Exploring the social accountability concept:
a literature review

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Increasing pressure on governments to demonstrate accountability and transparency has contributed to a multiplication of social accountability initiatives that aim to improve public accountability by strengthening civic engagement and good governance through a myriad of tools such as citizen monitoring or SMS-based complaint systems. The popularity of social accountability initiatives has not been matched with progress in the development of a sound theory on social accountability. This working paper presents existing literature on the topic of (social) accountability and highlights the shortcomings and gaps. We conclude with a brief outline of our own research agenda, which is based on the most recent conceptual development in social accountability literature, namely the distinction between tactical and strategic approaches towards social accountability which has been introduced by Jonathan Fox.

Introduction

This working paper is written as a part of an FWO project that aims to study innovative, off-the-blueprint approaches towards Monitoring and Evaluation. This paper builds on a Doctoral Research Paper that was written in 2014, also within the framework of the FWO project.

We start from the observation that the emphasis on transparency and accountability is growing, that the number of publications on accountability is rising, and that the number of social accountability initiatives is soaring (see among others Meier, 2003; World Bank, 2004a; Lehtonen, 2005; Friis-Hansen & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013, Fox, 2015). However, this expanding knowledge base is facing a number of shortcomings. Firstly, the evidence base of what works and what doesn't is still limited (Gaventa & McGee, 2013; Joshi, 2013). Systematic evaluations of social accountability initiatives are scarce and the ones that have been conducted often suffer from a lack of consistency in regard to evaluation criteria and theories of change (Fox, 2015). Secondly, the social accountability field has 'outgrown' conventional conceptual frameworks such as the division between 'long' and 'short' routes to accountability, made in the 2004 World Development Report (World Bank, 2004c). Joshi and Houtzager (2012) have criticized the narrow technocratic view on accountability that is central to the WDR model and argue that the short route doesn't exist. Thirdly, a number of authors has advocated a context-sensitive approach to social accountability, with sufficient attention for power struggles that pervade accountability relationships (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012; Fox, 2015).

Recently, Jonathan Fox (2015) has made an interesting contribution to the existing social accountability literature by differentiating between tactical and strategic social accountability initiatives. This opens perspectives for rethinking the existing evidence base, and for improving future social accountability initiatives with the ultimate aim of contributing to development. With our research we hope to contribute to the developing evidence base and conceptualization in the realm of social accountability. This paper is the first stage in our research project in which we aim to shed light on the complex interplay of accountability relationships between citizens, political leaders, and civil servants.

In this working paper we explore the existing literature on the concept of social accountability. In the first part, we zoom in on the basic accountability concept. In the second part, we focus on social accountability, a specific subtype of the broader accountability concept. We conclude the working paper by briefly dwelling on our own research project and its contribution to the existing literature.

1. EXPLORING THE ACCOUNTABILITY CONCEPT

Accountability is about controlling power to avoid abuse. The concept of accountability expresses the ancient concern for checks and oversight, surveillance and institutional constraint on the exercise of power (Schedler, 1999: 13). Brinkerhoff explains why public accountability has become so important: "the sense that government's power is dominant, coupled with the desire to see that power exercised according to the will of the citizenry puts accountability front and center on the stage of current governance issues" (2001: 1). Within the development discourse, public accountability has taken on a central role. It is a key concept in the 'good governance' and the public sector reform agenda, in major publications on the improvement of public service delivery – e.g. the 2004 World Development Report – and in the upcoming social accountability literature (Aubut, 2004: 14; Gildemyn, 2011: 10).

The term accountability has a long history. The origins of the term can be traced back to the start of the 11th century, when king William of England ordered the property holders within his kingdom to compile 'a count' of their possessions. What started as a simple list of possessions, evolved into a central administrative system (Bovens, 2007: 448). The reference to bookkeeping slowly vanished over the next centuries. By the late 20th century the concept of accountability covered a much broader form of public accountability, similar to how we conceive of it today. Remarkably, as the concept's meaning broadened, the direction of the accountability claim changed: in the 11th century citizens were forced to inform their king about their assets, but today it is government's responsibility to account for its actions towards citizens (Bovens, 2007: 449). After accountability 'emancipated' from its connotation to bookkeeping, it became firmly rooted in political science (Lindberg, 2009: 1).

In this chapter, we explore the concept of accountability. Because of the concept of accountability has been defined in many different ways across many different contexts, it is important to demarcate its semantic boundaries by providing a clear understanding of the concept. We start the chapter by providing a basic definition of accountability relations, arrangements, and regimes. Subsequently, we shed light on the two dimensions of accountability, namely answerability and enforceability. We also provide an oversight of the most commonly used classification criteria to distinguish between different types of accountability. Lastly, we situate the growing attention for accountability within the shift towards more Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) in the public sector.

1.1. Defining accountability: forums and actors

1.1.1. A relational concept

Accountability refers to institutionalized practices of account giving and can therefore be regarded as a social relationship (Bovens, 2005: 184). Bovens defines accountability as "a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences" (Bovens, 2007: 450). Both actor and forum can be an individual or an organization (such as an institution or agency). Within the context of the state, accountability relationships are often referred to as 'public'. This implies that the actors in the accountability relationship are public and elected officials that account for their actions vis-à-vis citizens and/ or civil society, while the object of the accountability relationship is the public sector (Bovens, 2005: 183).

When a forum A (e.g. parliament) cedes power to actor B (e.g. a minister), the latter

has the duty to be accountable towards forum A (Acosta, Joshi & Ramshaw, 2013: 5). If power is delegated, the actor and forum are connected through a principal-agent relationship (Bovens, 2007: 451). In the context of our research, various local government actors – both appointed and elected – take on the role of agents, while citizens – and to a lesser extent CSOs – are the main principals.

1.1.2. Arrangements and regimes

Accountability is not exclusively reserved for actors in formal positions (e.g. public office holders) that establish formally codified relationships. On the contrary, a wide range of actors and institutions, both formal and informal in nature, can legitimately demand for accountability (Chen & Huhe, 2010; Vu & Deffains, 2013). Also the relationships between forums and actors can be either formal or informal in nature. For example, if a relationship between a forum and actor that are both official office holders is not based on formal rules and regulations but on social norms, it is informal in nature (Lindberg, 2009: 8). Although the principal-agent model can be stretched to include these non-hierarchical informal accountability relationships and actors, it was originally focused on clear-cut, formal relationships of delegated authority with a limited number of formal principals (electorate) and agents (official state actors) (Fox, 2014: 9).

Bovens (s.d.: 12) distinguishes between occasional and informal relationship (e.g. between a politician and talk show host on television) on the one hand, and an institutionalized relationship on the other hand. In particular accountability relationships that are situated in the public sphere are laid down in practices, norms, rules, and formal procedures – and thus institutionalized. An accountability relationship that has taken on an institutional character is an accountability *arrangement*. A coherent complex of formal accountability arrangements and informal accountability relationships is an accountability *regime* (Bovens, s.d.: 12). In the context of our research, the notion of an accountability regime is particularly interesting since we aim to map and study both formal as well as informal strategies and channels that citizens use in order to demand accountability from their leaders.

1.2. Answerability and enforceability

Most definitions highlight two components of accountability whereby both are necessary and neither is sufficient (Goetz & Jenkins, 2005: 9). These components are described in the fourth and fifth recurring characteristic of accountability, as identified by Lindberg. Answerability is "the obligation of public officials to inform about and to explain what they are doing" and enforcement is "the capacity of accounting agencies to impose sanctions on power holders who have violated their public duties" (Schedler, 1999: 14). The answerability dimension is proactive since the right to information should lead agents to act responsibly. Therefore Moncrieffe names this dimension "ex-ante accountability". On the contrary, the enforceability dimension enters into force when agents fail to comply with their duty to provide information and to explain their actions. Moncrieffe refers to the enforceability dimension as "ex-post accountability" (2001). When referring to answerability and enforceability, Goetz and Jenkins use the terms "weak" and "strong forms of accountability" respectively (2005: 9).

1.2.1. Answerability

Brinkerhoff describes answerability as the "essence of accountability" (2001: 2). Some authors seem to equate answerability with accountability. Although "the right to ask inconvenient questions and have them answered" is a very important starting point, it does not constitute accountability in itself (Schedler, 1999: 14). In the light of this study, we expect citi-

zens to hold their government accountable by demanding their local government to be answerable to them. Answerability in itself is a two-dimensional concept with the informational dimension on the one hand, and the argumentative dimension on the other hand. The informational dimension implies that the principal demands to be **informed** about the agent's activities and decisions while the The agent is required to pass on reports and to communicate about facts and figures (Brinkerhoff, 2001: 2). If society is unaware of what leaders are doing, the accountability relationship between both is jeopardized (Kumah & Brazys, 2016: 287). In order to establish accountability, there is a need for "information-access policies and programs that reveal reliable information about institutional performance, specifying officials' responsibilities as well as where public funds go" (Fox, 2007: 667). For example, in the Ugandan context citizens or educational institutes have the right to ask local government to release detailed budget information. If the government meets this demand and sheds light on institutional behavior, it adheres to the principles of transparency – another popular term which is associated with the accountability concept (Bovens, 2007: 449; Fox, 2007: 667). Transparency gives citizens, civil society, and political opposition the opportunity to "pursue strategies of constructive change" (Fox, 2007: 667). The informational dimension also involves elements of monitoring and oversight.

The second dimension of answerability involves the right to receive an **explanation** and the duty to provide a **justification** with regard to one's conduct (Schedler, 1999: 15). Actors are obliged to justify the reasons for their behavior and decisions vis-à-vis forums. This allows the principal to pass judgement on the conduct of the agent (Bovens, 2007: 451). In order for this exchange to happen, both need to enter into a dialogue in which the 'why' question is posed (Brinkerhoff, 2001: 2). An example of this dialogue from the Ugandan context is the 'community meeting'. From time to time community gatherings take place during which local politicians explain their policy and answer questions from the attendees. The initiative to organize such a meeting can be taken by politicians, CSOs, or the community itself (Chonga, 02.06.2014).

1.2.2. Enforceability

The extent to which this second dimension of accountability is found to be crucial to the accountability concept, is subject to variance between different authors. Some argue that the flow of information, explanation and justification from the agent to the principal and the judgement from the forum vis-à-vis the actor is enough to constitute an accountability relationship while others insist on the possibility of sanctioning the agent (Bovens, 2007: 451). However, Lindberg calls enforceability a "crucial condition" of the accountability concept (2009: 9). Brinkerhoff defines enforceability as "the ability of the overseeing actor(s) to impose punishment in the accountable actor(s) for failures and transgressions" (2001: 2). The subject of this punishment can either be the failure to provide information and justification as well as the content of decisions and actions by the actor (Lindberg, 2009: 9). Besides punishing bad behavior, Schedler underlines that the enforceability dimension also comprises the reward of good behavior through incentive systems (1999: 15). The emphasis on negative and positive sanctions is 'borrowed' from neo-institutionalist literature that holds the idea that a rule can only be effective if it is accompanied by monitoring mechanisms to prevent cheating and by a control mechanism to punish cheating (Schedler, 1999: 16).

The enforcement dimension comprises of a broad array of sanctions, ranging from formal to informal. Formal sanctions, enforced through laws and regulations, are probably the most well-known type of sanctions. An example of a formal sanction is voting representatives in and out of office. However, many sanctions exist that do not have the status of law but that are

nevertheless effective in ensuring good conduct (Bovens, 2007: 452). A professional code of conduct for example spells out the kind of behavior that is expected as well as the consequences for not adhering to it. An example of a sanction that is informal in nature, is the "exit option" that users of a service may pursue if the quality of the service is unsatisfactory. Similarly, consumers may choose to boycott a certain product. Another example of an informal sanction is public exposure or negative publicity, usually initiated by media, civil society or watchdog organizations (Brinkerhoff, 2001: 2-3). This strategy is also referred to as 'naming and shaming'. Because these informal sanctions cannot be enforced through law, they may not directly lead the agent to change his behavior. However, the fact that these sanctions are used may send a signal to formal institutions, like parliament or audit offices, which have the power to put pressure on the misbehaving agent (Bovens, 2007: 452). Because the term 'sanction' has a rather formal and legal connotation, Bovens uses the somewhat more neutral term 'consequences' (2007:452).

Lindberg has made a timeline of accountability in which he lays out the dimensions of answerability and enforceability and adds a temporal dimension to it. The timeline is presented below a figure 3, P stands for Principal while A stands for Agent.

Figure 1: Time-line of accountability
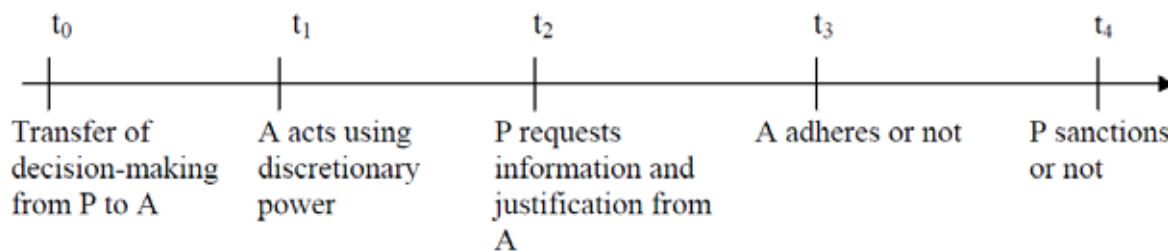
Source: Lindberg, 2009: 11

1.3.   Different types of accountability

In the previous sections we presented a very general definition that applies to all kinds of situations in which accountability relationships occur. However, the precise nature of an accountability relationship varies according to the context in which it appears. For example, the extent to which forums are able to effectively sanction an actor and the degree of formality of the accountability relationship vary widely depending on the types of actors involved, governance system, legal framework and so on. Because many different factors shape an accountability relationship, many different types of accountability exist, each with their own answerability and/or enforceability mechanisms (Gildemyn, 2011: 14).

As a result of this proliferation of accountability types, many attempts to categorize all these types can be found in the literature. Authors use various classification criteria; some differentiate based on the source (or locus) of the relationship, the type of actors involved while others look at the subject of the accountability relationship or the tools that are being used (Schedler, 1999; Brinkerhoff, 2001; Goetz & Jenkins, 2001; Bovens, 2007; Lindberg, 2009; Blind, 2011). These classification exercises result in typologies of different forms of accountability. These ideal-typical subtypes of the general accountability concept include 'democratic accountability', 'political accountability', 'social accountability', 'financial accountability' and 'informal accountability', among many others (for example Brinkerhoff, 2001; Goetz & Jenkins, 2005; Tsai, 2007; Lindberg, 2009; Acosta et al., 2013; Gaventa & McGee, 2013). In this section we first present some widely used classification criteria and then we draw from these criteria to

present a comprehensive classification of accountability subtypes that will guide our research.

1.3.1.   Classification criteria

The most popular way to differentiate between various forms of accountability is on the basis of the location of the forum and actor, and the type of relationship between them. This has led scholars to classify accountability relationships as **'horizontal'** or **'vertical account-ability'**. The distinction between horizontal accountability and vertical accountability was first made by O'Donnell in 1999 but has been frequently revisited by other scholars (see Schedler, 1999; Brinkerhoff, 2001; Bovens, 2007 amongst others). Horizontal accountability is described by O'Donnell as "the existence of state agencies that are legally enabled and empowered, and factually willing and able, to take actions that span from routine oversight to criminal sanctions or impeachment in relation to actions or omissions by other agents or agencies of the state that may be qualified as unlawful" (1999: 38). A typical expression of this form of accountability in de-mocracies is the checks and balances between the executive, legislative and judiciary branches within a governance system such as audit institutions, parliamentary hearings and ombudsmen (Brinkerhoff, 2001: 5). The actors engaged in horizontal accountability possess roughly equal power (Schedler, 1999: 23).

Vertical accountability describes a relation between a powerful, superior actor and a less powerful, inferior actor (Schedler, 1999: 23). Schedler takes into account the direction of the accountability relation: both top-down as well as bottom-up flows of accountability are in-cluded in the term. A classic example of bottom-up, vertical accountability is citizens that vote politicians in and out of office. Other, less formalized, examples are policy research, journalism, and citizen committees (Brinkerhoff, 2001: 5). An example of top-down, vertical accountability is the control that high-ranked public officials exercise over lower-ranked bureaucrats. Lindberg equally makes a distinction between the spatial direction of the accountability relationship. Similar to Schedler, he distinguishes between a vertical upward, a vertical downward and a horizontal movement (2009: 11). Brinkerhoff seems to disagree with Schedler on the two-way direction of the accountability relation. He excludes top-down flows of accountability from the vertical accountability concept, which he defines as a situation in which overseeing actors from *outside* the state hold state actors accountable (2001: 4). Thus, apart from occurring between actors that are unequal in terms of power, in Brinkerhoff's view vertical accountability relation-ships always cross the state boundary by linking state and non-state actors (Brinkerhoff, 2001).

Bovens (2007) uses the classical concepts of vertical and horizontal accountability as found with Schedler (1999) and O'Donnell (1999) but adds the notion of the "obligation to account" (2007: 460). Vertical accountability then refers to the situation in which the agent is formally obliged to render account to the principal since the latter has empowered the former to act on his behalf (e.g. through voting or based on laws and regulations). On the other hand, in horizontal accountability relationships he sees no formal obligation to render account, although there can be a moral one. However, this conception of the horizontal-vertical divide is not broad-ly acknowledged by other authors. In this research we follow Schedler's (1999) conception of the horizontal-vertical divide.

The categorization of accountability relationships regarding the locus of the actors has been expanded by scholars such as Bovens (2007) and Goetz & Jenkins (2001). These schol-ars aimed to bridge the vertical-horizontal divide and came up with the term **'diagonal'** and **'hybrid' accountability**. In the work of Goetz and Jenkins (2001), the concept of hybrid account-ability refers to non-state actors – mostly civil society organizations – that take up account-

ability functions, such as financial auditing, that are typically found in horizontal accountability relationships (Gildemyn, 2011: 16). As such, this type of accountability challenges the vertical-horizontal divide (Goetz & Jenkins, 2001: 364).

Apart from the locus of accountability and power relations between actors, other criteria have been used to classify accountability relationships. Recently, scholars have differentiated between **'formal' and 'informal accountability'** referring to the extent to which an accountability relationship stems from legally binding institutions (Tsai, 2007; Chen & Huhe, 2010; Romzek, Leroux & Blackmar, 2012; Vu & Deffains, 2013). The classification of accountability along the formal-informal axis is fairly recent and therefore the concepts are not very elaborate nor extensively studied. Before Tsai published her article in 2007, some authors had used the terms "formal" and "informal" to describe certain aspects of accountability types – e.g. formal and informal enforceability (Bovens, 2007: 452) – but never to characterize the accountability relationship as a whole. In formal accountability relationships, the agent is "required, obliged or permitted" to render account to a principal through a formally institutionalized set of rules. On the other end of the spectrum we find informal accountability relationships in which the motivation to render account is not centrally imposed but rather produced endogenously within social networks or groups. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the actors in an informal accountability relationship are connected through social norms, beliefs and conventions which create a mixture of moral and instrumental rewards and benefits through which they are motivated to behave in a certain way – consistent with their roles as principal or agent (Chen & Huhe, 2010: 8).

1.3.2. Classification of accountability subtypes

Based on the classification criteria that were discussed above, Lindberg (2009) presents a comprehensive typology of public accountability relationships. He uses three classification criteria: (i) **the locus of the accountability relationship,** (ii) **the direction of the accountability relationship,** (iii) **and the degree of control that the principal exercises over the agent**. First of all, regarding the locus he distinguishes between a principal that is external or internal to the one being held accountable. The accountability source is "external" when a principal outside of state agencies holds an agent within the governance system accountable. The accountability source is "internal" when both principal and agent are located within the governance system. Thus, the source is external when a voter holds a representative accountable and internal when a high-ranked bureaucrat holds a subordinate accountable for his work (Lindberg, 2009: 11). This criterion is very similar to O'Donnell and Schedler's distinction between horizontal and vertical accountability as interpreted by Brinkerhoff (2001). With the second criterion, Lindberg builds on the concepts of horizontal and vertical accountability by making a distinction between the spatial direction of the accountability relationship. Similar to Schedler, he distinguishes between a vertical upward, a vertical downward and a horizontal movement (2009: 11).

The third criterion is the degree of control that is exercised by the principal over the power holder. Although Lindberg (2009: 11) admits the degree of control is difficult to assess, he argues there are fundamental differences between the strict rules and regulations characterizing financial auditing vis-à-vis the diffuse power within patron-client relations. Again, this refers to Schedler's (1999: 15) enforceability dimension. This criterion also refers to the notion of formal accountability in which formal sanctioning is more likely compared to informal accountability.

The introduction of a third dimension allows for a much more detailed description of accountability types. When these three criteria are combined in a matrix, Lindberg comes up with a three-dimensional table and no less than 12 different types of accountability (table

1). In his work, Lindberg names and briefly discusses each type of accountability. This is the most comprehensive and useful classification found in the accountability literature up to date. Nonetheless, the specific terms Lindberg chose to name each accountability type are at odds with more generally accepted terms used by other scholars, which can causes confusion. For instance, 'representational accountability' is equal to what many scholars call 'political accountability', namely accountability through voting (see Adserà, Boix & Payne, 2000; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006; Bovens, 2007; Acosta et al., 2013). On the other hand, Lindberg reserves the term 'political accountability' to describe the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats.

Table 1: Typology based on source and strength of control, and direction of accountability relationship

Source of Control	Strength of Control	Direction		
		Vertical upward	Vertical downward	Horizontal
Internal	High	*Business*	*Bureaucratic*	*Audit*
	Low	*Client-Patron*	*Patron-Client*	*Peer Professional*
External	High	**Representative**[1]	*Fiscal*	*Legal*
	Low	**Societal**[2]	***Political***	*Reputational*

Source: Lindberg, 2009: 12

In our research we look at vertical accountability relationships that connect citizens with state actors. We are particularly interested in the upward and downward relationship between citizens and their elected representatives (in both the legislative and the executive branches), as well as the upward and downward relationship between citizens and appointed officials, and between elected representatives and appointed officials at the local level. Therefore we will focus mostly on representative, political, and societal accountability.

Representational accountability is the most evident type of upward vertical accountability, indicating a relationship between citizens and elected government officials (Bovens, 2007: 455; Lindberg: 13; Acosta et al., 2013: 5). Through periodic democratic elections, citizens cede power to politicians who are in turn obliged to explain and justify their actions to their electorate. If they fail, citizens have the right to sanction political leaders by voting those incumbents who did not act in the best interests of voters out of office (Malena, Forster & Singh, 2004: 2; Goetz & Jenkins, 2005: 8; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006: 6). This is the most conventional and well-known type of accountability and a classic example of accountability being exercised along the chain of a principal-agent relationship (Bovens, 2007: 455; Acosta et al., 2013: 5). However, voting is not the only representational accountability mechanism. Citizens can choose to interact directly with their representatives to demand responsiveness in other formal and informal ways. For instance, voters can choose to write a request or complaint letter addressed to their representative, or they might decide to make an appointment to visit an incumbent's office during a time slot that is foreseen for official meetings.

Societal or social accountability is also a relationship between citizens and elected public officials (Bovens, 2007: 457). It is a non-electoral, upward vertical mechanism of control of political authorities that rests on the actions of an array of citizen's associations and the media (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006: 10). Behind the concept of social accountability lies an enormous research agenda which we focus on in more detail in the next chapter. In contrast to political accountability mechanisms, social accountability is not limited to specific formal

[1]   Representative accountability is also referred to as political accountability in the literature.
[2]   Societal accountability is also referred to as social accountability in the literature.

procedures or regular intervals. Instead citizens can participate continuously in the political process (Acosta et al., 2013: 10). Social accountability is further distinguished from political accountability in that the principals (e.g. citizens, CSOs, citizen committees) are self-appointed in their role and thus have to convince state institutions of the legitimacy of their position before they can expect the state to render them account. The fact that these citizens and CSOs lack a formal framework within which they can operate, substantially reduces their ability to sanction the agent (Lindberg, 2009: 14).

Political accountability – the relationship between politicians and so-called MDAs (ministries, departments, and agencies) – is less studied. Power is delegated from voters to representatives but the chain doesn't halt there. Elected representatives in turn delegate power to a cabinet of ministers (the executive), which in turn delegates power to civil servants within administrative bodies such as ministries and agencies (Bovens, 2007). In Uganda, designed to be a parliamentarian democracy, this is no different.

1.4.   Accountability and M&E

Governments increasingly experience pressure from international actors (e.g. UN agencies, EU, development banks) as well as from domestic actors (e.g. citizens, civil society, media) to demonstrate transparency and accountability (Meier, 2003: 2; World Bank, 2004a: 2-11; Lehtonen, 2005: 169). On the other hand, the emphasis on complexity, interconnectedness, and plurality of perspectives, has led to a greater need for *learning* (Lehtonen, 2005: 170). Evaluation bolsters learning by explaining the reasons behind the policy outcomes, so as to improve policies. In order to meet this demand for more accountability and learning, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems emerged. These accountability and learning systems foster results-oriented, iterative and evidence-based policy-making and are therefore deemed crucial for poverty reduction. Furthermore, accountability towards citizens is considered an important building block for strengthening democratic checks and balances.

Since the rise of the new aid paradigm[3] around the turn of the century, accountability systems have seen a trend towards formalization and standardization (De Wit & Akinyoade, 2008: 6). This trend is reflected in the signing of the 2005 Paris Declaration in which 'managing for results' and 'mutual accountability' are two of the five pillars for aid effectiveness (OECD/ DAC, 2005). This has led public accountability relationships to be increasingly 'captured' in formal and technical procedures. In recent years, aid agencies, NGOs, and governments have developed formalized M&E blueprints which are widely used to demonstrate accountability (e.g. OECD/DAC, 1991; UNDP Evaluation Office, 2002; World Bank, 2004a; 2004b; UNEG, 2005). Despite their popularity, these M&E blueprints have been frequently criticized for being overly technocratic and context-insensitive, and for upholding a false sense of neutrality while disregarding the existing informal dynamics that are highly contextualized and subject to issues of power (Holvoet & Rombouts, 2008; Rodrik, 2008; Eyben, 2011). Because these blueprints are ill-equipped to take into account the informal and localized realities, they tend to ignore them which entails the risk of rendering the blueprints ineffectual (Evans, 2004: 35). Awareness is growing that blueprint M&E systems are not the only way in which accountability and learning are achieved.

1.4.1.   Defining 'M' and 'E'

The Development Assistance Committee of the OECD and UNDP define *monitor-*

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[3]   See Renard, 2006.

ing as "a continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention (a project, program or other kind of support) with indications of progress in the achievement of results" (UNDP Evaluation Office, 2002: 6; OECD/DAC, 2010:27). *Evaluation* is defined as "the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors" (OECD DAC, 2010:21). The activity of monitoring and evaluation generates knowledge, which is described as "content- and context-specific information capable of bringing change that can contribute to new learning and knowledge" (UNDP Evaluation Office, 2002:77).

1.4.2.   Linking 'M' and 'E'

The concepts of monitoring and evaluation have been thoroughly studied in M&E literature (see Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Moncrieffe, 2001; Deininger & Mpuga, 2004; World Bank, 2004c; Goetz & Jenkins, 2005; Weiss, Murphy-Graham & Birkeland, 2005; Tsai, 2007; Romzek et al., 2012). Both concepts interlink and even complement each other: while monitoring is used to oversee the implementation process at any time, evaluation gives evidence of why certain outcomes and impacts are (not) achieved. If the monitoring system shows that implementation is not going as planned, an evaluation of what went wrong can help to clarify causes and give rise to solutions. Both monitoring and evaluation can be done at project, program and policy level (World Bank, 2004a: 13). The ultimate goal of monitoring and evaluation is to utilize the generated findings to improve public policy in order to bring about development although there are many more ways in which monitoring and evaluation activities can produce outcomes (Mark & Henry, 2004; Lehtonen, 2005: 170).

Although the concepts of learning and accountability are interconnected, they seem irreconcilable to a certain extent. A trade-off exists between emphasizing the former or the latter: when accountability is the priority, performance is measured on the basis of output and outcome indicators, without much attention for the causal links between them. When the priority is learning, in-depth evaluation is needed, which entails uncovering the reasons behind policy outcomes (Lehtonen, 2005: 170). Another contrast is found in the relationship between the policy/program implementers and the persons executing the monitoring and evaluation activity. Where accountability is the main focus, implementation and evaluation are strictly separated in order to safeguard the evaluator's independence and impartiality. Where learning is the priority, implementers and evaluators interact more. This allows the implementers to draw lessons from the evaluation results but at the same time it jeopardizes the evaluator's independence (OECD/DAC, 2001: 66). According to Lehtonen (2005: 171) "the challenge is not to choose between the two, but to look for complementarity through clearly defining the roles of the two approaches".

From a learning perspective, an evaluation is a cyclic process that continuously adds to the accumulation of knowledge. A basic level of accountability can be established by the availability and transparency of evaluation results while learning requires a long process of in-depth analysis and scrutiny. In this sense, accountability can be regarded as an 'intermediary' outcome of M&E while 'learning' constitutes a 'long-term' outcome. In our research, we regard public accountability as the means that may lead to another end, namely individual and organi-

zational learning, and ultimately policy change. Lehtonen (2005: 183) calls this "accountability *for* learning".

Because 'M' and 'E' are concepts with distinct characteristics, it might seem contradictory to use the generic term 'M&E' which seems to disregard the conceptual difference. Yet, in the literature and among major actors in development aid the generic term is frequently used. We use the term 'M&E system' to refer to formalized systems that aim to establish accountability and learning. We refer to it as a 'system' because reporting chains and responsibilities are institutionalized while a budget for M&E activities is provided for. Besides, we refer to it as 'M&E' since government institutions monitor as well as evaluate their policies and programs.

1.4.3.   Monitoring and evaluating government programs

The activity of M&E can take place in many different contexts and settings, and it comprises of a myriad of tactics and instruments. In the context of our research, we look at monitoring strategies that citizens – and to a lesser extent CSOs – use in order to hold their leaders accountable. In Uganda, many initiatives have been rolled out in recent years that use M&E to improve the accountability relationship between citizens and government. The Ugandan government has shown commitment to improve its service delivery and reduce fraud. For instance, the World Bank, with the help of the government, has conducted three Expenditure Tracking Surveys in the primary education system: in 1996, 2002 and 2008[4] (Sundet, 2008: 9; Winkler & Sondergaard, 2008). These studies revealed leakages and contributed to a more efficient organization of capitation grant payments (Sundet, 2008: 9). In 2012 the Office of the Auditor General uncovered a major scandal involving illegal money transfers from project to personal accounts (Nyanzi, 01.11.2012). In 2009, the Office of the Prime Minister initiated the Baraza program, a platform for citizens to participate in the policy cycle through "effective monitoring of the use of public resources in the delivery of services at local Government Level" (Office of the Prime Minister, s.d.). Uganda also serves as an incubator for all kinds of more experimental initiatives as a lot of innovative M&E approaches are currently rolled out (e.g. SMS-based information systems, citizen-report cards, community monitoring, community scorecards) are currently being implemented (M4W, 2012; Tumushabe, Tamale, Ssemakula & Muhumuza, 2012; Cillier, Kasirye, Leaver, Serneels & Zeitlin, 2014).

In our research, we focus on two initiatives that aim to encourage citizens to monitor government, both implemented by the Ugandan NGO 'Uganda Debt Network' or UDN. The first initiative is an SMS Platform which gives citizens the opportunity to report malpractices and misconduct of their local leaders. The second initiative is a community monitoring project in which citizens organize themselves in teams that monitor and report on government policy and projects, after which a dialogue is organized between citizens and their leaders.

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[4]   In fact, Uganda was the very first country where a Public Expenditure Tracking Survey was conducted (Sundet, 2008: 9).

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2.   THE RISE OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVES

Of all different types of accountability, social accountability has probably received most attention in recent years. This is motivated by the increasing frustration with the limits of many classical types of accountability, such as political, bureaucratic and representational accountability. Over the years, an incredibly extensive literature has been developed on the topic of social accountability and its influence on service delivery (see Friis-Hansen & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013; Gaventa & McGee, 2013). Social accountability initiatives are multiplying as a result of the increasing emphasis on transparency and accountability (Fox, 2015: 346). Social accountability initiatives are interventions that aim to instigate the accountability relationship between citizens and state actors through mediation of collective actors within civil society (e.g. NGOs, faith-based organizations, media). Today, social accountability initiatives are becoming firmly anchored in government policies and NGO strategies as they are being implemented all over the African continent (Friis-Hansen & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013: 14).

Friis-Hanssen and Cold-Ravnkilde (2013: 14-15) identify four drivers behind this increased attention for social accountability in Africa. To start with, social accountability could be seen as a reaction to the governance gap that causes public services to be inefficient. Especially the 2004 World Development Report – discussed below – that deals with public service failures has had a great impact. Secondly, the emergence of social accountability initiatives can be seen as a part of a broader democratization process, within which decentralization is supposed to bring services closer to the people. Thirdly, accountability is one of the five key principles within the Paris Declaration. Lastly, international NGOs and academics see social accountability as a more radical and effective alternative to the good governance agenda.

In order to shed some light on the concept of social accountability, we start this chapter by defining it. Subsequently we explain the recent popularity of social accountability as we discuss the shift from 'old' to 'new' forms of accountability, followed by a presentation of two conceptual frameworks that are used to analyze the concept of social accountability. Firstly we draw from the influential 2004 World Development Report (WDR) which put forth the dichotomy between the 'long' and 'short' route to accountability. emphasize the importance of social accountability in improving the relationship between citizens, politicians, and civil servants as well as improving public service delivery. Secondly, we present a recent addition to the social accountability literature: the distinction between tactical and strategic social accountability approaches (Fox, 2015).

2.1.   Defining social accountability

The concept of social accountability is often used as an umbrella category that includes a wide range of strategies, such as citizen monitoring and oversight, user-centered public information dissemination systems, public complaint and grievance redress mechanisms, as well as participatory budgeting (Fox, 2015:346). However, some scholars have tried to come up with a definition. Malena et al. (2004: 3) defines social accountability as "an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability". Social accountability mechanisms can either be initiated by government, by citizens, or both. In our research project we focus on demand-driven mechanisms, which are the most common type of social accountability mechanisms (Malena et al., 2004: 3). These mechanisms comprise of the broad range of citizen and CSO actions – beyond voting representational forms of accountability – to hold the state accountable, as well as actions on the part of government, media, and other

societal actors that facilitate these actions (Malena & McNeil, 2010: 1). Social accountability – also referred to as citizen-led or demand-side accountability – is often diametrically opposed to political accountability – also referred to as state-side or supply-side accountability (Gaventa & McGee, 2013: S4).

Social accountability initiatives are said to have many virtues. Malena et al. (2004: 5) has identified three main arguments underlying the importance of social accountability. Firstly, social accountability is said to improve governance. As discussed previously, the traditional 'vertical' mechanisms of accountability allow for only minimal contact between citizens and government. According to Malena et al. (2004: 5) this has led to disillusionment on the side of the citizens, and even a "legitimacy crisis". Social accountability mechanisms allow ordinary citizens to access information, voice their needs, and demand accountability between elections. Secondly, social accountability is said to incite empowerment, especially of poor people. Malena et al. state that social accountability mechanisms provide a means to increase and aggregate the voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups by providing information on rights and entitlements and soliciting systematic feedback from poor people. This enhanced voice for the poor increases the chance of greater responsiveness on the part of the state (2004: 5). Lastly, social accountability is said to increase development effectiveness through an improved public service delivery. By enhancing the availability of information, strengthening citizen voice, promoting dialogue and consultation between citizens, service providers and politicians, service delivery can be made more effective and more transparent, participatory and pro-poor (Malena et al., 2004: 5).

Ackerman (2005: 26) presents six dimensions that capture the wide variety of practices characterizing the broad category of social accountability. The dimensions are depicted in table 2. Ackerman regards the first five dimensions as continuums because they can take on a broad range of values. Every social accountability mechanism has its own unique configuration of values on the different continuums, depending on contextual factors and the nature of the particular mechanism (see table 8). The first dimension is the incentive structure and refers to the enforceability aspect of accountability as described before. The incentive structure can range from being based on punishments to being based on rewards. The second dimension refers to the subject of the accountability relationship. The extent in which accountability mechanisms are organized – in an institutionalized way or on an ad-hoc basis – is captured by the third dimension. The fourth dimension refers to the depth of involvement or, in other words to the extent in which citizens as agents of accountability are invited "into the core of the state". The fifth dimension captures the breadth and depth of citizen participation. Some accountability mechanisms are initiated by highly professional NGOs only while others are based on grassroots movements. The sixth and last dimension refers to the type of government branch the social accountability mechanism is directed to: executive, judicial or legislative.

Table 2: Six dimenions of social accountability

Incentive structure	Punishments	← →		Rewards
Accountability for what?	Rule following	← →		Performance
Institutionalization	Low	← →		High
Involvement	External	← →		Internal
Inclusiveness	Elitist	← →		Inclusive
Branches of Government	Executive	Judicial		Legislative

Source: Ackerman, 2005: 26

In general, social accountability mechanisms tend to weigh toward the left side of the continuums while being directed towards the executive branch (Ackerman, 2005: 25). However, the term social accountability encompasses a wide variety of mechanisms that all have their own position on the continuums. For instance, a social accountability mechanism such as the scorecard is usually managed by a professional NGO which means that it is to some extent institutionalized and elitist. At the same time, the scorecard is developed to assess performance and is based on rewards (Ackerman, 2005: 26).

2.2. 'Old' forms versus 'new' accountability strategies

Accountability relationships can be established through various instruments and strategies. Gaventa & McGee (2013: S4) distinguish between traditional and innovative ways to deliver accountability. Voting is the most conventional and well-known example of traditional accountability mechanisms. Voting allows for only a minimal degree of citizen participation (Goetz & Jenkins, 2005: 9). In Uganda, citizens democratically elect councilors and chairpersons at all five tiers of the local government structure. The accountability mechanism operates in the opposite direction to that of the delegation. Voting is a highly formalized expression of representational accountability since voting practices, and the rights and obligations of both principal and agent with regard to elections, are firmly anchored in laws and regulations (Acosta et al., 2013: 5). Bureaucratic procedures such as intra-government controls (e.g. formal reporting chains, budget transparency) are another type of traditional accountability mechanisms. All of these 'old' accountability mechanisms are state-led and highly institutionalized.

In recent years, citizens and civil society have become increasingly frustrated with the limits of many classical methods to hold government accountable, such as voting. Malena et al. (2004: 3) describe voting as a "blunt instrument" which doesn't allow citizens to contribute in a meaningful way. According to Goetz and Jenkins, representative accountability has some shortcomings as voting allows for only a minimal degree of citizen participation (Goetz & Jenkins, 2005: 9). Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin (1999; in Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006: 6) identify three intrinsic limitations of elections that make them inadequate as a representational accountability mechanism. The first limitation refers to the periodic nature of voting, allowing citizens only one chance to punish or reward the numerous governmental decisions. Consequently, voters have few opportunities to participate in shaping policy outcome. The second limitation refers to the fact that a vote can be interpreted in many different ways. Citizen's votes can be guided prospectively or retrospectively and there is no way to know for sure the mechanism behind an electoral result. The last argument refers to citizen's deficit of information, which makes it difficult to adequately evaluate government performance and decisions.

Therefore citizens, CSOs and scholars have pushed for a more direct relationship between public authorities and the citizens that are affected by their decisions (Goetz & Jenkins, 2005; 77). This shift is associated with a wide range of strategies that are regarded as largely 'citizen-led', 'demand-side' driven, and even 'innovative' (Gaventa & McGee, 2013: S4). Some of these classic 'new' strategies include investigative journalism, public demonstrations and petitions (Brinkerhoff, 2001: 5; Acosta et al., 2013: 10). More recent innovative strategies include citizen report cards, citizen monitoring, social audits, public expenditure tracking and participatory budgeting (Malena et al., 2004: 3; Gaventa & McGee, 2013: S5). All of these accountability mechanisms go beyond the traditional formal democratic institutions of elections, recall of representatives or internal government audits (Gaventa & McGee, 2013: S4). All of these 'new' accountability strategies are grouped in the broad category of 'social accountability', which covers

a wide range of activities, strategies and mechanisms. Both formal and technically advanced CSO-led social audits as well as an informal meeting between citizens and their representatives are regarded as social accountability activities but are very different in nature.

2.3. Conceptual frameworks for social accountability

2.3.1. The long and short route to accountability

With the publication of the 2004 World Development Report (WDR), social accountability entered the realm of public service delivery as a central theme (World Bank, 2004c). The publication of the WDR sparked a lot of research on concrete accountability mechanisms in the succeeding years (De Wit & Akinyoade, 2008: 7; Gaventa & McGee, 2013: S5). The WDR starts from the observation that public services fail too often. Services like education, health, and water are often inaccessible, expensive, dysfunctional, low in quality or unresponsive to the need of clients, while innovation and evaluation is largely absent (World Bank, 2004c: 19). Of all people, the poor experience the most problems with service delivery. The authors of the WDR are clear about the importance of accountability in overcoming this public service problem: "successful services for poor people emerge from institutional relationships in which the actors are accountable to each other" (World Bank, 2004c: 47). Three types of actors are key: citizens, politicians, and service providers(World Bank, 2004c: 47).

Figure 2: Accountability relationships in service delivery
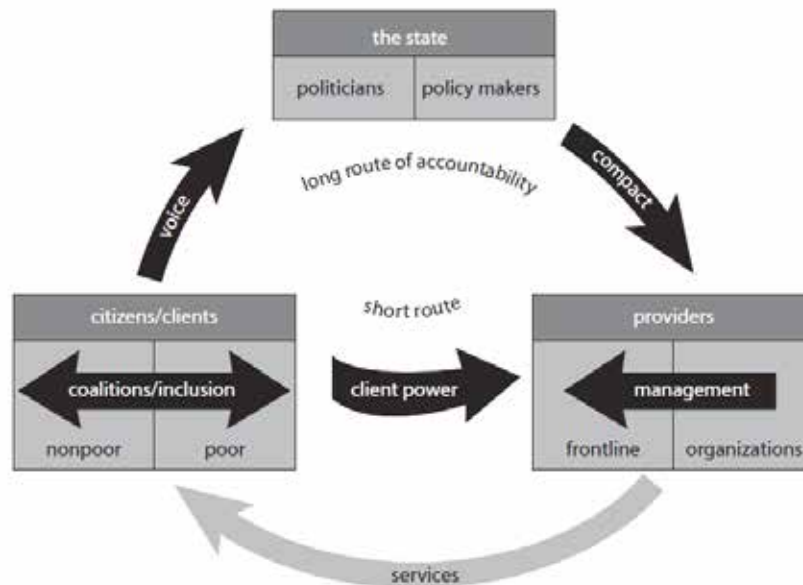
Source: World Bank, 2004c: 49.

Figure 2 shows that the accountability relationships between these actors differ in nature. The traditional formal accountability relationship between citizens and policy makers is called representational accountability (Lindberg, 2009: 11; Acosta et al., 2013). As we have argued in the previous chapter, the relationship between citizens and politicians also includes more informal mechanisms such as petitioning, and naming and shaming campaigns. The accountability relationship between citizens and politicians is captured in the term "voice and politics" (World Bank, 2004c: 50). To describe the accountability relationship between policy makers and organizational service providers, the term "compact" is used, referring to a broad agreement about a long-term relationship (World Bank, 2004c: 48).

The added value of the WDR lies in the conceptualization of the last relationship, between citizens and service providers. Traditionally, there is no direct relationship between citizens and public service providers. In ideal circumstances this relationship is not necessary, as citizens influence policy makers, and policy makers influence service providers to deliver adequate services (Lindberg, 2009: 15). In reality, this "long route to accountability" is fragile; for instance citizens could be excluded from the electoral process or policy-makers may not have the ability to control service providers. If the relations along this long route break down, service delivery fails. In order to ensure adequate public services, the WDR suggests strengthening the "short route to accountability" by increasing citizen's direct power over service providers (World Bank, 2004c: 6). The direct relationship between citizens and service providers is called "client power" and entails increasing citizen's choice and participation in service delivery. Client power can be exercised in many ways, for example by citizen report cards, social audits, and information campaigns (Ringold, Holla, Koziol & Srinivasan, 2012: 5). Usually these kinds of initiatives are implemented or assisted by CSOs because they require a lot of organization and skills. On the other hand, client power also refers to more informal strategies such as informal citizen-led monitoring of service providers – both organizational and frontline providers – as well as boycotting, or naming and shaming. These informal types of social accountability are not explicitly mentioned in the 2004 WDR. Instead, the WDR seems to concentrate more on formalized CSO-supported social accountability mechanisms.

The World Bank approach towards social accountability has been criticized for being too simplistic and technical (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012: 146; Friis-Hansen and Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013: 26). In the WDR logic, failures in public service delivery simply result from accountability relationships that are not transparent, formalized nor effective. In order to fix these service delivery failures, it seems sufficient to strengthen the accountability relationships between providers, policy-makers and citizens. Although the report makes mention of unequal power relations, and the importance of underlying factors such as context and culture, Friis-Hansen and Cold-Ravnkilde argue that the WDR approach does not take into account these factors in a substantial way. Joshi and Houtzager (2012: 146) call this the "widget" approach to social accountability because it reduces social accountability to labeled mechanisms such as score cards or social audits. This narrow view disregards the power struggles that are involved with poor people accessing public services. Instead, Joshi and Houtzager (2012: 146) suggest adopting a "watchdog" approach in which social accountability is regarded as "an ongoing political engagement by social actors with the state as part of a long-term pattern of interaction shaped by both by historical forces and the current context". This approach acknowledges that accountability processes are deeply infused with power and conflict (Friis-Hansen & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013: 15).

Fox (2015: 347) adds to the existing critique that the long-short dichotomy disregards other public 'check and balance' institutions such as legislatures, the judicial system, audit institutions, ombudsman agencies, or public information access reforms. Moreover, the WDR model is too narrowly focused on the local level, assuming that all accountability deficits are primarily local rather than situated at the central government level. Lastly, evidence gathered in the years after the publication has suggested that there is "no way around the central issue of political accountability and the incentive structures that influence the degree to which elected officials are responsive to citizens" (Fox, 2015: 347). Apart from conceptual deficits, the long-short conceptualization doesn't seem to tally with the reality on the ground. Therefore, Fox (2015: 348) argues that a "fresh set of conceptual propositions" is needed and therefore suggests to look at the social accountability concept through new analytical lenses.

2.3.2.   Tactical and Strategic Social Accountability Initiatives

Fox (2015) argues that social accountability has outgrown conventional conceptual frameworks, such as the WDR model. The relatively limited empirical evidence base of social accountability outcomes suggests that the results are mixed at best (Gaventa & McGee, 2013; Joshi, 2013). While the objectives and strategies differ to a large extent, many of these initiatives produce outcomes below expectations. This sparks the question as to why social accountability initiatives have not succeeded. Interestingly, the wide range of social accountability initiatives don't seem to use the same theory of change in their quest for social betterment. Moreover, many initiatives are based on unrealistic assumptions about which tools would lead to more accountability.

These weak propositions mainly have to do with the supposed impact of information sharing and transparency on accountability. It is often believed that the mere availability of information on government performance will spark collective action on the side of the community. However, Fox (2015: 349) argues that information has to be 'actionable', meaning that it needs to be readily available, clear, and – most importantly – that the demand for information and subsequent actions are welcomed by the government. Another assumption that is too easily made is that community participation is democratic in itself and that it can influence public services. On the contrary, community participation can be captured by elites, causing vulnerable groups (e.g. ethnical minorities, the poor) to be at risk of exclusion. Moreover, it is not a given fact that citizens are heard and acknowledged by their – potentially unresponsive – government (Fox, 2014: 16-17).

Consequently, the evidence-base and prevailing conceptual frameworks of social accountability need to be rethought. The most recent addition to the social accountability literature is the distinction between *tactical* and *strategic* social accountability initiatives, which was proposed by Jonathan Fox (2015) and the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (see table X). In general, a tactic is a discreet, focused procedure or method for promoting a desired end or result. In the case of social accountability projects, tactics refer to concrete and bounded accountability tools that are designed to improve the accountability relationship between citizens and state actors. Tactics can be range from being technical tools to being sensitive to power relations and the general context. On the other hand, a strategy is a collection of political and context sensitive tactics that all serve the same purpose (Guerzovic & Poli, 2014c). **Tactical approaches** to social accountability "emphasize local-level dissemination of information on service delivery outcomes and resource allocation to underrepresented stakeholders" while expecting them to demand accountability (Fox, 2015: 352). **Strategic approaches** to social accountability focus on "disseminating information that is clearly perceived as actionable, in coordination with measures that actively enable collective action, influence service provider incentives, and/or share power over resource allocation" (Fox, 2015: 352). Strategic approaches are said to have 'teeth', a concept which refers to the state's capacity to respond to citizen voice, a process that includes both negative as well as positive sanctions – and very similar to the answerability dimension that was discussed earlier (Fox, 2014: 28).

Table 3: Tactical and strategic approaches to social accountability

Tactical social accountability
- Bounded interventions
- Citizen voice as sole driver
- Assumption that information alone will inspire collective action with sufficient power to influence public sector performance
- Exclusive focus on local arena
Strategic social accountability
- Multiple, coordinated data
- Enabling environments for collective action, to reduce perceived risk
- Citizen voice coordinated with governmental reforms that bolster public sector responsiveness
- Scaling up (vertically) and across (horizontally)
- Iterative, contested and therefore uneven process

Source: Fox, 2015: 352

Fox (2015) argues that most social accountability initiatives that have produced meager results, are based on the weak assumptions that were presented above and as such can be regarded as tactical approaches. On the other hand, successful social accountability initiatives call for active engagement and participation of targeted government actors that must have the authority, know-how and willingness to pursue change (Guerzovich & Poli, 2014b: 2) and thus show characteristics of strategic approaches.

In 2015, the Global Partnership for Social Accountability – established by the World Bank in 2012 – identified four elements that are vital to strategic social accountability approaches (Guerzovic & Poli, 2014a-f). Firstly, social accountability work has failed to deliver results because it has relied on technical tools at the expense of political tactics that take into account the nature of a given political and institutional context. Therefore strategic approaches should "harness the context", meaning that they should propose a set of linked, realistic strategies that are tailored to the political context in order to contribute to a concrete policy problem. These strategies should include actors and reform efforts, and should look for institutional entry points that already exist on the ground (Guerzovic & Poli, 2014b). Blueprint approaches therefore will not work; politically 'smarter' approaches to development need to be developed. This first criteria seems to take the criticism to heart that social accountability initiatives are often too technical and maintain a narrow vision (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012: 146; Friis-Hansen and Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013: 26).

Secondly, the technical tools that are used in projects to solve development bottle-necks are often not 'politically savvy' which means that they are not adjusted to the conditions in which they are implemented. One-shot technical tools or tactics do not suffice in a complex environment. It is necessary to analyze the political economy, which entails mapping all stakeholders and existing institutional arrangements. On the basis of this analysis, multiple tactics – all geared towards solving a particular problem – should be developed which are sensitive to the political context. This is what Guerzovic and Poli (2014c) call "responsive and multi-pronged strategies".

Thirdly, social accountability interventions should be integrated and linked to other interventions with the same goals in order to build on each other's resources, and to bridge diverse forms of technical, institutional, and political capital (Guerzovic & Poli, 2014d). Fourthly,

social accountability initiatives should incorporate systematic real-time learning as well as M&E in order for 'adaptive learning' to take place. Adaptive learning entails changing tactics on the basis of negative feedback and results, which in the context of social accountability interventions refers to the extent to which projects gain and use knowledge from their own work and others to influence policy, strategy, plans, and actions (Guerzovic & Poli, 2014e).

3.   A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

The popularity of social accountability initiatives has not been matched with progress in the development of a sound theory on social accountability. However, in recent years the evidence base and conceptual frameworks have evolved considerably (see Peruzzotti & Smulovitz 2006; Renzio, Azeem & Ramkumar, 2006; Afridi, 2008; Björkman & Svensson, 2009; Lindberg, 2009; Malena & McNeil, 2010; Joshi & Houtzager, 2012; Gaventa & McGee, 2013; Joshi, 2013; Fox, 2015 among many others). In (social) accountability theory and practice, there is a noticeable trend away from a narrow technical blueprint approach towards a more context-sensitive, politically 'savvy' approach but it is unclear whether this 'watchdog approach' has already trickled down to the reality on the ground.

With our study we want to build on the theorization of social accountability by testing whether the conceptualization of social accountability in 'tactical' and 'strategic' approaches holds on the ground. The aim is to explore the nature of the accountability relationships that exist between and among citizens (demand-side actors in the accountability relationship), political leaders, and civil servants (supply-side actors in the accountability relationship), in three settings with a different accountability regime, in regard to the delivery of public water services. We decided to opt for Uganda as our research setting because of its central position in social accountability literature; in order to be able to study accountability relationships between and citizens and duty bearers, we need to select a case in which the chance of these relationships manifesting themselves is high.

The first reason for choosing Uganda is its decentralized structure. Decentralization is the process of dispersing decision-making from the center to a point closer to the service delivery or action. It provides an opportunity to develop and strengthen local governance through equipping local governments with the authority, capacity and resources to better respond to the needs of citizens (UNDP, 2009: 175). Apart from South Africa, Uganda is the most decentralized[5] country in Sub-Sahara Africa (Ndegwa, 2002: 12). The decentralization process in Uganda, dividing the country into 111 districts and 1 capital city, is even said to be one of the most far-reaching local government reform programs in the developing world (Francis & James, 2003: 325). Uganda promoted decentralization with the objective of empowering its nationals to participate in the process of development to improve their livelihood and of bringing social services closer to the people (Kritika, Sohini & Pooja, 2010). Citizens in a decentralized governance structure are reportedly better positioned to monitor the activities of their local government and to demand for accountability, compared to citizens in a centralized service delivery model (UNDP & GoG, 1999: 2; Misuraca, 2007: 44; Aiyar, 2010: 204). However, a lively academic debate on the positive (and negative) effects of decentralization on service delivery is still ongoing (see among others Francis & James, 2003; Andersson & Van Laerhoven, 2007; Mitullah, 2010; Spina, 2014).

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[5]   The degree of decentralization was measured by calculating the average of the raw number of elected sub-national tiers, the score for direct elections of Local government, the score for local government elections turnout and fairness, the score for the role clarity and subsidiarity, the score for responsibility for service delivery, the score for the responsibility for civil servants, of the score for the center to local fiscal transfers, and the score for local government share of overall expenditures (Ndegwa, 2002: 20).

The second reason to select Uganda, is the relatively high citizen participation – as shown by some of the round 4 Afrobarometer indicators (Gyimah-Boad & Armah Attoh, 2009). Citizens in Uganda are slightly more active in terms of civic awareness and participation compared to citizens in other African countries. High participation and civic awareness strengthens citizen's positions to demand accountability from their (local) leaders. An Afrobarometer indicator shows that 69 % of Ugandan citizens indicated having attended community meeting at least once, while the continent's average[6] sits at 65 %. Moreover, 63 % of Ugandans claimed to be somewhat or very interested in public affairs and even 83 % testified having voted in the last national elections. With regard to these figures, Ugandans slightly surpass the African mean of 59 % and 73 % respectively. Finally, Ugandan citizens tend to contact elected (MPs and local councilors) and appointed officials (within government agencies) more often, especially at local governance level. For instance, while on average only 27 % of Africans state to have contacted a local councilor at least once, 36 % of Ugandan nationals claims to have done so (Gyimah-Boad & Armah Attoh, 2009: 11).

Thirdly, a World Bank study revealed that Uganda performs well in "downward accountability", which refers to the ability of citizens to hold local authority to account. An indicator[7], used in a World Bank study, takes into account the presence of institutions necessary to enforce accountability such as elections and forums for citizen participation. Along with South Africa, Kenya, and Namibia, Uganda scored 4 on a scale of 0 to 4, leaving the other 26 African countries in the sample behind (Ndegwa, 2002: 7).

These three elements make Uganda an interesting case to study accountability relationships between citizens and duty bearers. Moreover, recently accountability has been at the center of attention in Uganda due to widespread and enduring corruption across various sectors and government institutions (Martini, 2013: 1). The government has taken a number of initiatives in order to reduce corruption and to improve public service delivery. As mentioned earlier (see first part of this paper), these initiatives include among others an Expenditure Tracking Survey (Sundet, 2008: 9; Winkler & Sondergaard, 2008), the 2012 Auditor General report, and the implementation of the Baraza program (Office of the Prime Minister, s.d.). Apart from government-led initiatives, many social accountability projects have been initiated by CSOs in order to encourage and assist citizens in demanding good governance from their government (see Reinnika & Svensson, 2005; Renzio et al., 2006; Björkman & Svensson, 2009; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2012; Gaventa & McGee, 2013). Moreover, Uganda serves as an incubator for all kinds of more experimental initiatives as a lot of innovative M&E approaches (e.g. SMS-based information systems, citizen-report cards) are currently being implemented (M4W, 2012; Tumushabe et al., 2012; Cilliers et al., 2014).

Within Uganda, we selected three cases that are situated in different but adjacent sub-counties in the district of Bushenyi in Western Uganda. The first village is characterized by the presence of a strategic social accountability initiative (the so-called "Community-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System", implemented by Uganda Debt Network, a local NGO), in the second village a tactical social accountability initiative is active (an SMS-based complaint reporting system, also implemented by Uganda Debt Network). A third village serves as a control case. In these three villages we interviewed all local stakeholders involved in the public

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[6]   The Afrobarometer sample consists of 19 African countries. The fourth round of data collection dates from 2008 (Gyimah-Boad & Armah Attoh, 2009: 1).

[7]   The degree of downward accountability was measured by calculating the average of the score for direct elections of local government, the score for local turn out and fairness, and the score for the type of local participation (Ndegwa, 2002: 20).

provision of water in the three focal villages: community members, political leaders, and civil servants. Using social network analysis, we carefully mapped all accountability relationships that are present among the stakeholders in these communities, in order to shed light on the complex network of accountability mechanisms.

In the first part of our study we test whether Fox's assumptions about tactical and strategic social accountability initiatives hold on the ground. Fox (2015) states that tactical social accountability approaches are mainly focused on the demand-side, while strategic social accountability approaches are involving both demand as well as supply side. Therefore we expect to see more network ties between citizens on the one hand and officials on the other hand within the village with a strategic accountability approach, which means that demand and supply side are exchanging more often. Additionally, Fox (2015) situates tactical social accountability approaches more on the local level while strategic social accountability approaches are active on multiple levels. Therefore we expect to see more direct and indirect ties between citizens and higher ranked officials in the village with a strategic accountability approach. Lastly, Fox (2015) states that strategic social accountability approaches exist out of multiple coordinated tactics while tactical social accountability approaches tend to exist out of a single bounded intervention. Strategic social accountability initiatives involve and 'reach' more people compared to tactical social accountability initiatives. Therefore we expect to see more active citizen and state actor involvement within the village with a strategic social accountability approach, resulting in a larger and more vibrant social network. In the second part of our study we examine whether the social accountability initiatives – and the emphasis on citizen involvement – has had an effect on the ones in charge of supplying water services to the communities in our research and if so, whether we can observe a difference in behavior, responsiveness and attitude of state actors in the three villages.

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