the character of political society is critical to the success of social accountability interventions, particularly regarding the political will of state functionaries (e.g. elected officials willing to hold bureaucrats to account) and the role played by formal and informal political institutions (e.g. political parties, patronage).
  
  - **Civil society:** the capacity and commitment to promoting SAcc within civil society is also critical, not as an autonomous associational sphere from which demands on the state are made, but in the more political sense of building progressive coalitions both within civil society and between civil and political society.
  
  - **Inequality and exclusion:** the capacity of citizens to engage in SAcc initiatives, and to hold public officials to account, are closely shaped and differentiated by power relations, involving inequality and exclusion along multiple lines (e.g. education, class, ethnicity, caste).
  
  - **State-society relations:** in an over-arching sense, the capacity and commitment to deliver accountable forms of governance is therefore located within the character of state-society relations. This can be conceptualized in terms of the presence and character of a ‘social contract’ around specific public goods, which can be strengthened over time through successive rounds of state-society bargaining (Joshi and Houtzager 2012).

- The emphasis placed here on the role of political as well as social actors emphasizes the extent to which demand-led approaches to accountability are, by themselves, no panacea for development and governance problems. Supply-side pressures are often required if the enforcement, and not just the answerability side of accountability, is to be realized.
However, the evidence-base on how context shapes SAcc interventions is weak, both in general and especially regarding the role of certain contextual features (e.g. informal political norms and processes, the role of donors). This is particularly the case with the donor-driven evaluation literature, and seems to flow from the erstwhile blindness to context in mainstream development policy and practice, and the growing methodological bias towards quasi-experimental techniques in impact evaluation. Some useful challenges to these tendencies have emerged, which need to be developed urgently if SAcc interventions are to become more attuned to particular contexts (see below).

Design matters to: interventions which managed to catalyse collaboration between state and non-state actors, who were deemed credible and legitimate, and which managed to generate and disseminate high-quality and salient forms of information, were particularly associated with success in terms of improved governance and increased levels of citizen empowerment.

Three main recommendations flow from this analysis:

- **Reconceptualisation of social accountability**: SAcc needs to be reconceptualised in ways that better reflect its deeply contextualised and political character. A promising way forward here is offered by the ‘polity’ approach to SAcc (Joshi and Houtzager 2012), which offers an alternative theory of change as compared to the voluntaristic tendencies of populism or the ‘best-practice’ approach of new institutionalism which have tended to dominate good governance thinking until recently. The polity approach offers a more politically, historically and sociologically attuned understanding of how change unfolds (Hickey 2010b), and promises to help relocate SAcc as a political and relational as opposed to technical phenomenon, and to help move design-solutions closer to ‘best-fit’ rather than ‘best-practice’ type solutions.

- **New evidence base**: there is a pressing need to generate a much more extensive evidence-base concerning how context shapes the impact of SAcc. Although this and a few other studies have contributed to filling this gap, a focus on context needs to inform all stages of data gathering around SAcc, from the construction of baselines through systems of monitoring and evaluation and onto impact assessments. By its nature, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to this problem. However, some useful approaches are currently being promoted, most notably ‘theory-based’ approaches which use both quantitative and in-depth qualitative methods to evaluate outcomes within an over-arching political economy analysis, and which could be further informed by the polity-based theory of change articulated above.

- **Design implications**: this report reflects and re-enforces the growing sense that demand-led approaches are rarely capable of enforcing accountability in the absence of supply-side factors. This suggests that SAcc interventions need to be designed in ways that develop state-society synergies but also that the most effective route towards ensuring downwards accountability may well be to strengthen public authority rather than to directly resource demand-led initiatives.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ART</td>
<td>Anti Retroviral Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BATF</td>
<td>Bangalore Agenda Task Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDA</td>
<td>Bangalore Development Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBMP</td>
<td>Community Based Monitoring Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFS</td>
<td>Centre for the Future State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGs</td>
<td>Community Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMCs</td>
<td>Community Management Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI-M</td>
<td>Communist Party of India (Marxist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSCQBE</td>
<td>Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFGG</td>
<td>Demand for Good Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAS</td>
<td>Employment Assurance Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESID</td>
<td>Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCCs</td>
<td>Health Centre Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIPC2</td>
<td>Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired immune deficiency syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HWCs</td>
<td>Health Watch Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBA</td>
<td>Independent budget analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDS</td>
<td>Institute of Development Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MKSS</td>
<td>Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MST</td>
<td><em>Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NK</td>
<td>Nijera Kholi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NREGA</td>
<td>National Rural Employment Guarantee Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PB</td>
<td>Participatory Budgeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDS:</td>
<td>Public Distribution System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEDP:</td>
<td>Primary Education Development Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETS:</td>
<td>Public Expenditure Tracking Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRS:</td>
<td>Poverty Reduction Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRSPs:</td>
<td>Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT:</td>
<td>Workers’ Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWA:</td>
<td>People with AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REPOA:</td>
<td>Research on Poverty Alleviation, Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RKS:</td>
<td>Rationing Kruti Samiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTI:</td>
<td>Right to Information Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAcc:</td>
<td>Social Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAMs:</td>
<td>Social Accountability Mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPS:</td>
<td>Samaj Pragati Sahyog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSS:</td>
<td>Statistical Package for the Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAC:</td>
<td>Treatment Action Campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAI:</td>
<td>Transparency and Accountability Initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ToR:</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPE:</td>
<td>Universal Primary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VECs:</td>
<td>Village Education Committees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Background

“...all transparency and accountability initiatives unfold within complex, non-linear, contextually specific social and political processes and it is these complex contexts and processes that they seek to change” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 27).

“...even the best designed DFFG mechanisms and institutions will have little impact on downward accountability if the critical factors and enabling conditions are not in place” (Agarwal and Van Wicklin 2011: 8).

Achieving higher levels of accountability, whereby governments not only deliver goods and services as per their policy promises but are also responsive to citizens’ demands, can play an important role in contributing to the achievement of various development outcomes. Development policy and practice has experimented with first supply-led and more recently demand-led approaches to promoting accountability over the past three decades of attempts to promote ‘good governance’, with demand-led approaches promoted since the late 1990s as the more likely route towards ensuring improved levels of government performance and also the empowerment of citizens (Joshi 2007; Joshi and Houtzager 2012; Malena and McNeil 2010; World Bank 2004). However, demand-led or ‘social’ forms of accountability have also come under growing criticism of late, as with other approaches to development that rely heavily on popular agency, for being based on a theory of change that does not reflect the political realities of governance and development in most developing countries (e.g. Booth 2011, Brett 2003). This scepticism is driven in part by the growing realisation within international development that ‘context matters’. This is apparent at both the general level of thinking on the politics of development, which has been increasingly moving away from ‘best-practice’ to ‘best-fit’ type approaches to ‘good-enough governance’ (Levy 2010, Grindle 2007); and, with specific reference to new research into the success of social accountability interventions which show that “context – social, political, economic, cultural and legal factors – significantly shapes the nature and potential effectiveness of social accountability initiatives” (O’Meally 2012; e.g. Menocal and Sharma 2008, McGee and Gaventa 2011). In this context, it is particularly important that both thinking and practice around social accountability is strongly informed by the available evidence concerning what works well in particular places, rather than by pre-determined preferences for particular institutional forms and approaches.

This report summarises the findings of a systematic review commissioned by the Social Development Department (SDV) of the World Bank to identify the main contextual factors and how they shape the form and effectiveness of social accountability (SAcc) interventions. The report is structured as follows: the next section proceeds by outlining the review objectives, defining the main concepts used, providing an overview of the studies included and identifying some of the critical methodological problems encountered here. A detailed explanation of the methodological approach adopted for this report can be found in Appendix One. Sections 3 to 5 interrogate the main design and contextual factors that are found to affect the three social accountability mechanisms identified here in turn, namely those around transparency, contentious action and participation in governance respectively. Section 6 synthesises the main contextual factors that cut across the different SAcc mechanisms, and also offers a provisional framework that seeks to map out how these contextual factors shape social accountability (SAcc) interventions, before Section 7 suggests some implications for moving forward. This report should be read alongside the
Annotated Bibliography on which it is based (Bukenya and King 2012), the key sources from which are listed in the References here.

2. Concepts, objectives and methodology
The principle aim of this review, as defined by the Terms of Reference (ToR), is to critically analyse “the question of ‘context’ and how it shapes the potential effectiveness of social accountability initiatives in achieving pro-poor outcomes”. To achieve this, the review was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the major contextual factors that we need to consider when designing demand-side/social accountability interventions and why?
2. What are the ‘conditions’ under which social accountability has been more or less effective?
3. How can the contextual factors be prioritised and also unpacked so as to enable us to assess their sub-dimensions?

This section sets out the groundwork for this review by introducing some definitional and conceptual issues around social accountability and identifying the approach adopted here.

2.1 Understanding social accountability
According to Malena and McNeil (2010: 4),

“In the social context, accountability is often defined as the obligation of public power holders to account for or take responsibility for their actions. Accountability exists when power holders must explain and justify their actions or face sanctions”.

More generally, there is a consensus that accountability involves both answerability, “making powerholders explain and give reasons for their actions” and enforcement, “ensuring that poor or immoral performance is punished in some way” (Hickey and Mohan 2008:236). The literature generally draws attention to two main channels of accountability, referred to as horizontal and vertical mechanisms. Horizontal mechanisms focus on the conventional internal – political, fiscal, administrative and legal – forms of government accountability that underpin the institutional checks and balances of the state (Peruzzotti 2011). These include anti-corruption commissions, auditors-general, human rights machineries, legislative public accounts committees and the rule of law more generally. Vertical mechanisms are generally portrayed as the ‘bottom up’ actions of non-state actors through electoral participation and different forms of social action. However, there are at least two important caveats to this general depiction of accountability, both of which are increasingly recognised within the literature. First, it is clear that these two forms often become entwined, particularly in instances where the vertical accountability activities of citizens engage directly with horizontal forms of accountability, even, as in the case of participatory budgeting, becoming directly involved in processes of planning and prioritising public spending that have generally been the preserve of public officials. This is clearly a step beyond the ‘watch-dog’ or protest role of vertical accountability activities, and is increasingly referred to as ‘diagonal accountability’ (Goetz and Jenkins 2001). However, the focus here tends to remain on how social accountability actors can help prompt improved public sector performance (e.g. Goetz
and Jenkins 2001: 365), rather than on highlighting the role played by supply-led approaches within this blending of horizontal and vertical forms.

This brings us to our second, and perhaps more important caveat, which is that horizontal forms of accountability are often at their most effective when they involve top-down pressure from the political arm of the state. The critical role that hierarchy plays here, something also stressed in Brett’s seminal (2003) account of the proper relationship between participation and accountability, is not well-captured in the term ‘horizontal’ as it fails to recognise the importance of power relations within the state, between elected and bureaucratic officials, which are often critical for accountability outcomes. Given the problems with these spatial metaphors, we generally refer here to ‘demand-led’ (or social) and ‘supply-led’ forms of accountability, with the main focus falling on the demand-led approaches through the non-electoral action of social actors, or what is generally referred to as ‘social accountability. However, as discussed below, it does not make sense to consider these in isolation from supply-led approaches.

Social accountability is itself a contested concept, with no universally agreed definition of the range of actions that fall within its remit (Joshi and Houtzager 2012). A more narrow view takes social accountability to mean “the ongoing engagement of collective actors in civil society to hold the state to account for failures to provide public goods” (Joshi and Houtzager 2012: 150). Such a definition limits the concept to existing state obligations and excludes claims for new rights and participation in policy processes which are clearly important in making public authorities responsive to the needs of its citizens. Therefore the definition of social accountability as “the broad range of actions and mechanisms beyond voting that citizens can use to hold the state to account, as well as actions on the part of government, civil society, media and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts” (Malena and McNeil 2010:1) is more usefully encompassing for our purposes here.

From this definition it should be clear that social accountability initiatives often, but not always, aim to support and complement rather than replace ‘traditional’ mechanisms of government accountability, aiming at “affirming and making operational the direct accountability relationships between citizens and the state” (Malena and McNeil 2010:6). However, in an indication of how contested this field has become, critics have noted for some time that the promotion of direct/participatory mechanisms can potentially displace/undermine other forms of accountability that could be considered more democratic, legitimate and effective (Brett 2003; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Hickey and Mohan 2008). For example, the forms of participation generally promoted through poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) consultation processes have tended to privilege the types of civil society organisation (CSO) that lack the political weight to shift the incentives that shape elite behaviour in developing countries (Booth 2005), and take the focus away from the role of parliaments, the media and other forms that may have more democratic credentials and disciplinary influence over power holders (Gould 2005, Hickey and Mohan 2008). These points are returned to in the analysis below.

---

1 The reference to ‘public authorities’ here recognises that the state is not the sole provider of public goods and services in developing countries, and that social accountability initiatives may sometimes be directed towards other actors, including traditional authorities and corporations (e.g. Newell and Wheeler 2006). However, and as per the ToR (O’Meally 2012), the literature surveyed for this report dealt primarily with citizens seeking to hold the state to account.
2.2 Overview of the studies considered

Categorising the interventions
Our approach to categorising social accountability mechanisms followed Joshi and Houtzager’s (2012) view that it is important to disaggregate social accountability by examining the different actions that citizens actually engage in to attract state responsiveness to citizen demands. They suggest five potential actions including:

i) requesting information about the level and quality of services being provided,
ii) monitoring the quality of the actual services being delivered,
iii) making demands to enforce legal standards that are not currently being met,
iv) collectively invoking formal grievance procedures – either through existing administrative complaint mechanisms and/or engaging in court cases against the government for non-fulfilment of legal obligations, and
v) holding demonstrations to protest against the poor quality of services.

Joshi and Houtzager note that their categorization leaves out citizen participation in formal policy making spaces (2012:151), a distinction that they prefer to make to avoid overlapping with the considerable range of participatory activities that are not directly aimed at securing accountability outcomes and also because this may introduce a danger of circular logic, concerning whether citizens are entitled to hold public authorities to account in the same way once they have directly participated in the policy process themselves. However, and inspired in part by the finding that “citizens are more likely to get involved in monitoring the implementation of government programmes if they have also been involved in shaping them in the first place” (McGee and Gaventa 2010:5), we prefer to maintain a focus on participation here, albeit one closely focused on participatory efforts to secure accountability rather than the whole field of participatory governance, as reflected in the search terms used here (see Appendix One).

The problem of circular logic is not so pressing, we would argue, as citizens are entitled to hold authorities to account for the actual delivery of goods and services whether or not they have themselves played a role in the associated policy process (e.g. as when those involved in participatory budgeting check whether governments have actually spent the budget according to the agreed priorities).

These concerns, together with a closer reading of the interventions covered in the studies identified in the systematic review led us to identify three main types of social accountability mechanism for analysis here:

1. Transparency-related activities: e.g. the collection, analysis and dissemination of information related to government policies/programmes;
2. Contentious action such as public demonstrations, protests, advocacy campaigns, and public interest lawsuits; and,
3. Participation in policy-making processes, as in participatory budgeting and community management committees.

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2 Our more general analysis in Section Six, however, does draw on the broader literature on participation, and politics and development more broadly, where appropriate.
Any typology is to some extent subjective and open to legitimate critique. For example, the one offered by Joshi and Houtzager above includes some significant overlaps between the categories, as with the critical role played by information-generating mechanisms across the first two categories, or the role of contention across the latter three categories, and problems could also be identified with the threefold categorisation adopted here. However, it is also important to note here that this flows directly and inductively from the particular studies we reviewed here, and we are not claiming that this offers a new typology that can capture the entire realm of social accountability activities.

**Selecting studies for review**

The methodology through which the literature was identified, filtered, selected and analyzed in order to make the review systematic is outlined in Appendix One. Figure 1 below shows how many of each type of study was analyzed here. The studies which focused specifically on one of the three categories listed here are referred to as ‘category-specific’ studies within the report. ‘Synthesis studies’ refers to those that examined interventions that employed one or more of our three mechanisms. ‘Generic’ refers to those more general studies of social accountability that went beyond the evaluation of any particular intervention, and which also included a discussion of contextual factors.

**Table 1: Study type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of study</th>
<th>Transparency</th>
<th>Protest &amp; contentious action</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Synthesis studies</th>
<th>Generic studies</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The judgement as to whether the interventions were successful, a partial success or failed (Table 2) derives from our reading of the argument presented in each specific study. Following McGee and Gaventa (2011: 9), we prefer ‘success’ to ‘effectiveness’, as the latter refers to “the extent to which initiatives are successful at achieving their stated goals, for example whether a FoI (freedom of information) initiative was well-implemented and made information more readily available”, whereas ‘success’ can be defined as, “the attainment of the initiative’s further-reaching or ‘second order’ goal, for example whether the institution of a complaint mechanism about a public service leads to improved service delivery or a citizen monitoring initiative to greater state responsiveness, and thereby to improved development outcomes”.

In particular, we focused on whether the studies reported changes in governance institutions and/or citizen empowerment vis-à-vis the state, and less on improvement in services.

It is difficult to generalize from these aggregate findings, other than to note that social accountability interventions are clearly neither a magic bullet (especially those that rely mostly on participation in government policy processes, see Table 2) nor a generalized failure, which reflects the current contested nature of debates over social accountability. The apparently strong record of transparency initiatives indicated here may derive in part from the sense in which some interventions under this heading seek to exact a less difficult degree of accountability than interventions in some other approaches, e.g. they are rarely concerned with enforcement.

**Table 2: Success/failure of the intervention**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention Type</th>
<th>Succeeded</th>
<th>Partial success</th>
<th>Failed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest and contentious action</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the main focus of this synthesis report is on the contextual factors that shape the success/failure of social accountability interventions, it is also fundamental to examine how these were designed and the general approach that they took, not least as many studies paid more attention to these than issues of context. Although the wider literature is clear that even the best-designed interventions will fail unless the context is amenable (e.g. Agarwal and Van Wicklin 2011), it is also recognized that the success of social accountability interventions derives from an iterative process of engagement between elements of the intervention and the broader context. Proceeding inductively, seven different characteristics of SAcc interventions emerged from our interrogation of the reports as helping to shape the success/failure of social accountability interventions, as detailed in Table 3. The numbers
refer to the number of studies which identified particular factors as significant in shaping success/failure.

Table 3: Main intervention factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Transparency (n=15)</th>
<th>Contentious action (n=10)</th>
<th>Participation in policy design (n=19)</th>
<th>Synthesis studies (n=18)</th>
<th>Generic studies (n=29)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority-credibility of lead actors</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-society collaboration</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-quality and salient information</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the issue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention length</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen involvement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions among SAMs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again proceeding inductively, we identified those contextual factors that the studies raised as having a significant influence on the success/failure of social accountability interventions (Table 4). These are discussed in greater depth below.

Table 4: Main contextual factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Transparency (n=15)</th>
<th>Contentious action (n=10)</th>
<th>Participation in policy spaces (n=19)</th>
<th>Synthesis studies (n=18)</th>
<th>Generic studies (n=29)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingness of state functionaries</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO working environment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality-hierarchies within society</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity and commitment of citizens to participate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratisation and rule of law</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State capacity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social contract-Political settlement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of state-society bargaining</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality-Hierarchies between state and society</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Categorising factors as either contextual or as related to the intervention design and implementation was not easy in all cases. For example, different forms of media are often employed directly in SAMs as well as being part of the more general context. Over time, mechanisms introduced within SAMs may themselves become part of the context, as when participatory channels become institutionalised (e.g. as part of constitutional guarantees in some parts of Latin America), or when lead agencies (including donors) have over time become embedded within national policy processes. As such, there is a degree of fluidity between these categories, which makes it difficult to be definitive here. Our allocation of factors into one or the other reflects the main sense in which these were discussed and framed both within and across the particular studies examined here. It is instructive that one of the few factors that does genuinely cut across this intervention/context divide is that of state-society relationships, an issue that we dwell on in more depth in Section Six.

2.3 Challenges faced during the review

“Most studies do not examine the longer trajectory of citizen-state relationships or civil society networks that underpin specific social accountability initiatives, neither do they examine the influence of activities outside the narrow scope of the initiative that can influence outcomes...we do not really have an understanding of why social accountability demands emerge more in some settings than in others” (Joshi and Houtzager 2012: 154).

Three main challenges faced this study. The first concerns the fact that “we lack a meta-literature on the impact of TAIs (transparency and accountability initiatives)” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 11), with “few comparative studies that look across various cases to discuss the degree of effective implementation and explain it” (ibid: 12). In general, “The evidence base is not large enough – there are simply not enough good impact studies – to begin to assess overall trends” (ibid: 19), regarding the effectiveness and impact of TAIs, both in general terms and with particular initiatives. This is acknowledged in a recent World Bank report, which that notes that “there is ample scope to expand the body of empirical evidence on social accountability” (Ringold et al 2012: 103). 4

Second, not all of the studies paid a great deal of attention to issues of context, which therefore makes it difficult to draw out which contextual issues were significant in shaping their effectiveness. This problem is typical of systematic reviews which are seeking to identify the role of factors not necessarily built in to the original studies. More specifically, the failure to include a strong focus on context within many evaluations of social accountability derives from the methodological approaches generally favoured by development agencies in

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donors-state relations</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political stability</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
evaluating interventions, which tend to obscure “vital issues underlying accountability work, which are about power and politics” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 3). Most social accountability interventions are conceptualised in instrumental and technical rather than political terms (Joshi and Houtzager 2012), thereby “over-emphasizing the tools to the detriment of analysis of context” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 8). For example, the current bias towards certain evaluative methodologies, such as randomized control trials, tends to minimize rather than explore the role of context and are limited in their capacity to identify impacts and trace these to particular causes, criticisms that have been made both in relation to their use in social accountability evaluations (e.g. Joshi and Houtzager 2012: 153) and more broadly (e.g. Schaffer 2011). This also reflects the more general tendency within international development to focus on technocratic aspects of interventions that can be delivered across many countries rather than the contextual differences between countries (as classically critiqued by Ferguson 1994). Even where the importance of context is acknowledged, this “has not proven sufficient to enable donors to grapple with key challenges posed by the interaction between formal and informal institutions, the prevalence of the latter over the former in many instances, and underlying power relations and dynamics” (Menocal and Sharma 2008: v). Although recent research into the politics of development has given us good reasons to think that social accountability interventions in developing countries will be closely shaped by the operation of informal institutions and processes (e.g. Leftwich and Sen 2011, Unsworth and Moore 2010), such factors are only very rarely and very recently been emphasised in the social accountability literature (e.g. Harris et al 2011), and donors themselves also remain out of view here, despite concerns over the role that external actors can (or ought) to play in relation to domestic processes of accountability.

This raises a significant challenge for development agencies, who we find to be the most influential producer of knowledge on the effectiveness of social accountability initiatives, in terms of building-in a much stronger focus on context at all stages of their work, from baseline through to monitoring and evaluation studies, as well as in programme design processes. The fact that this type of study is being commissioned, and the more general increased awareness of the significance of context within development agencies (Levy 2010), is promising in this regard but needs to go much further.

The third problem concerns the validity of generalising from a large range of studies, particularly around contextual factors. Although the methodology outlined above is judged to be fairly rigorous, particularly in terms of the number of studies covered and the mode of analysis employed, it is not possible to fully overcome the fact that even the same factor (e.g. the role of the media or of political parties) will play out and be considered in very different ways in different contexts. This is the classical problem of inference that arises within multi-case analysis (George and Bennett 2004), and which can only really be overcome through more in-depth within-case analysis which can reveal the meaning of particular variables in that particular context, as undertaken within a comparative country-case study project that adopts a standardised approach across the investigations undertaken within each case. This was not feasible here, although these principles could provide the basis for further work in this area. It also proved very difficult, in the context of largely qualitative studies that were considering often fairly intangible processes, to identify the weight that each study attached to each factor, or to aggregate a sense of this across the studies. This should caution against any generalisation about 'what works' outside the
intricate and complex web of drivers and constraints acting on any one intervention within any one specific locality. Further problems concern the fact that the majority of the literature covered here was either commissioned or undertaken by the same development agencies that are strongly associated with promoting and funding social accountability interventions, which introduces the possibility of bias in their findings.

The next three sections move on to analyse the evidence that is available concerning the role of intervention-based and, in particular, contextual factors in shaping the success or failure of the three types of SAMs identified here. Each of Sections 3, 4 and 5 the following sub-sections: a basic summary of the specific SAcc approach under discussion; a brief illustration of the types of impact that these specific interventions are associated with; an analysis of the role played by intervention-based and then context-based factors, and a summary. Section Six brings together the main findings from across these sections into a cross-cutting analysis that is then framed with reference to wider debates around social accountability and the politics of development more generally.

3. Citizen-led Transparency initiatives

3.1 Introduction

Transparency involves ensuring that “information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by decisions and that enough information is provided in easily understandable forms and media” (Kim et al. 2005:649). In order for the state to be fully responsive to citizens, there is an implicit requirement that citizens too need to be transparent about their needs and how they feel about public agencies. According to McGee and Gaventa (2011: 7), transparency initiatives “in the service delivery sector often purport to increase accountability by increasing transparency and access to information”, and being in possession of information regarding their entitlements should, in theory, allow citizens to make evidence-based demands of supply-side duty bearers. Some civil society efforts here have increasingly expressed social accountability in terms of promoting the ‘right to information’, suggesting a potential sequencing within a wider rights-based approach to development, whereby citizens need to be first informed about their rights in order to attain them. The transparency-based initiatives to accountability considered below include a range of approaches focusing on both state and citizen transparency, including:

**Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys:** These are studies carried out to identify where blockages and leakages exist, which in theory leads to action being taken when a discrepancy arises between disbursement and actual expenditures (McNeil and Mumvuma 2006).

**Independent budget analysis:** Civicus defines Independent budget analysis (IBA) as efforts: “to analyse proposed government budgets and to share their findings and concerns with the government and the public at large in order to advocate for budgetary changes”

The aim of IBA is to “increase the transparency of budgetary processes and decisions; raise

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5 The studies we reviewed thus cover the majority of the different types of transparency initiatives driven by social actors that are noted in the wider literature (e.g. Agrawal and Van Wicklin 2011: 10).
overall awareness of budgetary issues; and enhance the involvement of CSOs and citizens in the budgetary process” (ibid.).

**Report cards:** Report cards grade service providers based on feedback from the users of services. Services can be rated on different dimensions, and the ratings compared across agencies (Paul 2011).

**Community scorecards:** These combine quantitative surveys with village meetings whereby citizens have the opportunity to provide immediate feedback to service providers in face-to-face meetings (Odugbemi and Lee 2011).

**Social audits:** The social audit mechanism, as pioneered by the MKSS in India, “operate(s) by first gathering information about the budgets and expenditure in public programmes and presenting and verifying these in a public gathering in which all relevant stakeholders—public officials, elected leaders, private contractors and workers—are present” to hold public officials accountable for local level implementation of programmes (Joshi 2010:11).

### 3.2 Some illustrative evidence of impact

All but one of the fifteen studies covered here claimed that the transparency interventions they examined had achieved either ‘success’ or ‘partial success’. Taken at face value this is impressive, although this is in part explained by the fact that transparency campaigns can be successful to an extent without exacting particularly high levels of accountability. While transparency campaigns are important in providing citizens with information concerning (1) their rights, entitlements, and the content, including financing and budgeting, and organization of benefits and services, and (2) the quality and performance of service providers (Ringold et al. 2012), they do not automatically generate accountability, particularly at the level of enforcement. According to McGee and Gaventa, “Transparency is a necessary but insufficient condition for accountability, … transparency initiatives which ‘mobilise the power of shame’ have no purchase on the shameless” (2010:14). The following sub-sections briefly discuss the types of impact that each type of transparency intervention has had here.

**Social audits**

Over half of the studies examined here were based on interventions from Asia, and most of the evidence on social audits to date is from India where they are reported to have reduced corruption in public works programmes, and in some instances even compelled public officials to return the money that they had appropriated (Joshi 2010). According to Goetz and Jenkins (2001) the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) which pioneered this accountability method in the 1990s succeeded in getting the state government to change the local government Act to include local residents directly in auditing official development schemes. When integrated in the implementation of development projects, social audits have potential for increasing awareness of these projects to the target beneficiaries thereby increasing pro-poor access while reducing elite capture (Aiyar 2010). Joshi examines a grassroots organization in Delhi called Parivartan that used similar methods to monitor the implementation of the Public Distribution System (PDS)—a large food subsidy programme intended for the poor. Joshi reports that the “depth of corruption exposed through the process led to improvements in the operation of PDS as well as institutionalization of a
system of monthly ‘opening of the books’ for public scrutiny” (2010:12). Similar to Parivartan, is another NGO called the Rationing Kruti Samiti (RKS) which is reported to have led to improvements in the capacity of the PDS to reach the poor in Mumbai’s enormous low income settlements (Goetz and Jenkins 2001).

The popularity of social audits encouraged some Indian states to institutionalise them in national programmes such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA, see Aiyar 2010 and Aiyar and Samji 2009). An assessment of social audits in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh found that the exercise increased poor people’s demand for work and increased exposure of corruption within the programme leading to a significant amount of programme funds to be recovered and as many as 500 local level state agents to lose their jobs through accusations of misconduct revealed by the social audits (Singh and Vutukuru 2010). As far as redressing grievances in the public hearings is concerned, Aiyar (2010) reports that the majority of the labourers were satisfied with the way issues were being handled. However, social audits seem to have had no impact on the efficiency of the payment process – which is a key indicator of bureaucratic responsiveness to citizens (Aiyar 2010). The explanation for the audit’s underperformance in this area is provided by Shankar (2010) who studied the same program and found that social audits present a weak hierarchical relationship between the ‘auditors’ and government officials – implying that social audits have feeble enforcement power.

Scorecards and Report Cards

Compared to social audits, there are few examples of studies which analyse the impact of scorecards. Wild and Harris’ (2012) analysis of the Community Based Monitoring Project scorecard in Malawi reports some improvements in aspects of service delivery such as the construction of new school facilities and requests for additional funding in communities which implemented the project. However, they conclude that “there was no real sense of changed relationships between citizens and state service providers” as for instance exhibited in the agricultural component of the project where coupons are said to be going to kinsmen and close friends (Wild and Harris 2012:21). Another example of community score card is provided by Bjorkman and Svensson (2009) who report a randomized field experiment on community-based monitoring of public primary health care providers in Uganda. The authors claim that “a year after the intervention, treatment communities are more involved in monitoring the provider, and the health workers appear to exert higher effort to serve the community” (Bjorkman and Svensson 2009:735). It is claimed further that the intervention resulted into large increases in utilization and improved health outcomes reflected in “reduced child mortality and increased child weight—that compare favourably to some of the more successful community-based intervention trials reported in the medical literature” (ibid).

Ravinda (2004) positively assessed the citizen report card in Bangalore India. It is claimed that the report cards contributed to improvements in service delivery and public sector reforms; resulted in increased citizen activism and increased responsiveness to media reporting among government officials. According to other sources:

Three agencies – Bangalore Telecom, the Electricity Board, and the Water and Sewerage Board – streamlined their bill collection systems after the 1999 survey…
Two large public hospitals in the city that had received very poor rankings agreed to
support an initiative designed by an NGO to set up help desks to assist patients and
to train their staff to be more responsive to patients’ needs (Ramkuma 2008:84).

These findings have recently been re-echoed by one of the lead persons that started the
initiative in this part of India (see Paul 2011). Despite the impressive findings in some
instances in India, as Sundet (2008) observes, there are few other documented cases of
successful CSCs identified in the literature to date.

Public expenditure tracking surveys
The Malawian Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education (CSCQBE) which monitors
education expenditure using the PETS methodology successfully lobbied government to
revoke its decision to close a teacher’s college, to create a specific budget allocation for
children with special needs and that it “brought the parliament’s attention to the failure to pay
teacher salaries” (Sundet 2008:17). These outcomes notwithstanding, the author observes
that the results did not emanate from PETS per se, rather “it was qualitative observations,
such as late or non-payment of teacher salaries” that was used in lobbying (ibid). The author
therefore suggests that if the coalition had invested resources spent on PETS into alternative
activities, perhaps more positive outcomes may have materialised. Another example of
PETS is reported in Uganda by Reinikka and Svensson (2011), although these authors
place greater emphasis on the information campaign that was launched by the government
following the PETS intervention, arguing that it was this newspaper campaign which
successfully reduced ‘leakage’ in government expenditure by disseminating systematic
information about financial releases of Universal Primary Education (UPE) funding to enable
the public to monitor local officials' handling of these funds. However, this study has been
challenged for failing to take into consideration other more supply-side drivers of
accountability relating to UPE in Uganda (Hubbard 2007), an issue we return to below.

Independent budget analysis
In his analysis of the work of IBA groups in Brazil, Croatia, India, Mexico, South Africa and
Uganda, Robinson (2006) gives several examples to demonstrate that IBA work can
produce significant results in terms of increasing financial allocations for pro-poor
programmes and in ensuring that such expenditure allocations are implemented fully. He
reported that in Mexico, resources were availed to poor indigenous women for emergency
obstetric healthcare and contributing to a reduction in the prevalence of maternal mortality.
In South Africa, there was increased child welfare support for low-income black households
while in India there was improvement in the efficiency of expenditure allocations for tribal
welfare. Also “expenditure tracking improved the utilisation of development resources for the
benefit of tribal and poor rural communities in Gujarat and Uganda” (Robinson 2006:21).
Perhaps more significantly, Robinson finds that additional advocacy work by the budget
analysis groups helped to ensure that reported incremental expenditures were sustained and
not merely one-off commitments that were eroded afterwards. Robinson’s last observation
has got two important points for transparency-based social accountability initiatives: first is
what this review calls “the length of the intervention”, which relates to the view that
interventions require sustained action rather than ‘one-off’ activities; while the second
concerns the forging of links and synergies between different SAMs, both of which we return
to below.
3.3 Intervention based factors influencing the effectiveness of transparency initiatives

This section draws out and discusses the key intervention-based factors that our studies identified as significant in shaping the success and/or failure of particular transparency initiatives. These are discussed in descending order of importance in terms of how many studies mentioned each factor.

Authority-credibility of the lead actors

Nearly half of the studies of transparency-based initiatives covered here find that the authority and credibility of the lead actor/s is a critical factor in shaping the effectiveness of these interventions. Lead organisations need to show that they can: a) extract reliable data; b) manage it to produce disaggregated data; and, c) disseminate it regularly. For instance, in Robinson's (2006) independent budget analysis work, the legitimacy of the budget groups came from the fact that the agencies were authoritative sources of information on budget issues and that “in several cases were the only source of information and expertise outside government” (Robinson 2006:24). Additional attributes of this factor include whether the lead agency is considered credible and legitimate by both the state and citizens that are being mobilised. For the social audits in India, they gained legitimacy and social status from MKSS’ ability to enlist prominent social workers, politicians, judges, civil servants, and artists to sit on the citizen ‘juries’ at its public hearings (Goetz and Gaventa 2001). When social audits were ‘scaled-up’ in Andhra Pradesh, the committees included employees of MKSS to give them credibility (Aiyar and Samji 2009).

State-society collaboration

Just under half of the studies also found that successful transparency initiatives involved working across different sectors spanning the private-public divide. Particularly for social audits, Aiyar and Samji (2009) argue that they need to be undertaken in partnership with the state to ensure ‘grievance redressal’ whereby people’s concerns are responded to during public hearings. In Malawi, Wild and Harris observe that where the scorecard project was able to nurture ‘collaborative spaces’ bringing together communities, service providers, local authorities and others “to collectively solve service delivery problems, with each type of actor contributing to improvements according to their endowments”, service delivery improvements were realised (2012:22). For IBA, Robinson (2006) noted that when budget analysis initiatives were able to lobby for support from parliamentarians especially those serving on special legislative committees responsible for public expenditure or the social sectors, they enhanced the answerability of the political executive in relation to policy decisions and budget commitments. The author illustrates how budget tracking in Uganda linked with legislators to raise concerns around the utilisation of government resources and to enforce expenditure commitments at the local level. In the South African case, lobbying and analysis by a civil society coalition led to enhanced budgetary commitments prior to legislative deliberation, thereby serving as a case of ex-ante accountability (Robinson 2006:21). He concludes that linkages between budget groups in civil society and legislators in political society form the basis for tactical interventions in the budget process and strengthen the legitimacy of applied budget work (Robinson 2006:28).

The importance of high-quality and salient information

The term ‘lead actor’ refers here to the civil society agency [or other agency?] actually leading the initiative on the ground.
Information is both an input into and an output from successful transparency initiatives. Six of our 15 studies suggested that the effectiveness of interventions varied depending on the quality of information given to either citizens or state agents. The report card in Bangalore, is said to have disseminated clear comparisons among the various agencies of citizens' perceptions. According to Paul (2011) the ranking of agencies created a ‘glare effect’ to both citizens and the heads of the worst performing agencies. The chairman of the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) is quoted to have reacted to the findings of the report card as follows: “My curiosity was triggered by the fact that in the rankings the report card assigned to the various agencies, I found the BDA had got the first rank from the bottom. I thought I should do something about this” (Paul 2011:353). Conversely some initiatives are reported to have failed due to lack of clarity in the information disseminated. Sundet reports of a 2002 PETS information campaign which involved media advertising and public displays of central government financial releases to districts by Tanzanian authorities. It is said that the campaign did not reduce ‘leakage’ because the information advertised was “too aggregated, not tied to any specific outputs and in general of little help in informing local stakeholders of any specific entitlements” (Sundet 2008:11). Moreover recent research shows that information alone even when it is clear may not be enough to stimulate citizens to demand accountability or motivate state functionaries to become more responsive, especially if the information is not of relevance for, or in demand from, the intended information constituents (e.g. Fung et al, 2007). In an experimental study to examine the impact of mass media on educational outcomes in Benin, Keefer and Khemani (2011) found that villages with greater access to community radio exhibited greater functional literacy among children in public schools. However, the caveat to this finding was that ‘the power of information’ resulted not in increased government responsiveness, but rather in persuading parents to invest more of their own private resources into the education of their children and the health of their family.

Several studies stressed that the capacity within SAcc interventions to build links between their intervention and the wider media was important in shaping their success. The Public Affairs Committee in Bangalore, for example, relies on the media to publicize its report cards (Goetz and Gaventa 2001; Paul 2011; Ramkuma 2008). All independent budget analysis groups analysed by Robinson used both print and radio: “the press and broadcast media not only provide a platform for disseminating budget information but they also contribute to improved transparency where the availability of official government information is limited” (Robinson 2006:25). The synergies can continue even once a project has ended; for example, after the PETS in Uganda’s UPE programme, the government introduced a newspaper campaign to stimulate citizens’ vigilance in the monitoring of resources. However, at least one generic study reveal that the media is a double-edged sword, which may encourage populist pandering amongst elected officials as much as transparency and openness (Devarajan et al 2011: 24-5).

**Significance of the issue**
A handful of our studies emphasised that the issue addressed in transparency initiatives needed to be of significant interest to citizens. Reinikka and Svensson (2011) in part

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8 Fung et al (2007) contend that transparency policies can produce information that is incomplete, incomprehensible, or irrelevant to the consumers, investors, workers, and community residents who could benefit from them. They argue that, to be successful, transparency policies must place the needs of ordinary citizens at centre stage and produce information that informs their everyday choices.
accounted for the success of the newspaper campaign on the value households place on education in Uganda. In India, Paul reports that the report card focused on public service delivery because the issue had raised latent but widespread dissatisfaction from the public – hence people “were sufficiently concerned about it to devote their time and energies to demand change” (Paul 2011:356). Shankar’s study of social audits in the three Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh finds that villagers were more likely to monitor the performance of public officials on the wage component of the NREGS – implying that social audits are more effective in reducing thefts when citizens have a private stake in the outcome but less so when the supply of public goods is involved (Shankar 2010:19). The study reported further that complaints related to late payment of wages and low wages were frequently raised by villagers in the three states yet “almost no one brought up the issue of poor construction or the poor quality of materials” (Shankar 2010:20). Later in the report, we argue that the role of ‘significance’ in shaping levels of citizenship action that are effective in holding duty-bearers to account is closely linked to the wider social contract between state and citizens, whereby there is a recognition amongst both parties that the state has a responsibility to supply a particular public good.

Length of the intervention

Three of our 15 specific studies emphasised the role played by the duration of the intervention, arguing that transparency initiatives have to be sustained for results to emerge. First of all this is to ensure that early successes (such as budgetary allocations) are not scrapped in the following budget reading (Robinson 2006). For others institutionalisation is important simply because results take time to emerge; for example, the Bangalore report card started in 1994 but it was not until 2003 that clear positive results started to emerge (Paul 2011). MKSS’ right to information campaign started in the early 1990s and gained partial success in 2000 when the Indian state of Rajasthan (where the organization is based) passed the right to information act (Ramkuma 2008), although it took another five years for the nation-wide Right to Information Act (RTI) to be passed (Aiyar 2010; Ramkuma 2008). It also takes consistent action for people to gain trust in the initiative. Popular interest in the social audits for the NREGS was limited until it was observed that the state government had a plan involving regular follow-ups where social auditors were required to go back to interact with social audit participants and monitor action taken on audit recommendations. Thus, labourers were assured on feedback, which in turn built citizen trust in the process and resulted in this change in perception (Aiyar 2010:220). As discussed in Section Six, there is a temporal element to state-society relations that is only partially captured in the focus on the ‘length of intervention’ that emerged in some studies here (also Gaventa and Barrett 2010, Tembo 2012), around viewing social accountability involving successive phases of state-society bargaining over time (Joshi and Houtzager 2012).

Interactions among SAMs

“...transparency, accountability and participation reforms need each other, they can be mutually enforcing – but such synergy remains exceedingly rare” (Fox 2007a: 354, cited in McGee and Gaventa 2011: 14).

Only one of our studies of specific interventions noted the importance of how initiatives interacted with other social accountability mechanisms, although this was identified as a critical factor shaping success in half of the synthesis studies. For example, and as already noted, independent budget analysis had to be accompanied by targeted advocacy of key
decision markers (Robinson 2006). These mechanisms may originate from the ‘supply’ as well as the ‘demand’ side, as with the reforms in the Ministry of Education which Hubbard (2007) argues accompanied the information campaign that reduced the ‘leakage’ in the UPE programme in Uganda as reported by Reinikka and Svensson (2011). The results of the report card in India were accompanied by a series of reforms within government such as the creation of Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) – a public agency tasked to improve the city’s services and infrastructure, with greater public participation (Paul 2011). As already noted, MKSS’ work on social audits in India was more successful when it decided to campaign for the right to information legislation plus amendments to the state’s local government law (the Panchayati Raj Act) to create mandatory legal procedures for the investigation of corruption and to institutionalise officially the public-hearing audit method at the village assembly level (Goetz and Jenkins 2001). The critical point here is that an integrated approach to promoting social accountability can be particularly powerful where this involves both demand- and supply-led factors, and moves from being introduced as part of a stand-alone intervention to being institutionalised.

3.4 Contextual factors influencing transparency initiatives

Having reviewed the role played by intervention-based factors in shaping the success of transparency interventions, the focus now shifts to the key contextual features that studies revealed to be influential here.

Willingness of state functionaries

The level of ‘political will’ towards transparency-based initiatives emerged as the factor referred to most regularly across the studies examined here (Table Four), particularly amongst elected officials within influential roles. In short, whether the problems identified by transparency initiatives are addressed, or are even accepted to exist by duty-bearers within government, depends first and foremost on the interests of those in government (Goetz and Jenkins 2001; Singh and Vutukuru 2010). For the Bangalore report card, Paul (2011) notes that the political support and commitment of the chief minister of Karnataka state was a decisive factor. With the findings of the second report in 1997, the minister directed the creation of the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) – a public-private partnership involving several non-official and eminent citizens along with the heads of all service providers – to improve services and infrastructure in Bangalore. Paul notes that “in contrast to the more limited agency responses, this move by the chief minister ensured systemic responses across agencies. It was the first time that a chief minister in India had launched an initiative to improve services for a large city in response to citizen feedback” (2011:352).

In contrast, because the various PETS interventions in Tanzania did not attract the attention of state functionaries, they have had limited accountability outcomes (Sundet 2008). Hubbard (2007) observes that the commitment of the Ugandan president towards the success of UPE was a key factor that led to the reduction in the leakage reported by Reinikka and Svensson (2011). Social audits are proving to work in India because of political will reflected in the state’s willingness to institutionalise them in its programmes such as the NREG. According to Aiyar (2010) the Indian state is an “activist state” which proactively mobilize its citizens to monitor its programmes and open itself up for scrutiny. RKS’ success in PDS peaked in 1992 and 1994 when “an unusually reform-minded bureaucrat, Mr. Salvi,
held the post of Regional Controller of Rationing” (Goetz and Jenkins 2001:371). He granted the vigilance committee the right of access to official information about PDS deliveries. It is reported that Mr. Salvi also set up regular monthly meetings between the RKS and city officials in charge of the PDS. The RKS used these meetings as a means of informing officials about specific cases of malpractice that had been uncovered by its vigilance committees working with the shop owners and the local-level ration inspectors (Goetz and Jenkins 2001). However, after Mr. Salvi’s departure in 1994, “the relationship between the PDS and the RKS soured, moving from continued cooperation, through disinterest and opposition to downright rejection of the credibility of the RKS as a networking group” (2001:373).

It is important to note that political will is not limited to high ranking state officials, ‘street level bureaucrats’ are also important and can frustrate initiatives if they are not involved (Goetz and Jenkins 2001). In Andhra Pradesh, social audits have worked well precisely because of the early involvement of key government officials in the interventions, leading to the early recognition,

“that government functionaries like the mandal development officers would feel threatened by the entire process and so there was a concerted effort to reach out to these officials, sensitise them to the process of social audits and a clearly communicate that they were key members of the audit teams” (Singh and Vutukuru 2010:34).

Civil society environment: relationships and brokerage

The nature of civil society, and in particular the depth, extensiveness and character of the relationships amongst CSOs, plays a critical role in determining the success of transparency-based SAcc interventions. Nearly half of our specific studies identified this as critical. For example, the civil society coalition behind the Bangalore report card in India had more than 200 organisational members by the time of the second survey which sent a strong signal to state officials that citizens were concerned about the quality of public services (Paul 2011). In the budget analysis study, Robinson observes that:

“budget groups tend to be small and have limited human and financial resources at their disposal. Their ability to acquire specialised knowledge and organisational capacity for mounting effective campaigns is limited. But when budget groups form alliances with other specialised advocacy organisations with wider constituencies the potential to achieve positive impact is much greater” (2006:28).

This suggests that the other actors should be able to bring complementary resources to the coalition for their membership to be of value. However, in a warning about the difficulties involved here, Sundet (2008) explains how the absence of cooperation and apparent competition among CSOs caused the failure of PETS in Tanzania. In line with other observers of civil society in Africa, Sundet links this fragmentation among civil society actors to the incentives in largely aid-dependent environments for CSOs to compete rather than cooperate with each other.

Democratisation and rule of the law

The significance of democratisation and the rule of law, both strongly emphasised in the good governance literature, were the focus of only four of our fifteen studies on transparency initiatives, and usually cast in quite general terms. For example, Paul (2011) argues that
report cards will work only in democratic settings ‘with institutionalised tolerance of dissent and debate’ that can accommodate citizens’ pressure and media exposure. Likewise, since independent budget analysis operates with the help of legislators (potentially opposition), there is a presumption of democratic governance. Robinson (2006) notes that in those countries with “political systems characterised by strong executive authority and weak legislative traditions such as Mexico and Croatia, the budget process [is] relatively impervious to legislative oversight” implying that collaboration with the legislature in such contexts might not be an effective strategy. The level of democratisation is also closely linked to the effective involvement of the media in transparency campaigns, as noted in the section on ‘Interventions’ above. Some generic studies go further here, suggesting that there is little evidence of TAIs being effective in non-democratic settings, whereby “In a regime lacking the essential freedoms of association, voice or media, citizen-led TAIs do not have the same prospects for success as in societies where these conditions exist” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 21). Social accountability interventions can play a role here in triggering existing accountability mechanisms, as in the case of citizen report cards whereby “information, and possibly complementary mobilization, activated a client power mechanism that the state has already set up” (Devarajan et al 2011: 26). However, Devarajan et al also show that accountability might emerge even within semi-authoritarian regimes, which suggests the need to treat the concept of ‘democracy’ more carefully here.

In terms of the rule of law, Goetz and Jenkins (2001) identify the legal standing of transparency structures e.g. citizen juries having the disciplinary power and authority to take binding decisions, as important. They argue that most transparency initiatives have challenges in enlisting mandatory legal action because they are not established by a legal framework. Thus, neither the identification of accounting discrepancies clearly worthy of further investigation, nor even admissions of guilt from local officials at the MKSS’s unofficial public hearings, have propelled the state-government-controlled police into initiating follow-up action (Goetz and Jenkins 2001).

**Capacity and willingness of citizens to participate in accountability activities**

The capacity and willingness of citizens to engage in individual and collective action was noted in four of our fifteen studies, with this capacity found to be positively related to the levels of education and income. The effectiveness of the slum-dweller women who sit on RKS’ informal Vigilance Committees was challenged by the fact that the women “lack the literacy and accounting skills needed to make sense of PDS records so as to track inconsistencies between amounts of goods delivered and sold” (Goetz and Jenkins 2001:374). A recent study evaluating the right to information access (RTIA) in India found that 45 percent of randomly selected respondents in urban areas (state and national capitals) knew of it as compared to 20 percent of the more than 400 focus group discussions conducted in villages that a single person who knew about the RTIA (RaaG 2009 cited in Aiyar 2010). The study concluded that the RTIA is largely an urban phenomenon with citizens in rural areas, and those with lower incomes and from vulnerable groups, less likely to use it. In Mumbai, where Bengali Muslim immigrants lacked citizenship rights – which Goetz and Jenkins describe as the primary essential resource – they had difficulties in participating in RKS vigilance committees to monitor and challenge state authority because they were not recognized as *bona fide* ‘Indian nationals’ by the municipal and state administrations (Goetz and Jenkins 2001). This is underlined by further findings from India
(Shankar 2010) that villagers who participated in the meetings for social audit exercises were not confident to express their views freely for fear of reprisals from the officials who were present in the meetings. The capacities of individuals to engage in social accountability initiatives is closely shaped by their status within broader political communities, which would support the call by Goetz and Jenkins (2001) for transparency activities ought to start with fighting for rights of citizenship, or what Hannah Arendt called the ‘right to have rights’.

**Timing of the intervention**

Even if social accountability initiatives are properly executed, if the timing is not right they may not translate into desired outcomes. This point can be illustrated with the PETS which focused on Primary Education Development Project (PEDP) in Tanzania. Despite its highly regarded methodology, with a nationally representative sample of schools, and despite being conducted by a renowned Tanzanian research organisation, REPOA, the findings of this 2004 project were not enthusiastically received by the state. According to Sundet, although the exercise found a huge leakage in the region of 40% of the total allocated funds, the findings came in the run up to the 2005 elections. The author argues that ‘government might have been concerned about publicly tackling powerful vested interests at the central and local level’, who might have upset its political fortunes (Sundet 2008:11). Moreover, donors – the World Bank in particular – were possibly also less inclined to press the government on the findings because they had just given acclaim to Tanzania’s handling of public expenditures in the 2004 World Development Report. Conversely, in India Goetz and Jenkins report that MKSS “exploited the state-level election campaign of 1999 to ensure that the right to information became a campaign issue, and has since held the newly elected congress administration to account for its manifesto promise to pass right to information legislation” (2001:44).

**3.5 Summary**

“change for the better in accountability systems... is, first and foremost, a political challenge, while technical challenges are only a secondary concern. There is therefore a need to pay much closer attention to the political context of the various methods of expenditure tracking and budget monitoring” (Sundet 2008: 8).

Achieving higher levels of transparency appears to be a necessary but insufficient condition for social accountability to emerge. Success here has been found to be closely related to the level of political will amongst state functionaries, particularly those in elected positions who are able hold service providers to account although few studies go further to explore the origins of this political will. This, and the fact that bottom-up vertical accountability interventions generally achieved greater success where they were able to forge synergies with horizontal forms of accountability mechanisms, suggests that supply-side factors are critical here. The choice of issue/s or public goods around which transparency is sought is also important, both in terms of catalysing demand-making and gaining a response, suggesting that there might be a stronger ‘social contract’ around some issues and public goods than others, in the sense that actors on both sides of the equation perceive that there is a duty for public authorities to respond. A good example here concerns the success of PETs in relation to primary education in Uganda, a public good that people have come to expect and demand and on which the President also makes demands of his public officials in line with his understanding of the electoral logic of doing so.
Only a few studies noted the significance of democracy and the rule of law, mainly in terms of enabling oversight and allowing SAMs to trigger existing mechanisms, and also in terms of using elections to politicise certain issues around which accountability is sought. However, the nature of the findings suggests that rather than focus on broad-brush categories, it might be more useful to think in terms of the particular forms of power and politics that shape incentives around political behaviour in particular contexts and their implications for social accountability interventions. The Uganda case is again instructive here, in that although primary education was introduced in relation to a national election in 1996 (Stasavage 2005), this was primarily a populist measure that fits the patronage mode of politics in Uganda, in that it is held in place by and understood to have been delivered by Presidential fiat rather than of right (Tripp 2010). Indeed, the more critical issue of accountability around primary education in Uganda concerns not PETS but the way in which the original UPE reforms rode rough-shod over the local accountability structures that were in place in the form of parent-teacher associations, in favour of empowering headmasters with upwards lines of accountability (Dauda 2004). Furthermore, this took place within the wider context of reforms that were driven by the populist politics of patronage and which were delivered via donor-funding, which further removed this public good from the realm of state-citizen accountability (Tripp 2010). As noted in the latest literature on social accountability, the formal world of accountability that most SAMs seek to engage in operate in contexts where other, often “informal rules of engagement prevail. These often involve patrimonial structures of exchange, which rely on different logics of accountability and appeal to different narratives of legitimacy” (Harris et al 2011: 5).

The capacity of CSOs to network and build alliances, particularly in terms of moving beyond the rather narrow world of professional advocacy NGOs and through popularising technical issues (e.g. around budgeting) with broader social constituencies and avoiding the fragmentation that typifies donor-driven forms of civil society in developing countries, is also significant. However, there is also good evidence to suggest that transparency-based initiatives tend to be utilised more frequently and successfully by better-off and less excluded citizens, who tend to possess the capabilities to engage. This raises difficulties regarding the degree of voluntarism that underpins the promotion of social accountability mechanisms (e.g. Booth 2011), an issue we discuss in more depth in Section Six.

4. Contentious actions

4.1 Introduction

This section moves on to discuss our second cluster of SAMS, under the heading of contentious action. Social accountability mechanisms in this category are to be distinguished from transparency initiatives in the sense that they go beyond mere ‘barking’ and further towards helping to complete “the accountability loop” (Aiyar 2010). According to Gaventa and McGee, taking a ‘contentious view’ is a serious step that can enable a move from mere “voice... to real influence in policy processes” (2010:11). The activities included in this category are regarded by some as the original social accountability strategies before the invention of what Joshi and Houtzager (2012) call the “Widgets” – the modern social accountability mechanisms or donor-driven operational ‘tools’ such as social audits, community scorecards and report cards. As emphasised by the World Bank itself, a target of the above critique, “traditionally, citizen or civil society-led efforts to hold government
accountable have included actions such as public demonstrations, protests, advocacy campaigns, investigative journalism, and public interest lawsuits” (World Bank n.d: 6). Although contentious action is most often spearheaded by social movements and NGOs, there are also less formal and more individual-level actions that Hossain (2010) terms ‘rude forms’ of accountability that fit under this heading, including undressing, shouting and spreading rumours (also Tsai 2007).

4.2 Illustrative evidence of impact
Social movement and NGO mobilisations and protests have a large body of evidence regarding their impact, much of which focuses on issues not directly related to the issue of social accountability per se. However, we identified ten studies that did focus specifically on social accountability, nine of which suggested that they were either successful or partially so in achieving their objectives (Table Two). These included studies of famous movements such as The Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil, which sought to hold the government to account for its constitutional responsibility around land, whereby ‘land has a social responsibility to be productive’. MST pressurized the government to redistribute idle farmland from “landowners who are not using it to landless people who are willing to work it” (Campbell et al. 2010:965). MST has organized more than 230,000 land occupations, won 15 million acres for land reform, created 1500 agricultural communities, and settled more than 250,000 families. In South Africa, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) successfully pushed the African National Congress (ANC) government to put in place policies around HIV/AIDS such as universal provision of ART through the public health system (Campbell et al. 2010, Friedman 2010).

In Bangladesh, Naila Kabeer lists several outcomes from the mobilization work of a local NGO called Nijera Kholi (NK) including: an overall increase in wages in areas where NK groups have engaged in successful collective bargaining; reduction of illicit payments to health officials and reduction in other forms of public sector corruption; more regular attendance by teachers when NK members become members of school committees; construction of schools in areas where they did not exist and their registration with the government and others (Kabeer 2003:36). In a recent and more systematic analysis of the same NGO, Kabeer and colleagues suggest that NK improved the political standing of its members vis-à-vis the state in the sense that NK members were more likely than non-members to: know their constitutional rights; vote; campaign in local and national elections; interact with locally elected representatives and government officials; be elected to informal village committees’ (Kabeer et al. 2009). In other words, NK members have managed to achieve enhanced citizenship status, and also appear to be moving beyond social and into issues of political accountability. Similarly, Chhotray’s (2008) analysis of Samaj Pragati Sahyog (SPS) in Madhya Pradesh, India, reveals that the NGO managed to realize concrete changes in local power relations by overturning wage relations, transformed common property access and challenged an exploitative anti-tribal coalition. Activities at this level hold out the promise of reforming the relational basis of accountability and governance in a more inclusive and pro-poor direction.

4.3 Intervention factors that influence contentious activities
Authority and credibility of lead actors

According to just under half of the specific studies, the credibility of the lead actors involved in promoting the specific SAccc initiative helped encourage citizens to mobilise behind it. For example, the leaders of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa are seen as respected middleclass citizens who had played an active part in the anti-apartheid liberation struggle (Friedman 2010). The credibility of the agency can also come from a track record of achievements. The SPS is again a good example here as it began small, focusing on just one village, working on the individual plots of land of people, building/improving on wells as a way of building direct relationships with the local population, before moving into more politicised activities (Chhotray 2008). The eight founding members of SPS were high caste, highly educated and left-leaning elites, which both enabled and encouraged their critical interactions with high ranking bureaucrats in the district. Plus, they were not from the original area where they founded the NGO, and not being indigenes sent a message that they were neutral actors. Hossain (2010: 917) also notes that, in Bangladesh, where state officials operate in their communities of origin they tend to be more responsive. In Bangladesh NK is a highly regarded organisation in terms of the hard work and leadership skills of its staff (Kabeer 2003; Kabeer et al. 2009). The ability to enlist the support of eminent citizens is another source of credibility, as with the TAC gaining support from individuals like Bishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela (Campbell et al. 2010; Friedman 2010). Credibility within government was also important, with SPS benefiting from the public approval of the highest elected authority in the district (Chhotray 2008).

State-society collaboration

Just under half of the category-specific studies suggest that successful contentious activities require working across the private-public divide. Although this is something of counter-intuitive finding given that ‘contentious’ action tends to imply an adversarial relationship between the state and social actors, it has been increasingly recognised that the relationship between state and non-state actors is more critical than the level of CSO autonomy. Chhotray’s work on the activities of SPS reveals a continuous interface not only with government officials but with other key actors within ‘political society’, including political representatives, activists and local courts, as being key for success (Chhotray 2008). In China, Tsai (2007) finds that it is solidarity groups which are structured so that they overlap and mesh with government structures that can provide local government officials with important incentives to provide the public goods and services that citizens demand even when democratic or bureaucratic institutions do not work effectively. In 2010, and despite initially hostile relations between aids activists and the state in South Africa, TAC sided with the government when the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association took the government to court over its attempt to sanction the importation of generic anti-retro viral drugs (Campbell et al. 2010; Friedman 2010).

Interactions among SAMS

It is clear from the studies considered here, and particularly from the synthesis studies, that initiatives relied on several strategies, including the use of media and litigation. Paré and Robles (2006) studied an initiative that sought to help indigenous communities in Southern Veracruz in Mexico to manage watersheds and realise the right to water from municipal authorities. The intervention included the development of an effective legal framework, mechanisms of technical/environmental monitoring, and a social audit. They concluded that “building accountability … between numerous actors with diverse and contradictory interests
requires an ongoing process of negotiation and engagement through both formal and informal channels” (Paré and Robles 2006:80). According to Odugbemi and Lee (2011) the impact attained by protest movements and advocacy organizations is directly proportional to the amount of media visibility they are able to gather – implying that mobilisation has to be accompanied by media engagement. The TAC in South Africa has used the media strategically to provide clear information on its activities: according to Campbell and colleagues,

“when TAC started a civil disobedience campaign in 2003, it took out full-page advertisements in newspapers explaining why it had decided to use such tactics. By framing its struggle as an uncontestable moral issue, it has mobilized the support of a wide range of prominent national and international constituencies, making it very difficult for the government to challenge its claims” (Campbell et al. 2010:968).

Perhaps the most important point is that TAC combines civil disobedience with service provision (Friedman 2010). TAC’s treatment project, which provides medication and treatment literacy for a limited number of TAC and ‘community’ members, thus offering direct benefits which helps keep members committed. Although the main strategies of the MST in Brazil are protest road blocks and long-distance mass marches to government ministries, the “leaders readily [also] meet government ministers and actively seek media attention to publicize its demands” (Campbell et al. 2010: 965). According to one study of the role of movements in promoting social accountability in Latin America, movements that employ all three key strategies of judicial process, community mobilization, and media campaigns together are generally more successful in achieving accountability (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2002: 226).

**Significance of the issue**

Some issues clearly generate higher levels of contentious action than others. In Bangladesh, NK mobilization was more pronounced in areas that involved “struggles over control of khas land” because it is a “matter of life-and-death” for the dispossessed groups (Kabeer 2003:37). The author contrasted this with efforts in the same country to expose corrupt government officials, which have seen less dramatic forms of group activity and only incremental forms of change. In South Africa, TAC chose the provision of ARVs which is the only treatment available that can significantly reduce the HIV-virus. The highly unequal distribution of land in Brazil, whereby “70 percent of agricultural land is owned by 3 percent of the people”, has enabled MST to gain wide appeal among the landless.

**4.4 Contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of contentious initiatives**

**Civil society environment: relationships and brokerage**

One of the key aspects of the working environment is the availability of other CSOs with whom strong relationships and coalitions can be built. The strength of TAC in South Africa is said to emanate from the strategic bridging relationships including academics, South African churches, international activist organizations and trade unions with political clout. According to Campbell and colleagues, in 2003 when TAC moved towards civil disobedience, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the largest union coalition in South Africa and member of the ruling ANC tripartite alliance publicly announced that it was considering
joining the action. “While it did not, this expression of support added legitimacy and strength to TAC’s claims” (Campbell et al. 2010:968). In Southern Veracruz, Paré and Robles (2006) note that it took the efforts of ‘neutral’ academics to facilitate dialogue between state actors and indigenous movement groups on issues of water management. With ‘rude’ forms of accountability, Hossain (2010) argues that the availability of local media plays a key role in these informal dynamics as officials are afraid of the potential reputation damage or punitive measures from higher authorities that can result from media exposures. While the availability of CSOs is critical, not all of them are capable of contributing positively to social accountability goals. In Bangladesh, Kabeer finds that “NK groups tend to be weaker in areas where there are a lot of other NGOs in operation, particularly those distributing credit, since such activity undermines collective mobilisation on the part of the poor” (Kabeer 2003). The fragmentary character of civil society, and the competing projects undertaken within it, can therefore obstruct as well as enable moves towards higher levels of social accountability. Some movements seeking greater accountability struggle to sufficiently distance themselves from the politics of patronage and ethnicity that predominates in some contexts, as with one movement struggling to secure the right to housing from informal tenants in Mombasa (Nyamu-Musembi 2006: 140), a point returned to in Section 6.

Democratisation and rule of law
The role of democratisation and the rule of law is considered to be significant in a few of the category-specific studies identified here. Movements such as MST in Brazil and TAC in South Africa draw from their countries’ constitutions to demand that the provisions therein are implemented (Campbell et al. 2010). The NGO SPS also relied on a correct reading of the laws and official guidelines of the Indian state to fuel its radical initiatives (Chhotray 2008). For litigation to be a successful strategy implies that there is a functional court system, revealing once more the role that SAcc interventions can play in triggering existing accountability mechanisms. Such mechanisms are (by definition) more likely to be in place in more democratic contexts, although (as discussed above and, more fully, in Section Six) it is more useful to think about particular forms of power and politics rather than blanket terms such as ‘democracy’.

Inequalities within society
The impact of inequalities on the effectiveness of contentious action is quite ambiguous. In countries such as Brazil, India and South Africa, it seems likely that the pervasiveness of inequality has played a role in stimulating aggrieved citizens into action in search of redress, as indicated by the case of MST. On the other hand, studies noted that the degree of fractionalisation along religious, ethnic or class in communities negatively impacts contentious action because it affects citizens’ capacity for collective action. Chhotray (2008) attributed the relative success of SPS mobilization activities on its location, in a valley region where there was less inter-caste tension because of a majority of ‘tribals’ rather than the plateau region where ‘upper castes... dominate the district’s politics and political economy’ (2008:264). This may indicate that social mobilization is easier in socially homogeneous communities with shared social norms, although this reading is contested by recent work on Kerala, which shows that a high degree of fractionalisation can be overcome through building cross-group alliances in accordance with broader interests and ideological commitments (Singh and Vutukuru 2010). According to Paré and Robles (2006), shared
social norms underpinned by traditional principles of reciprocity and cooperation were an enabling factor in laying the foundations for a reframing of water management for the common good in Southern Veracruz. Hossain (2010) and Tsai (2007) also observe that informal methods of extracting accountability operate where people can rely on social norms to exert pressure on public officials.

State capacity to respond to accountability demands
It matters that the environment in which contentious activities are undertaken has ‘functioning state institutions’ (Gaventa and McGee 2010), a finding that supports earlier work on the critical role that state capacity plays in shaping effective forms of social action (Moore and Putzel 1999). Movements like TAC and MST were in part successful due to the existence of a competent judiciary which disposed of the cases brought to its attention (Campbell et al. 2010). In Mombasa Kenya, Nyamu-Musembi (2006) illustrates how the presence of an under-capacity bureaucracy undermined the actions of the tenant movement’s proposal for a tenancy purchase scheme. Although the proposals had received support from the Director of Housing (a bureaucrat) but the city mayor (politician) opposed them and threatened to use his influence to have the Director sacked. The author argues that although the mayor had no powers to dismiss the director, the formal chain of command of public service is not followed as “it is not uncommon for mayors and councillors to use their influence to get civil servants dismissed or transferred to less attractive postings” (Nyamu-Musembi 2006:137). ‘State capacity’ here refers not to the organisational competencies or human resource capacities of particular bureaucrats, but the pervasive influence of informal and personalised institutional norms, and issue we return to in Section 6. This suggests that ‘supply-side’ factors are critical to the success of ‘demand-side’ activities, and echoes broader findings on the significance of state capacity in achieving accountability outcomes (e.g. Menocal and Sharma 2008: xiv).

Political will
Four of our ten category-specific studies indicated that NGO and social movement mobilisation works best where there are links with reformist politicians and bureaucrats, as hinted at above. SPS work in India greatly benefited from the support of a senior district official with the authority to impose sanctions upon corrupt junior officials (Chhotray 2008). In terms of what motivated this senior bureaucrat, it seems that he was impressed by SPS’ proposal to streamline government operations in line with constitutional provisions and also did not personally stand to benefit from maintaining a dysfunctional system at lower levels. However, Nyamu-Musembi’s (2006) analysis of the tenants’ movement above also points to the issue of political will but more importantly to the ‘politics of political will’. The story suggests that alliances with reformist bureaucrats may not be enough in contexts where there are influential politicians opposed to the changes. This point is also highlighted by SPS’ work in India.

History of state-citizen bargaining
Most successful contentious initiatives are recorded in countries with a history of grassroots mobilisation against a ‘common oppressor’ (Shankland 2010), which in Williams’ terms (2004) has helped develop the political capabilities of citizens over time through iterative processes of interaction and bargaining (also Joshi and Houtzager 2012). In South Africa, TAC’s mobilization happened in the aftermath of a successful antiapartheid movement (Campbell et al. 2010; Friedman 2010), with the founders of TAC using the same techniques developed in the fight against apartheid. Campbell and colleagues also argue that “MST’s
successes can be partially understood within the wider context of Brazilian activism, especially the ‘liberation theology’ preached by the Catholic Church’s radical wing in the 1960s and 1970s — a religious worldview encouraging activism among the poor” (Campbell et al. 2010:965). A history of civil society action can create “a repertoire of activism, replete with skills, networks and tactics, on which these later campaigns could build” (Gaventa and McGee 2010:13, also Joshi and Houtzager 2012).

**Capacity and willingness of citizens to participate in accountability activities**

Citizens’ capacity and commitment to engaging in the collective forms of action that predominate in this category is positively related to the levels of education and income. Campbell and colleagues (2010) suggest that citizens’ capacities can be built by incorporating the provision of education and capacity-building in the intervention. There may also be good reasons for poor and vulnerable people to avoid engaging in contentious action. Kabeer’s work in Bangladesh reports that “the absence of immediate economic gains may discourage the longer term participation of the very poor, particularly if NK group membership jeopardises precarious survival strategies which depend on … maintaining the patronage of powerful sections of village society” (Kabeer 2003:37-38).

**4.5 Summary**

The key intervention factors that influence the effectiveness of contentious action of social actors include the authority and credibility of the lead agencies, their ability to mobilise support spanning the state-society divide, and their employment of a wide range of strategies. It is argued that the forging of strategic alliances between actors from civil society and political society helps to create a more receptive environment for the demands of social mobilisers among power-holders. Alliances between interest groups bring the numbers and legitimacy necessary to get the attention of decision-makers, while alliances with elite political and legal networks have assisted communities to use legal challenge and constitutional frameworks. Such alliances appear easier to form when lead agencies successfully create a symbolic value around the issue they are promoting through strategic moral, legal or economic discourses and using the media to popularise what might otherwise be deemed to be technical concerns.

The main contextual factors that shape contentious activities include: a working environment which is characterised by the presence of strong CSOs which can join forces, the pre-existence of accountability mechanisms that can be triggered (deemed more likely in democratic environments), and a state with functional institutions and political will amongst state elites, particularly elected officials. The salience of mobilisation that persists over time highlights the view that social accountability could to some extent be path dependent, and reveals the importance of viewing social accountability as the outcome of longer-term and iterative processes of bargaining between social and state actors (Joshi and Houtzager 2012, Section Six). It appears that ‘rude’ and ‘less formal’ forms of accountability are more likely to take centre-stage in contexts where governance is weak, and where civil society lacks the capacity or inclination to hold civil servants to account. As such, these might be framed as ‘second-best’ forms of accountability (Hossain 2010), that may not even constitute moves towards even ‘good enough’ forms of governance (Grindle 2007). This again draws attention to the significance of context in shaping the types of social accountability activities
that emerge and have impact, in line with Moore and Putzel’s (1999) point that it is the shape and nature of the state which strongly shapes the type of response that will emerge from civil society.

5. Participation in formal policy making spaces

5.1 Introduction and illustrative evidence of impact
Social accountability initiatives in this category involve the direct participation of citizens in policy making, policy advocacy and deliberation (Joshi 2010). The main advantage that this form of participation has over other social accountability initiatives is that “instead of trying to influence policy from the outside … citizens … are invited inside the governmental apparatus itself” (Ackerman 2004:451), in a move towards diagonal rather than simply bottom-up forms of accountability (Goetz and Jenkins 2001). Our search of the literature generated a particular focus on three examples of social accountability mechanisms that fall under this category, namely consultations within poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), participatory budgeting (PB) and community management committees (CMCs).

PRSPs
The Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) has been heralded as a participatory process involving governments, civil society agencies and ‘development partners’, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), through which developing countries formulate macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs that they follow in order to promote growth and reduce poverty (Craig and Porter 2003). Established in 1999 by the World Bank and IMF as a condition for countries applying for debt relief under the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC2) initiative, the PRSP experiment set out to transform two sets of relationships that are critical to development in highly indebted poor countries – those between governments and citizens and those between governments and international donors. The current analysis focuses on the former i.e. the extent to which the PRS process transformed relationships between the state and citizens. Komives summarises the assumptions normally held on how the PRS process and the resultant PRSPs help to produce social accountability:

“PRSP consultations are formal spaces where civil society actors could make ‘noise’ and denounce the government’s failure to take a particular problem, group of people or policy option into consideration. The PRSPs themselves facilitate debate and monitoring by publicizing governments’ policy intentions. In many countries, more permanent participatory bodies are also set up to monitor the results of the strategy. These are formal bodies with representation from civil society and often also from government and/or donor organizations. Members of these participatory bodies could theoretically activate horizontal accountability mechanisms if governments were not implementing the PRSP or if the strategy was not producing the desired results. In heavily aid dependent countries, civil society actors might also appeal to donors, rather than Parliaments, for ‘enforcement’ of PRSP agreements” (Komives 2011:304-305).

9 As we use the heading CMC to cover user management committees, and compared to the list generated by Agarwal and Van Wicklin (2011: 10), the only SAMs that fall under this category that we do not consider here are more general forms of participatory planning and also community contracting.
In brief, the hypothesis here is that, obliging governments to debate their policies openly with other actors in their countries, creates incentives for greater commitment to equitable and efficient development policies (Booth 2005:1).

Evidence of Impact
A few reviews identify examples where PRSPs have helped to engender new institutional channels for debating poverty in some countries e.g. in Bolivia, Honduras and Rwanda the process of national dialogue was institutionalised by legislation (Driscoll and Evans 2005; Molenaers and Renard 2003). In some Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Nicaragua and Guatemala, the PRSP is linked to legislation that granted municipalities the powers to implement participatory budgeting processes, thus institutionalising participation in the policy process (Shah 2007). This can be interpreted as a genuine attempt to increase transparency in the disbursement of resources with potential for “lay[ing] the foundations of a new ‘poverty contract’, under which politicians and other leaders acquire new obligations and poor people gain new rights” (Booth 2003:147). However, recent analyses have downplayed the possibilities of this poverty contract emerging (e.g. see Vos 2011 on in Bolivia, Honduras and Nicaragua), in line with broader criticisms regarding the tendency within PRSPs to empower less political actors such as professionalised and urban-based NGOs, and to ignore the role of more political CSOs and actors, and processes within political society (Cheru 2006, Dijkstra 2005, Gould 2005).

According to a comparative study of participation and accountability in Bolivia and Zambia, this means that “PRS processes focus on those mechanisms that offer … the weakest forms and levels of accountability, in terms of their capacity to ensure the answerability of power-holders or the enforceability of conditions upon them” (Hickey and Mohan 2008:251). In particular, the more disciplinary and supply-led forms of accountability that are generally associated with higher levels of public accountability (Brett 2003), such as the oversight of elected officials and judicial actors, the watchdog role of the media and certain forms of bureaucratic accountability (Hickey and Mohan 2008), are ignored or even undermined by PRSPs (Brown 2004, Gould 2005). This links to the broader critique that PRSPs have failed to shift the key power relations that underpin pro-poor forms of politics over the long-run, particularly in terms of empowering citizens and holding states to account, because “the implicit theory about political change that underlay the concept and its operationalisation has been proven naïve” (Booth 2005: 4). This is particularly the case concerning the potential for the participatory activities of citizens and CSOs to shift the deeper incentives to which political elites respond, and for formal democratic procedures to take hold within contexts characterised by informal political practices and lacking high-levels of educated, organised and urbanised citizens. The report will return to these and other issues of the PRS initiative below, after briefly introducing the other participatory mechanisms.

Participatory Budgeting
Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a process through which citizens can contribute to decision making over at least part of a local governmental budget (Devarajan et al. 2011; Goldfrank 2007). According to Ackerman (2004) participatory budgeting places “normal citizens … in the planning and supervision of public spending, activities normally under the exclusive purview of public officials” (Ackerman 2004:451). Drawing on Porto Alegre experience, Ackerman claims that participatory budgeting “drastically reduced the possibilities and
incentives for corrupt behaviour on behalf of bureaucrats" (Ackerman 2004:451). It is also claimed that because:

> “each neighborhood and region is informed as to the exact amount of funds that will be invested in which products and services in its area [and] since the citizens themselves participate in designing the budget, [then] they feel they have a personal stake in making sure the government complies with its commitments” (ibid).

PB helped to limit the capture of state resources by wealthy interests through the weighting system that was used in determining budget priorities which essentially “tilt[ed] investments towards poorer neighbourhoods” (Ackerman 2004:451). From 1989 the Worker’s Party (PT) in Porto Alegre placed as much as 10% of its annual budget in the hands of citizens to decide where to invest it (Shah 2007). In confirmation of these benefits, a 2003 World Bank report quantified the benefits of PB in Porto Alegre as follows:

> “Between 1989 and 1996, the number of households with access to water services rose from 80% to 98%; percentage of the population served by the municipal sewage system rose from 46% to 85%; number of children enrolled in public schools doubled; in the poorer neighborhoods, 30 kilometers of roads were paved annually since 1989; and because of transparency affecting motivation to pay taxes, revenue increased by nearly 50%” (Waglé and Shah 2003:3).

Citizens are said to have recognised the impressive performance by rewarding the Worker’s Party four consecutive terms in office (Goldfrank 2007). More important however are claims that the exercise transformed relations between the state and citizens in fundamental ways through close collaborations between bureaucrats and the people in designing and implementing projects (Shah 2007). However, there is a caution that the experience of Porto Alegre must be interpreted with care especially that not many cities in Brazil itself let alone other countries have successfully replicated PB (Shah 2007). As noted by Goldfrank (2007), systematic comparisons of the ways in which participatory budgeting is designed and implemented are rare.

**Community management committees**

This involves efforts to improve accountability in the allocation of resources for public services by devolving decision making powers to local levels thereby enhancing both (a) community management over resources and (b) citizen oversight of local government’s use of resources (Mansuri and Rao, forthcoming). Typically, such initiatives involve organising citizens into committees to manage development programmes ranging from environmental resources, targeting of benefits of poverty alleviation schemes, infrastructure projects to health and education services (Devarajan et al. 2011). It is assumed that devolving decision making powers to the community level increases citizens’ interest in the activities of public agencies and leads to more effective allocation of resources, and that increased vigilance in turn increases incentives for service providers to modify their behaviours in pro-poor ways (Bruns et al. 2011). It is also assumed that citizens gain transferable skills from the experience of managing one project that they can use in other public engagements. This type of mechanism is informed by the broader community-driven development (CDD) approach, and, as discussed here and in Section 6, shares some of the same problems.
Some evidence of accountability impact from community management committees

A rigorous assessment of two interventions, the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) and Village Education Committees (VECs) across three states in India by Corbridge and colleagues (2005) found mixed results. In some parts of West Bengal e.g. Debra-Midnapore such initiatives were successful in “bringing the state to the people”, in the sense that government officials, including some quite senior officers in unprecedented ways started dialoguing with the poor in the targeted Indian villages. These researchers presented evidence suggesting that “less powerful villagers have used these forums to make a case for Project A or Project B, and for the most part their views …have been heeded” (ibid:148). However, in rural districts like Bhojpur, more than two-thirds of the VECs “failed to meet at least once” (ibid:128). It is reported further that those which managed to meet, the meetings “were dominated by local teachers … and upper-caste landlords and their kinsmen” – implying that CMCs did not challenge pre-existing inequalities in some areas (ibid:129). Such observations support the findings of a randomised evaluation of VECs in India which reported that they have no impact on community involvement in public schools, and no impact on teacher effort or learning outcomes in those schools (Banerjee et al. 2008).

In Zambia, health centre committees (HCCs) had positive outcomes for awareness raising on public health issues but did not directly increase the allocation of resources towards the poor and vulnerable groups or improve health service responsiveness or improve health worker behaviour towards local communities (Ngulube et al. 2004). Health workers looked down on the activities of the HCCs in view of their members’ low levels of professional knowledge on health issues (ibid). In Bangladesh, Mahmud (2007) investigated two models of CMCs in the health sector – Community Groups (CGs) set-up with by elected local government body of the Union Parishad and Health Watch Committees (HWCs) established with the assistance of advocacy NGOs. It was found that although both models were weak on exacting accountability, HWCs performed relatively better because in their villages, people became more aware of what services were available; health awareness and the number of people accessing the services increased; and doctor punctuality and attendance improved in some clinics. The factors explaining variations in the effectiveness of these interventions are discussed below.

5.2 Intervention based factors influencing the effectiveness of participatory initiatives

Authority and credibility of participatory mechanisms and actors

The degree to which participatory mechanisms were deemed to be credible and authoritative by citizens was deemed to be an influential factor in 12 of our 19 category-specific studies. The key here was that decisions taken within these mechanisms (or spaces), or the complaints or problems that were raised therein, led to some form of enforcement. Without this participants tend to get discouraged, as with Corbridge et al’s finding from participatory governance initiatives in India that “[When] district and state education officials … failed to respond to the VEC’s demands for a second teacher to be posted at the school…villagers took the view that attendance of VEC meetings was not worth their while when the committee could not secure this most basic goal” (2005:143). Similarly, in Bangladesh, Mahmud (2007) finds that neither CGs nor HWCs were able to enforce decisions relating to staff appointments at the clinics. In contrast, PB in Porto Alegre was accompanied by real
spending powers to citizen councils which allowed them to decide on projects (Goldfrank 2007). Drawing on evidence from Zambia and Bolivia, Hickey and Mohan (2008) found that these PRS processes were dominated by CSOs which lacked the capacity to ensure the answerability of power-holders or the enforceability of conditions upon them. Komives’ (2011) analysis of the PRS processes in Bolivia, Honduras and Nicaragua found that because PRSPs did not reflect civil society priorities, civil society actors became demoralised and did not therefore engage in monitoring and auditing at the implementation stage.

**State-society collaboration**
Seven of the 19 category-specific studies noted that successful participatory initiatives involved working across the state-society divide. In Porto Alegre, collaboration around participatory budgeting involved civil society actors mobilising citizens while the bureaucracy organized meetings, provided information to citizens about their choices, and offered technical analyses for project proposals (Ackerman 2004; Goldfrank 2007). Regarding the PRSP process in Zambia, Hickey and Mohan (2008) argue that the failure to involve representative actors on the state side (parliament and political parties) and key CSOs, like media and strong research-based agencies, undermined the process; a finding that resonates with that of the wider literature on participation in PRSPs (e.g. Gould 2005, Cheru 2006). The EAS and VECs in India suffered most in areas where CSOs were not involved, and could not therefore help to mobilise beneficiaries or communicate information regarding the initiatives (Corbridge et al. 2005; Williams et al. 2003).

**High-quality and salient information**
People will be reluctant to participate if they are poorly informed about the schemes that are on offer and the benefits that might be attached to them (Corbridge et al. 2005). In India participatory initiatives suffered due to the limited circulation of information to the intended beneficiaries of the projects (ibid). In Bangladesh, Mahmud (2007) reported that awareness-raising and mobilisation was poor and most community members did not know about the existence of the CG or HWC or how to interact with them. The success of PB in Porto Alegre is in part attributed to the rigorous information dissemination and mobilisation to the extent that, even in the remotest of the city’s suburbs “in the impoverished Brazilian fishing village of Icapuí … the mayor painted monthly budget figures—both revenues and expenditures—on the side of his house” (Goldfrank 2007:102). It is argued that delegates in participatory structures require information concerning the rules governing the process, including the criteria used to allocate resources across neighbourhoods, as well as all the budgetary and planning information necessary to make informed decisions and monitor results. However the importance of information in participatory initiatives should not be stretched far, and one meta-review emphasises that ‘salient’ rather than ‘full’ information is what is required here (Devarajan et al 2011). More critically, a randomised control study in Uttar Pradesh (UP) in India examined the provision of information to VEC members – concerning what they were entitled to, what they were actually getting, and how they could put pressure on the providers – and concluded that they were neither able to effect direct control over public schools nor improve school performance (Banerjee et al. 2010). This suggests that such interventions face significant constraints beyond information (Banerjee et al. 2010).

**Role of donors**
Donors were central to many of these interventions, providing the financing, technical
assistance, and also establishing the processes through debt-related conditionality in the case of PRSPs. On PRSPs, Hickey and Mohan (2008) argue that donors failed to overcome the contradictions regarding the role of extra-national actors in securing accountability mechanisms within particular states, not least regarding the emphasis within PRSPs on “external accountability” to donors at the expense of “domestic accountability” to the citizens (Dijkstra 2010; Piron and Norton 2004). Although the HIPC II initiative was also the main source of resources for implementing participatory budget initiatives in Latin American countries, only limited analysis of how donors might have influenced its impact on social accountability is available (Goldfrank 2007).

5.3 Contextual factors influencing participatory accountability initiatives

Degree of inequalities within society
The contextual factor that emerged most frequently as shaping the success or failure of participatory approaches to securing accountability concerned inequalities amongst citizens as would-be participants. Björkman and Svensson (2010) argue that differences in income and social class adversely affect collective action, while others observed that in highly fractionalised societies participatory initiatives tend to reproduce existing inequalities as for instance reflected in the dominance of VECs by local teachers, upper-caste landlords and their kinsmen in India (Corbridge et al. 2005). Corbridge and colleagues argue that the high levels of social exclusion which lower caste households endure contribute to their much lower levels of political awareness and involvement when compared to other upper-castes like the Paswans (ibid). Citizens’ capacity for collective action is influenced by their levels of income and education. Several studies pointed out that ensuring high participation among poor households is a significant and widespread problem, particularly when interventions do not swiftly realise direct benefits to participants. For instance, in India, Corbridge and colleagues observed that “to expect Musahar children – boys as well as girls – to go to school in Bihar, or, still more optimistically, to expect their parents to take part in VECs, is to miss the very obvious point that these families lack even the most basic assets: land, of course, but also a sense of self-worth and the prospect of secure and properly paid employment” (Corbridge et al. 2005:149). Thus, people’s education levels influence their self-confidence. Socially excluded groups tend to be isolated and Mansuri and Rao (Forthcoming) argue that poorer localities benefit less from participatory programmes due to their limited access to information and media. Goldfrank’s (2007) comparative analysis of PB in Bolivia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Peru suggests that it functioned most effectively in small, homogeneous, indigenous communities with strong traditional organizations. However, a key question therefore is: why did PB succeed in Brazil, a country considered to have one of the most unequal societies? Goldfrank (2007) argues that there was a deliberate attempt to make the system ‘informal’ and ‘deliberative’ in the sense that participation was open and not limited to pre-existing groups, which helped protect PB from privileging the well-off.

Citizen capacity and commitment to participating in SAMs
Nearly half of the category-specific studies and over half of the synthesis studies found that individual capacity for collective action shapes the success of participatory interventions. For example, participatory initiatives generally performed better in contexts with a prior history of social mobilization (Ackerman 2004; Coelho et al. 2010). In Porto Alegre, PB “originated in
civil society, was pushed forward by social actors and was ultimately modelled on previously existing practices in civil society by a new government that itself consisted mostly of individuals who had made their careers as community and social activists" (Ackerman 2004:452). Performance is also influenced by the degree to which actors in participatory structures have the skills to perform the roles expected of them. For example, interventions were less successful where there was lack of adequate training and capacity building not only for participants in VECs but also for local administrators charged with organising and facilitating public meetings where decisions about the EAS contracts would be discussed (Corbridge et al. 2005:149). In Zambia too, Health Centre Committee (HCC) members felt that both the community and health system stakeholders looked down on their involvement HCCs in view of their low level of professional knowledge on health issues. There was a common perception that HCC members lacked the necessary capacity (knowledge and tact) to engage the health system in meaningful dialogue in order to effectively prioritise health problems and stimulate necessary action in the community for positive health outcomes (Ngulube et al 2004).

Civil society environment: relationships and brokerage
The availability of strong CSOs and their willingness to collaborate with each other and with political parties is identified as an important contextual factor underpinning the success of participatory initiatives in a third of specific studies and around half of the synthesis and generic studies. For PB in Latin America, Goldfrank (2007) noted this in terms of "social capital" – measured by the number of associations, whether they work cooperatively with one another, and whether they engage in clientelist exchanges; and availability of civil society associations "preferably disposed to participate in municipal affairs, organized in networks, and relatively autonomous" (2007:116). It is observed that PB is correspondingly less effective in locales with “fragmented, conflict-ridden civic associations” (ibid). Similarly in India, CMCs were reported to be less effective in areas where NGOs and other activists were either absent or lacked knowledge about the existence of the programmes (Corbridge et al. 2005; Williams et al. 2003).

The capacity of civil society actors to collaborate and innovate around social accountability initiatives is shaped by the histories of conflict and stability, although this was noted in only two out of nineteen studies. For example, Goldfrank (2007) argues that the weak and fragmented nature of civic participation which made PB ineffective in Guatemala partly stemmed from the country’s internal armed conflict (Goldfrank 2007). Roque and Shankland (2007) show that the end of the civil war in Angola provided an environment in which NGOs and other CSOs started to experiment with participatory initiatives.

Political will
Seven of the 19 category-specific studies noted that political will significantly shaped the success or failure of participatory accountability initiatives. One study of PB claimed that this was particularly important given the fact that citizenship participation in policy processes is rarely guaranteed as a constitutional right, but needs to be actively enforced (Goldfrank 2007). Goldfrank notes that in Brazil, “in the few hundred cities where it exists, mayors are more likely to be at least somewhat committed to citizen participation” (2007:101), whereas there is a dearth of mayors committed to sharing power with citizens in Guatemala. The origins of political will differ. When the Workers’ Party lost the 2004 municipal elections in Porto Alegre, the new mayor promised to maintain participatory budgeting, although “unlike
his predecessors, he has not attended PB assemblies, and he has announced a new model, Solidarity Local Governance, based on government and civil society organizations” (Goldfrank 2007). Although, the Workers’ Party government has actively encouraged the participation of unorganized citizens through the use of government employed community organizers (Ackerman 2004), the new system has been described as a “non-deliberative executive forum” that excludes individual citizens (Goldfrank 2007:118). On CMCs, Mahmud’s (2007) work in Bangladesh also reveals that the lack of strong and visible official support undermined their effectiveness. Corbridge and colleagues’ work in India reveals that vested interest in the status quo motivates bureaucrats and politicians especially at the local level to sabotage new programmes. It is reported that in most cases these officials tend to re-interpret the rules of new programmes so that they serve their interests and not those of intended beneficiaries (Corbridge et al. 2005).

The role of political parties
As indicated in the preceding section, political parties can be critical to the success of accountability initiatives, in areas where CMCs were effective, e.g. in India’s Midnapore District, Corbridge and colleagues find that it was mostly because of the CPI-M party’s commitment on mobilizing the poor (Corbridge et al. 2005). The Porto Alegre experience points to the fact that not all political parties are likely to promote the adoption of participation. According to Goldfrank, the parties most likely to adopt participation goals in their platforms are (a) long-term opposition parties reacting to authoritarian regimes or (b) political parties that represent the poor or a social justice agenda (Goldfrank 2007, also Hickey and Bracking 2005). In relation to the latter, he observes that between 1997-2000, 73 of the 140 Brazilian cities using PB had Workers’ Party mayors and 33 had mayors from other parties on the left (Goldfrank 2007:101).

Democratization
Although some observers make the theoretical argument that people can only use participatory initiatives when they are promoted by a legitimate and therefore democratic government (e.g. Folscher 2007), the effects of ‘democracy’ on participatory efforts to secure accountability appear to be closely mediated by the character of political institutions, particularly political parties. In Brazil, PB was introduced after the end of the authoritarianism (Shah 2007). Corbridge and colleagues observe that the CPI-M party in India was an effective mobilization tool for CMCs in areas where it had reasonable competition from other parties (Corbridge et al. 2005:149), while the critical role of the PT members as participants in PB in Brazil has long been noted (Schneider and Goldfrank 2002). Indeed, Goldfrank’s (2007) analysis also reveals that PB worked best where opposition from opposing political parties was weak or nonexistent; where the opposition party was strong there was a tendency to sabotage PB so as to deny the opponent credit of its good performance. Further evidence in favour of moving beyond the assumption that ‘participation’ and ‘democracy’ necessarily offer the basis for effective forms of social accountability comes from Brautigam’s (2004) five-country comparative case-study of participatory budgetary processes, which included comparisons between Costa Rica, Brazil, Ireland, Chile and Mauritius. This study found that the actual levels of participation were much less significant in determining the pro-poor character of budgeting than the (broadly leftist) ideological character of the political parties in power and their location within well-institutionalised political systems.
Capacity of the state

Participatory initiatives at the local level appear to be effective in areas where local governments have substantial resources and bureaucratic competencies. In their analysis of participatory development initiatives in eastern India, Williams and colleagues (2003) concluded that the poor performance of state officials in facilitating participatory structures in most locales was not a matter of personal attitude, but rather something linked to broader “structural constraints” in the public sector including poor incentives for good performance for lower level civil servants underpinned by limited career progression opportunities. For PB, good performance is noticed in municipal governments which control substantial revenues thereby making possible sufficient allocations to enable investments in public works projects and social programs identified by citizens (Goldfrank 2007). Conversely, in Guatemala the performance of PB was deemed to be poor because of weak fiscal devolution (ibid.).

5.4 Summary

The evidence suggests that the performance of participatory mechanisms in heightening accountability depends on several elements, particularly the role of committed public officials, the mediating effects of social inequalities, the capacity of citizens to participate and also some design features, particularly the perceived legitimacy of the structures and spaces involved and their capacity to catalyse collaboration across state-society lines. Success seems to be related to the simultaneous presence of state actors interested in building alliances with civil society, of citizens and civil organizations that display interest in participating in public policies, and of design features that reduce the asymmetric distribution of status and resources among participants. Moreover as pointed out by Corbridge and colleagues, before introducing participatory initiatives, “the state first needs to provide incentive systems for its employees to see the poor as clients or citizens” (2005:150), once more bringing the supply-side of the accountability equation into view. The following section now delves more deeply into these findings, along with those of the previous two sections, and relates them to broader debates around social accountability and the politics of development.

6. Cross-cutting Analysis

This section summarises the main contextual factors that influence the three types of social accountability intervention identified in this review, with a particular emphasis on trying to sort these into broader categories and identifies the relationships between them. Where appropriate, links are drawn between the findings presented here and the broader literature on the politics of development. In general, there is a strong convergence between our findings here and the new wave of research into the politics of development, which tends to focus on the forms of politics and power which underlie and shape the performance of institutions (rather than institutions per se), and on the importance of state-society relations. Importantly, this convergence tends to challenge many of the underlying assumptions that have tended to characterise most mainstream thinking and practice on social accountability (and ‘good governance’ more broadly) over the past decade, and suggests the need for reconceptualising this work within a more contextually and politically attuned theory of change.
6.1 Key findings and issues

“...contextual factors will shape affect the inter-relationships between the three core concepts at stake: transparency, accountability and citizen participation or engagement...even where similar initiatives are undertaken, their larger impact is dependent not only on their internal effectiveness, but also on their interaction with broader external factors” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 19).

“...we regard the relationship of politics, that reflects underlying structures of power in a society, as being the primary influence on overall accountability relations” (Devarajan et al 2011: 8).

The political context shapes social accountability interventions in multiple and often complex ways, particularly in terms of the incentives and capacities of key actors involved in promoting and enforcing SAcc. Although the particular configuration of contextual factors that matter most in shaping SAcc will differ from place to place, and also over time, the evidence examined for this report suggests that the most critical features can be categorized within four overarching dimensions, namely the two institutional spheres of civil and political society and their interactions, as located within the broader fields of power relations between states and societies and within society. Figure 2 making a provisional suggestion as to how these dimensions might be mapped in relation to each other and also identifies the key factors within each of them, with a particular focus on capacities, commitment and the inter-relationships between key actors and spheres. In a holistic sense, the diagram represents the politics of social accountability in terms of the broader social contract between states and citizens around the provision of rights and resources. This sub-section briefly discusses how these findings relate to other generic studies of SAcc before the next discusses and unpacks each of these four dimensions, and their relationships, in greater depth.

At first glance, our key findings on how context matters are broadly in accord with those reported in generic studies that have attempted to synthesise findings from a range of social accountability interventions. For example,

“O’Neill et al (2007: 4-5)...identify political contexts, existing power relations, the enabling environment, the nature of the state and its institutions and the social contract between state and citizens as key variables that explain the successful impact citizen-led initiatives can have on state accountability” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 20).

Menocal and Sharma (2008: xiv), argue that there is a need to “Pay considerably more attention to the lack of substantial political capacity of both state and non-state actors, i.e. the capacity to forge alliances, evidence and build a case, contribute to the decision-making and policy-making process, and influence others to make change happen”, while a further broad-level study also notes the significance of capacity and commitment on both sides of the state-society equation (Agarwal and Van Wicklin 2011: 7).

Figure 2: Contextual factors that influence social accountability
Others place a particular emphasis on the importance of a high-capacity state (e.g. Malena et al 2004, Goetz and Jenkins 2005), and several of the studies reviewed by McGee and Gaventa (2011: 20) note the significance of supply-led factors in ensuring the success of SAMs, particularly in terms of legitimate state authorities imposing sanctions on public officials. For Calland and Neuman (2007: 3, cited in McGee and Gaventa 2011: 21), “the demand and supply sides must match, and where they intersect will determine the quality of the transparency regime”. In most cases, civil society activism without reforms on the other side of the equation will fail to yield sustained results.

However, and even by their own admission (e.g. McGee and Gaventa 2011), these studies lacked the systematic basis of this one, and few have gone on to show how either how these different factors can be conceptualised in broader terms in relation to each other, or through breaking these down into more specific forms (Figure Two). Agarwal and Van Wicklin (2011: 7) do propose a diagram that seeks to capture the ‘Critical success factors for DFGG [Demand for Good Governance]’, which places the willingness and capacity of state and citizens centre-stage, within a wider ‘enabling environment’ that includes legal, economic, political and socio-cultural factors. However, this does little to identify which of the legal/political/economic/socio-cultural factors are important here, nor does it attempt to spell out a theory of change in terms of how these might be related together in shaping the outcomes of particular interventions; an issue that we return to below. Moreover, the diagram does not encompass the importance of power relations both within society and
between state and society, something that this review and others (e.g. Devarajan et al 2011) have found to be central.

Finally, and as noted in Section 2.3, a further key finding of this report is the current evidence-base on what shapes the effectiveness of social accountability interventions is sorely lacking, both in general terms and particularly regarding the role of contextual factors, and most notably around how social accountability mechanisms are shaped by power and politics. In sum, “There is a mismatch between how we study the impact of accountability and what we know about the politics of accountability” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 30). This is particularly the case with the particular, category-specific impact studies that we have reviewed here. As discussed in Section Seven, a key challenge moving forward is to devise a stronger evidence base from which fuller accounts of how particular contextual features interact with the design features of SAMs to influence outcomes can be drawn.

6.2 Mapping the key contextual dimensions that shape social accountability

Our review of the current evidence-base and literature on social accountability, along with our broader reading of the politics of development, suggests the importance of two broad institutional spheres, namely civil and political society, and of two related fields of power relations, namely those between states and societies and those within societies, as being the most significant contextual features to shape the success of social accountability interventions. This section elaborates on what we mean by each of these four aspects in turn: political society, civil society, inequality and exclusion and state-society relations – before Section Seven explores some of the implications moving forward.

Political Society

Political society is critical to the success of social accountability interventions, particularly regarding the political will of state functionaries and the role played by political institutions (e.g. political parties) that appear from the evidence of our studies to mediate the effects of democratisation. Political society is viewed here, following Corbridge et al’s (2005) discussion of Partha Chatterjee’s work, as the arena within which people perceive and encounter the state on an everyday basis and which creates and maintains different patterns of political rule that shape the scope for ‘citizenship empowerment’. It is constituted by a loose community of recognised political parties, local political brokers and councillors, public servants, a set of institutions, actors and cultural norms that provides the key links between ‘government’ and ‘the public’. It is the identity and quality of the agency that mediates power in political society rather than civil society that is often the most critical part of the equation here, although it is also clear that civil society actors can influence political society in progressive directions here (Corbridge 2007, see below). We focus here on the three elements of political society that emerge as most critical, namely commitment, capacity and the nature of key political institutions.

The commitment of key actors, both in terms of bureaucrats and elected officials, has emerged as central, not only here but also in other meta-reviews (e.g. McGee and Gaventa 2011; 21). For example, Houtzager and Joshi (2008: 6) emphasise the critical role played by public sector officials in not only delivering on accountability demands but also pushing for accountability reforms and even stimulating social actors to mobilise to make demands on government. Our studies tend to emphasise more clearly the role played by elected officials
who are both susceptible to popular pressures and also in a position to shape the behaviour of public officials through sanctions and other forms of supply-led accountability (Brett 2003). This is significant, and points to the need to think about ways of linking social accountability interventions with forms of political accountability, particularly through making links to supply-led enforcement mechanisms and involving elected officials in the design of demand-led initiatives. Several observers have argued that we need to unpack the notion of political will (e.g. Booth 2008), although few have managed to do this beyond the standard disaggregation of political actors into different types, e.g. elected officials, public sector professionals, as we have done here. Others have argued that it is more useful to move beyond the language of political will or commitment to examine the ‘incentives’ that structure and guide elite behavior (CFS 2010). This call links to a new wave of thinking around what shapes not only the commitment of elites to development but also the capacity of states to deliver, which focuses on the character of the ‘political settlement’ (North et al 2009, Khan 2010). The “political settlement” refers to the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes, on which any state is based.” (di John and Putzel 2009: 4), and the key implication of this here is that the commitment of elites to development, and the capacity of the state to deliver, will be strongly shaped by the terms of the political settlement and the incentives that this places before them to act in favour of certain interests over others, i.e. the interests of those groups who are required to sustain a particular political settlement. The need within ruling coalitions to maintain certain types of relationships both horizontally (with other elite factions) and vertically (with organised social groupings) in order to preserve regime stability and survival will create strong incentives to act in particular ways.10

This approach also offers a more nuanced and relational reading of the capacity of public and elected officials to act in the public interest, around accountability issues but also more broadly. As a recent review notes, the developmental capacities of the state need to be defined not only in terms of its organizational competence (e.g. the levels of human resource and bureaucratic capacity generally referred to in the literature on good governance, including studies of social accountability), but also its capacities to forge and maintain synergistic relations with different social actors (vom Hau 2012). As such, this could provide a promising route forward for future research into accountability, particularly if the focus on ‘incentives’ can be extended away from a narrow and instrumental reading to one that also takes account of the role of ‘ideas’ (e.g. around public service and development) play in shaping elite behaviour. The political economy study of anti-logging advocacy in Tanzania by Harris et al (2011) reveals the promise of applying this type of thinking within evaluations of SAcc interventions.

Finally, our review suggests that it is generally less useful to deal in broad terms with concepts such as ‘democracy’ and to instead identify the more specific forms of politics and power relations that shape the success of social accountability interventions. What might matter more here are broader forms of state-society relations within which accountability resides (see below) and the types of political institutions that mediate the relationship between broad democratic procedures such as elections and public policy processes. This seems to be clearest in the case of participation in policy spaces. For example, Brautigam’s (2004) review of participatory budgeting notes that democracy or even popular participation

10 The Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre is currently planning primary research on this new agenda (www.effective-states.org).
per se is less significant in achieving government responsiveness to pro-poor concerns than the role of well institutionalized and programmatic political parties, a finding that is echoed in other similar studies of the links between participation and pro-poor approaches (e.g. Crook and Sverisson 2001, Heller 2001, Hickey and Mohan 2005). This suggests the need to rebalance current thinking on social accountability away from participatory and towards representative forms of democracy (Harris et al 2004, Hickey and Bracking 2005), with a particular focus on the social and ideological character of particular political organisations. As indicated above, this could involve advocates of social accountability working more closely with elected officials and political parties, and in alignment with electoral processes, when identifying and designing interventions.

Overall, it is clear from the evidence presented above, and also from the wider literature, that efforts to understand the capacity and commitment of citizens and state officials to undertake effective forms of governance reform are closely shaped by the incentives to which each responds and the room for manoeuvre that each is able to find within the broader field of power relations. This focus on power relations is central to our analysis here, as emphasized below.

**Civil Society**

The success of social accountability interventions rely heavily on the capacity of civil society organisations to mobilise citizens and to network effectively, both within civil society and across state-society boundaries. Individual CSOs are unable to achieve much acting alone (Bebbington et al 2007; Fox, 2004), and their capacity to develop alliances with those pursuing similar projects is critical to achieving the power required to achieve change. The type of civil society that emerges as significant from this review is not the autonomous associational realm that has generally been promoted within international development theory and practice over the past decade (Howell and Pearce 2001), but a much more politicised and relational realm. Here, ‘civil society’ is not an autonomous arena that is free from the logic of how power and politics operate in developing countries, and citizens and CSOs therein often find it very hard to find room for manoeuvre for their projects vis-à-vis the broader politics of patronage, ethnicity and exclusion. The agency that citizens and CSOs are able to exercise within civil society is closely shaped by the underlying field of power relations, involving forms of inequality and exclusion along economic, social and cultural inequalities lines (see below). Importantly, the capacities of CSOs to be effective in this realm have less to do with autonomy than with the relationships and networks that they are able to forge with actors from within this realm but also within political society (Evans 2010, Lavalle et al 2005).

These issues are better understood from an alternative, Gramscian reading of civil society, which recognises both the power relations that shoot through civil society and the historical fact that progressive struggles are nearly always constituted by actors from both sides of the state-society divide (Bebbington et al 2008, Howell and Pearce 2001, Fox, 2004), an issue we return to below. This would point advocates of SAcc away from assessing the ‘strength’ of civil society alone, and towards identifying and assessing the nature of the relationships and networks across state and society and supporting their strengthening in more progressive directions (Unsworth and Moore, 2010).
The available literature is less useful in breaking down which elements of civil society are particularly important in shaping social accountability, nor the driving force behind each of these. However, what appears to matter most is the capacity and commitment of citizens and CSOs to mobilise and act, both individually and collectively, around social accountability demands. In particular, citizens need to display high levels of both in order to ensure the success of SAMs, particularly those involving contentious action and direct participation (see Table 4). In terms of CSO capacity, “mobilization, coalition-building, negotiation, and advocacy” (Agarwal and Van Wicklin 2011: 7) are critical. The origins of these capacities are not made clear in the particular studies, although at the collective level, it seems likely that these are built up over time through successive rounds of bargaining with the state (Houtzager and Joshi 2008, 2012).

Inequality and Exclusion

“In political economy environments characterized by high degrees of clientelism and rent-seeking, such as are widespread in the Africa region, an unqualified faith in civil society as a force for good is more likely to be misplaced. The evidence base on the organization of civil society suggests that historic institutions of poverty and inequality, or of ethnic identity, can inhibit collective action in the broader public interest” (Devarajan et al 2011: 4).

The field of power relations that shapes social interactions and popular agency within society plays a cross-cutting role in shaping the success of social accountability mechanisms. This is particularly apparent in terms of the barriers that prevent people from participating in initiatives that demand high levels of agency. At the individual level, education and income emerged as significant in some studies, reflecting the wider sense in which citizenship-based activities are strongly circumscribed by the level of agency that different individuals are able to exert within particular contexts (Mansuri and Rao 2004, forthcoming; also Hickey 2010). For critics, this represents a failure to take structural constraints seriously, and recognise the ways in which marginal and vulnerable individuals and groups in particular struggle to transcend these. For example, Cleaver’s (2004) thinking on the social embeddedness of agency identifies several obstacles here, including social status, confidence, time and a lack of able-bodiedness, which lead her to caution against “advancing a heady but ultimately unconvincing notion of participatory citizenship based on over-optimistic notions of agency and combined with romantic ideas about groups and institutions” (ibid: 271). Even strong proponents of participatory approaches to accountability (e.g. McGee and Gaventa 2011) stress the need for a greater focus on ensuring the relevance of SAMs to poor and vulnerable groups.

State-Society Relations

State-society relations have been recognised as critical to the politics of development (CFS 2010), and efforts to promote social accountability are both an attempt to institutionalise more democratic and developmental forms of relationship between state and society, and are closely shaped by the existing character of these relations. For Di John and Putzel (2009), this is more likely to emerge when the political settlement becomes more inclusive and where the relations between the state and society become more robust and legitimate. At this stage it becomes possible to discuss state-society relations in terms of a ‘social contract’. This is apparent in both a narrow sense (e.g. Goldfrank (2007) shows how
participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre was a product of the social contract between the Workers’ and civil society negotiated before the former was elected into office), and more broadly. For example, it has been argued that deep forms of public accountability flow from ‘social contracts’ rather than the institutional trappings of democracy (e.g. de Waal 2000), with the notion of a social contract referring to both the legitimacy of political rule and the degree of popular influence that citizens are able to wield over rulers. More broadly, as Newell and Wheeler (2006: 29) argue, “in order to be able to make accountability claims, there must be an implicit assumption about the roles and responsibilities of the state, as well as the rights and entitlements of citizens”.

However, it is important to place this notion of social contracts, which derives from a particular history of state formation in the west (Hickey 2011) in contexts within which state-society relations are often heavily informalised, and driven by a logic of patronage rather than the democratic forms of exchange imagined in the literature on social accountability, whereby the dominant theory of change at play here suggests that the social world consists of autonomous, well-informed and active citizens who are capable of making demands on public officials who in turn are capable and, potentially, incentivized to respond accordingly. This theory of change is glaringly at odds with the realities on the ground (Booth 2005, 2011).

Different forms of social contract will emerge in different contexts, depending in part on the balance and interaction between democratic and more clientelist forms of politics. For example, contracts can emerge within the context of semi-authoritarian regimes, usually on the basis of Presidential patronage and/or a ruling party with an ideological commitment and/or strong incentives to offer certain public goods (examples include primary education in Uganda, see above, and food security in Ethiopia and other countries during the 1970s; de Waal 1996). In either context, elections can provide a window of opportunity for politicizing certain demands and beginning to forge new, public agreements around them. This may mark the start (or part) of longer-term bargaining around this particular issue or public good, or could locate the provision of public goods insecurely in the field of asymmetrical reciprocity that defines patron-client politics in some contexts. For example, de Waal’s (1996) analysis of social contracts around food security in Africa and India shows that the strongest such contracts have been derived from processes of popular mobilization at key moments of state formation, which then became institutionalized within constitutional commitments and protected by political institutions such as programmatic parties and parliaments more broadly. This also suggests that more research is required into the possibility that informal mechanisms may provide ‘good enough’ forms of accountability in certain contexts (e.g. Unsworth and Moore, 2010).

The broad notion of a ‘social contract’ can be broken down further by examining the agreements or settlements that exist around different sectors, or what others call the ‘structural linkages’ that bind states and citizens to each other (Skocpol 1992). This is critical, as what is expected by citizens and what states are prepared to commit to delivering varies according to the particular goods and services under discussion, to their level of popular and political importance (see Section Four), and the history of state-society

11 A social contract constitutes the bargains or settlements between states and citizens, which are often forged during seminal political moments, and endure for prolonged periods. See Hickey (2011) for a review of the conceptual basis of social contract thinking in international development, with particular reference to social protection.
bargaining around them (Houtzager and Joshi 2008). Assessing the possibilities for both locating social accountability interventions within existing social contracts, and deepening them as a result, could therefore start from an analysis of how the rights of citizens to different resources and public goods (e.g. education, land, health, social security) have been differentially distributed to different individuals and groups over time and on what basis. Evidence that a social contract is operational in relation to a particular public good for at least some citizens may be derived in part from an examination of constitutional rights and provisions but would be more strongly evidenced by the presence of an active process of popular pressure and state-society bargaining around this good (de Waal 1996). Recent calls to ‘go with the grain’ of governance in developing countries (Booth 2011) suggest that it might be wise for external actors to promote social accountability initiatives where a degree of commitment already exists rather than seek to create new contracts. However, it is also worth noting that the language of social contracts can belie the extent to which the field of state-society relations are a contentious arena: Jonathan Fox, for instance, discusses accountability in terms of “the ‘arena of conflict over whether and how those in power are publicly held responsible for their actions’” (Fox 2007b: 1-2, cited in McGee and Gaventa 2011-12). A social contract approach may be able to shed considerable light onto the actual forms of power and politics that matter in securing accountability, but no easy routes have yet been devised to operationalising a social contract approach within development policy and practice (Hickey 2011).

**Towards a More Context-Sensitive Theory of Change for Social Accountability**

Achieving improved levels of social accountability is therefore a profoundly political challenge, not least because “…accountability reforms challenge powerful interests that benefit from lack of transparency, low levels of institutional responsiveness, and poor protection of citizens’ rights”. Our findings regarding the ways in which issues of context should be understood by those promoting social accountability thus accord closely with the ‘polity approach’ which Joshi (2008) and Houtzager (2003) have suggested be adopted from the seminal work of Theda Skopcol. As indicated in Figure Two, which locates SAcc interventions within the core elements of the political context outlined above, this approach focuses on “the ways in which state and societal actors are constituted, become politically significant, and interact across the public-private divide” (Houtzager 2003: 13).

The polity approach, especially when further informed by a critical, Gramscian reading of power and politics, offers a more contextually-attuned theory of change for social accountability when compared to the voluntaristic tendencies of populism or the ‘best-practice’/west-is-best approach of new institutionalism which have tended to dominate good governance thinking in general until recently. New institutionalism directs attention to the long term evolution of the ‘rules of the game’ and how they shape development trajectories, and particularly the behavioral incentives for elite groups that are embedded in different kinds of ‘rules of the game’ (North 1990). This frames the state is simply an incentive structure that is somehow autonomous from wider social forces and both neutral and homogenous in character. From this perspective, institutions structure politics (rather than

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Whereas a new institutionalist approach tends to focus on technocratic fixes (or ‘best-practice’ rather than ‘best-fit’), the polity approach focuses on the central role of building progressive coalitions and capabilities across state and society divides in order to address accountability problems within the context of unequal and often informal relations of power. As Fox (2000: 2) notes, “pro-accountability outcomes often depend on mutually reinforcing interactions between…state and non-state institutions”, akin to Gramsci’s idea of building counter-hegemonic coalitions of social and political forces, or Fox’s idea of the reform-minded ‘Sandwich Strategy’ between progressive state-society coalitions.

A polity approach shows how politics is mutually constituted by state-society relations. In particular, it draws attention to four kinds of processes: (1) the processes of reforms of state institutions; (2) the impacts of state institutions on collective actors interested in specific policy arenas; (3) the ‘fit’ between collective actors with specific goals and the points of access and leverage afforded by political institutions; and (4) path dependence of policies and social action” (Skocpol 1992: 41, cited in Joshi 2008: 15). As argued below, this involves reconceptualising social accountability as an “ongoing political engagement by social actors with the state as part of a long-term pattern of interaction shaped both by historical forces and the current context” (Joshi and Houtzager 2012: 146). Shifting the lens in this way has important implications for policy and practice, some of which this report turns to briefly here.

7. Moving forward

The evidence and analysis presented here suggests at least three main forms of change within the theory and practice of social accountability. The first of these has already been articulated above, and concerns the need to rethink social accountability in ways that better reflect its deeply contextualised and political character by drawing in particular on the ‘polity’ approach (e.g. Joshi and Houtzager 2012), which offers an alternative theory of change concerning social accountability initiatives as compared to the populist and new institutionalist approached which have dominated most thinking in this area until recently. The second and third, which we discuss in more depth here concern working this perspective through into issues of design and implementation, with a particular focus on the importance of relationships and supply-side reforms, and improving the evidence base on social accountability interventions, particularly in terms of capturing the importance of context.

7.1 Implications for devising social accountability interventions

Adopting a political rather than technical approach to social accountability means thinking less in terms of the ‘widgets’ that constitute the particular inputs of social accountability initiatives and more in terms of the ‘watchdog’ nature of social accountability actors. This is particularly appropriate given that “The watchdog approach is more rooted in the organic politics of particular contexts” (Joshi and Houtzager 2012: 158). The emphasis given in our report and others to the capacity of CSOs and networks amongst them, rather than to the specific methods of SAcc, reflect this, and is now being recognized in terms of calls for increased capacity-building for CSOs and citizens in political as well as technical terms (e.g. around mobilization and coalition-building, Agarwal and Van Wicklin 2011: 7, Menocal and

13 This is because they: 1) define who is able to participate in the particular political arena, 2) shape the various actors’ political strategies, and (more controversially) 3) influence what these actors believe to be both possible and desirable (ie. their preferences). From Hickey (2010b).
However, the policy and operational focus clearly needs to go far beyond civil society. As this report has identified, “Civil society’s effectiveness will almost always depend on incentives, and in particular the activation of sanctioning mechanisms, within the state. These may take the form of internal bureaucratic structures within implementing agencies, or formally independent institutions of accountability within the state, including the legislature, judiciary, auditing departments etc” (Devarajan et al 2011: 7).

There are few grounds here for suggesting that social accountability mechanisms are a panacea for improved levels of governance and development, and much to suggest that their success is closely determined by context and their interaction with other accountability mechanisms, most notably supply-led forms. As argued by Menocal and Sharma (2008: ix), support for ‘voice-based approaches’ “may prove problematic in terms of increasing voice without a parallel effort to build the effectiveness and capacity of state institutions to address growing demands and expectations”. In particular, our review of the literature concurs with the more general sense in which “much of what we call accountability reflects only the weaker category, answerability. While citizen-led or public initiatives often involve ‘soft’ peer or reputational pressure, they rarely involve strong enforceability” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 11).

The point is not to contrast those reforms that have been aimed at horizontal forms of accountability (e.g. anti-corruption commissions, auditors-general, human rights machineries, legislative public accounts committees) with bottom-up forms, as there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that both sets of reforms have been promoted without due consideration of the underlying incentives that drive elite behaviour and the power relations that constrain popular agency. What is currently missing from many of the impact studies evaluated here is a stronger sense of civil servants being held to account by their political masters, particularly elected executive officials (presidents, mayors), also norms of public service (e.g. around professional pride and wider public sector ethos). The incentives to which state functionaries respond are as likely, and probably more likely, to emerge from supply- rather than demand-led sources of power, particularly in contexts where democracy and the rule of law remain contested. This is where the discipline required to ensure that accountability interventions achieve both enforcement and sanctions resides, and better, more contextualised understandings of how such incentives operate are required. Several case-studies help make this point, from the role of presidential commitment around UPE in Uganda through to the critical role played by mayors and other elected officials in ensuring bureaucratic buy-in to social accountability processes.

This also accords strongly with the broader literature on the politics of accountability, which tends to suggest that supply-side factors are either more critical than demand-side (Booth 2011) or are required alongside them (Brett 2003). Taken alongside the finding that increased levels of state capacity enhance the success rate of social accountability, an important implication for development policy here might be that the most effective way of ensuring downwards accountability would be to strengthen public authority first rather than seek to directly resource civil society organisations (also Moore 2001, Moore and Putzel 2001).
This report also offers further grounds for the now standard call for institutionalizing political analysis, or what some call higher levels of ‘political intelligence’ within donor agencies and programming procedures (Menocal and Sharma 2008: v). More specifically, and in line with the move away from ‘best-practice’ to ‘best-fit’ type approaches, there is a need to find ways of ensuring that this involves a closer mapping of interventions onto the particular context, so that as far as possible social accountability interventions are designed and rolled out as,

“…(a) supporting existing domestic initiatives and pressures for change, and (b) in ways that are consistent with the initial state of the polity. The latter is likely to vary significantly across countries. This suggests a procedural case for linking external support with diagnosis of the institutional functioning of a country, sector, region or wherever the focus of desired action is.” (Devarajan et al 2011: 32).

7.2 Generating a more relevant evidence-base
This point links well to the final challenge raised by this report, which concerns the need to generate a much more extensive and contextually-nuanced evidence-base concerning factors that shape the impact of social accountability mechanisms. Although this report has contribute in some way to filling this gap, this and other desk-based efforts remain constrained by the nature of the material upon which they rely, material which has only just started to reflect upon and articulate the importance of context. Given the significance of social accountability work to most aid donors, therefore, “the search is on for credible, reliable ways to assess TAI’s effectiveness and impact” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 9), and there are now a growing range of ideas concerning how to move forward in ways that seek to overcome the problems identified in Section 2.3 above. For example, McGee and Gaventa (2011: 19) argue that,

“…an approach which only asks the question of the impact of TAI’s in an abstract or de-contextualised sense has limited value. A more nuanced question is needed: What are the factors – enabling and disabling – that shape the possibility of TAI’s achieving their goals in a particular context? Such an approach binds the analysis of impact both to the broad contexts in which TAI’s exist, and to the theory of change underpinning their application in a particular setting” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 19).

This needs to inform all stages of data gathering around social accountability interventions, from the construction of baselines through systems of monitoring and evaluation and onto impact assessments. For example, “A learning approach to evaluation and final impact assessment would give power and politics a central place in monitoring and evaluation systems” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 3).14 However, it will not be easy to devise ways of tracking the role of context in a systematic way: as noted by McGee and Gaventa (2011: 19), “Context matters so much, in a range of ways, that there is no general evaluation model that can be applied across all contexts”.

14 In relation to expenditure tracking, one author goes further and suggests that “There is also considerable scope for the integration of CSO initiatives into existing monitoring systems, as this would provide valuable independent data for actors at the national level, while CSOs are being given the political support they need in order to improve their access to financial data” (Sundet 2008: 8). For Sundet, the challenge for moving forward in this area is predominantly political, and it is this dimension that is largely missing from the present approach to expenditure tracking. A political change approach to expenditure tracking would require a more determined and deliberate effort to document, examine and discuss what is being planned, implemented, and achieved" (Sundet 2008: 24).
One way forward here is to search for some kind of middle-ground, where certain types of context are identified, within which there are different possibilities for the effective implementation and success of different types of SAMs. There is some evidence of movement in this direction. For example, one report notes that “the appropriate DFGG initiatives are highly dependent on the context if a given country”, and an attempt is made to suggest which types of SAM are appropriate for two different types of context, one where there is a legal framework and political system that permits access to information, civil society has capacity and the government is willing to engage, as against one where “the legal framework and political will to allow civil society participation is weak or non-existent” (Agarwal and Van Wicklin 2011: 12). This is potentially promising, although it is not clear whether this approach is based on sound evidence, and there are also other potentially more nuanced approaches currently under development that might be helpful here in mapping out different types of context, including one that engages directly with the thinking around political settlements introduced above (see Levy, forthcoming). It is hoped that this report will also offer a way forward for those seeking to integrate a focus on key contextual factors within the planning and evaluation of SAcc interventions, by offering a mapping of how such interventions can be located within the key dimensions of political context.

In terms of methodology, some promising alternatives are now being promoted in contrast to the quasi-experimental approach to programme evaluation. This includes calls for “Alternative methodological designs” which are better able to enable learning, “about the complex connections between variables, the social and political dynamics and transmission belts by which impact is being attained and how this impact – political in nature – could be enhanced” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 26). According to McGee and Gaventa, “Such questions direct us towards what is known as a ‘theory-based’ approach to impact evaluation” (op cit). 15 a call also taken up by Tembo’s (2012) focus on how outcome-mapping approaches might be blended with political economy analysis. This report has gone further to argue more specifically that the current weight of evidence on how context matters for SAcc can be best appreciated from polity-based theory of change (Joshi and Houtzager 2012) which views social accountability as part of an historical process through which state and non-state actors forge social contracts around particular public goods over time. Again, such a reframing offers the first step towards a fuller appreciation of the role of political context in shaping social accountability.

15 The same authors also call for “an appreciation of complexity thinking and methods such as qualitative case studies, in-depth interviews, ethnographic studies or participatory methods” (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 26).
Appendices

Appendix 1: Scope and methodology of the review

Bibliographic search
This desk-based review began with a thorough bibliographic search of the social accountability literature including empirical case-study material and more general studies of political economic conditions affecting social accountability. To ensure that the review reflects the most up-to-date findings, only studies published since 2000 were included. The studies considered varied in the range of methodologies employed and included experimental designs such as randomised controlled trials, survey based studies, as well as specialized synthesis reviews. The findings of this review were then related to a trawl of the broader literature on good governance and the politics of development, with a particular focus on demand-side approaches.

To guarantee comprehensiveness and quality control, the literature selection for the systematic review was done in the following phases:

4. The first researcher carried out a bibliographic internet search using the key terms identified below.

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<tr>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Factors affecting</th>
<th>Assessment of</th>
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<td>With search term</td>
<td>Social accountability; demand for good governance; demand side accountability; demand side governance; deliberative governance; public expenditure tracking survey; social audit; community report card; community management committees; social movement mobilisation; NGO mobilisation; CSO mobilisation; participatory governance; citizen* led accountability; citizen* led governance; short route to/for accountability; accountability from below; participatory budgeting; community score card; transparency and accountability initiatives.</td>
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The search engines, databases and websites searched included:

a) ProQuest with a focus on the 10 Social Development data bases including: ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts), Social Services, PAIS (Public affairs, public and social policies, international relations), Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, Worldwide Political Science, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), and ERIC.

b) Google scholar
c) The John Rylands library catalogue
d) Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC)
e) Affiliated Network for Social Accountability
f) The World Bank’s Social Accountability and Demand for Good Governance Cluster online resources
g) The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL)
h) Eldis.org: Eldis is a database of development references developed by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). It mostly contains unpublished development policy, practice and research papers.

i) Centre for the Future State (CFS)

j) Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC)

k) Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

1. Once collected, the second researcher summarized the documents and passed the results to the other two researchers for vetting. This exercise reduced the possibility of overlooking an eligible study or including an ineligible one. At this point, the researchers were able to identify areas where further searching was required. More studies were also identified from the references of already selected documents and from consultations with expert colleagues beyond the core team, including the commissioning official at the World Bank.

2. The bibliographic search exercise produced 91 studies. Of these, 44 were empirical studies, 18 synthesis papers and 29 generic studies (which covered topics such as decentralisation with clear relevance to the question of how context affects social accountability). The final number of studies was reached after dropping 26 studies for being “supply-side only” interventions (general Public Sector Reforms with limited or no societal involvement) or for poor quality.

3. The following criteria was used to exclude certain studies:
   - Studies focusing exclusively on supply side initiatives/reforms.
   - Studies not focusing on citizen-state dynamics. For instance, studies focusing on the accountability of NGOs and other development agencies other than the state were excluded.
   - Studies done before 2000 because:
     - ‘Poor quality’ studies where: no clear methodology information is presented, or the presentation of findings is poorly structured and communicated, or the emphasis is on measuring satisfaction with the programmes among local people rather than actual outcomes or explanatory factors for outcomes.
   - Studies in languages other than English.

Data analysis
The 91 studies were summarised within a comprehensive annotated bibliography. For systematic analysis, each entry into the annotated bibliography was classified as a case and individually entered into Nvivo 9, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software that supports the analysis of non-numerical and unstructured data by indexing, searching, and theorizing. Given the voluminous text from over 90 studies, it would be cumbersome and time consuming to manually synthesise. Drawing on Gaventa and Barrett (2010) who have recently undertaken a related task, Nvivo (a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software that supports the analysis of non-numerical and unstructured data by indexing, searching, and theorizing) was identified as the best suited software. The software’s main advantage lies in the capacity to facilitate logical storage, organisation and retrieval of huge volumes of textual and other qualitative type data. As explained below, the logical sequencing of the data into categories or themes facilitated in-depth perusal of the selected
studies in an ordered manner, requiring much less time and avoiding the confusion of manually going through text printouts. For systematic analysis, each entry into the annotated bibliography was classified as a case and individually entered into Nvivo 9. As opposed to quantitative software packages such as SPSS that have predetermined integrated database, with Nvivo the researcher has to customise the database to fit the interests of the task at hand. Thus, basing on our objective of synthesising the main factors that influence the effectiveness of social accountability, the database was structured as follows.

To facilitate the analysis, the database in Nvivo had three main parts.

i) Case attributes
A case was defined as each entry into the AB. Guided by the requirements of the review as per the ToR, the researchers created the following attributes.

a) Intervention typology. All studies were characterised in terms of one of the three broad types of social accountability mechanism, a typology we discuss in greater depth in Section 2:
   • participatory mechanisms,
   • transparency and accountability mechanisms, and
   • contentious action by social movements and NGOs.

b) Region: studies were coded to reflect the geographical region where they were carried out. We identified studies done in Africa, Asia and Latin America or a combination of these.

c) Verdict on the intervention: for those studies which focused on a specific intervention or group of interventions, they were coded to indicate whether the intervention in question was judged to have been successful, had mixed results or failed (discussed in greater depth in Section Three below).

ii) Nodes
Themes and sub-themes were developed to capture those factors that were identified in each study as shaping the results of the intervention. Two types of factor were identified: those associated directly with the intervention itself (e.g. the strategy employed), and those associated with the context within which the intervention was introduced (e.g. the political or legal environment). The list of both categories is discussed further below. This inductive approach helped reduce the problem of bias, although distinguishing between these categories was not always straightforward (for example, the media is often used within social accountability mechanisms whilst also forming part of the context).

iii) Matrix coding query (analysis)
To establish the significance of the different intervention and contextual factors according to each study, "matrix coding" queries were run for each of the three social accountability mechanisms. This helped generate a broad sense of the regularity with which the same type of factor was identified as being significant in shaping the success of social accountability mechanisms both within and across the three types of intervention identified here. "Matrix coding" queries create tables to compare multiple pairs of specified items. The process and output are akin to producing cross tabulations in SPSS. An example here is that when
we wanted to see the most mentioned contextual factors that influence each type of social accountability, a matrix coding query “SAcc interventions type by all contextual factors” was run.

Approaches for reducing bias:

a) Including all the relevant studies
We engaged in a comprehensive search strategy for the studies considered here which enabled the inclusion of published and unpublished, easily accessible and harder to find reports of research studies. We combined systematic database searching with searching of specialist websites, and personal contacts.

b) Internal checks
Tasks for bibliographic searching, sieving of the studies, writing of annotated bibliography, synthesizing of findings (nvivo), and writing of the review report were divided among the three researchers. At each stage, we held meetings to review and discuss each others’ work.

c) External ‘peer reviewing’
The team in World Bank’s Social Accountability and Demand for Good Governance department provided invaluable comments and input at various stages of this review.
Appendix Two: examples of data analysis via NVIVO

Figure 3: Nvivo screenshot Political stability

- Stable political contexts with steady economic growth and relatively capable local bureaucracies;

- In Colombia, ‘a political context characterized by widespread violence and high levels of contestation of the state authority has restricted the expansion of the politics of accountability.’

- In post-conflict or fragile political contexts, allowing room for civil society initiatives to matute and experiment is important to the process of democratization: ‘It permits adaptation that enables these structures to respond to the demands and opportunities of their particular contexts in ways which may be more effective than pre-programmed models.’ p.222
Figure 4: Nvivo screenshot political will
References


Hickey, S. (2010b) ‘DFID’s new approach to Empowerment & Accountability and Theories of Change: Exploring the links. Paper produced for DFID.


