

Session Keynote  
Stream Inclusive Governance for Sustainable Landscapes

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# Accountability Keywords

From participation to accountable governance

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# What are keywords?

- Keywords capture big ideas, phenomena or explanations
- Not “merely academic” – because...
- Shared vocabulary enables collaboration across sectors, cultures & disciplines
- The term “keywords” was in widespread use before it became a digital search term (Williams 1976)
- The meanings of “keywords” are constructed & contested
- The “keywords” approach has now been applied widely across disciplines & sectors

# “Participation” and “accountability share conceptual challenges...

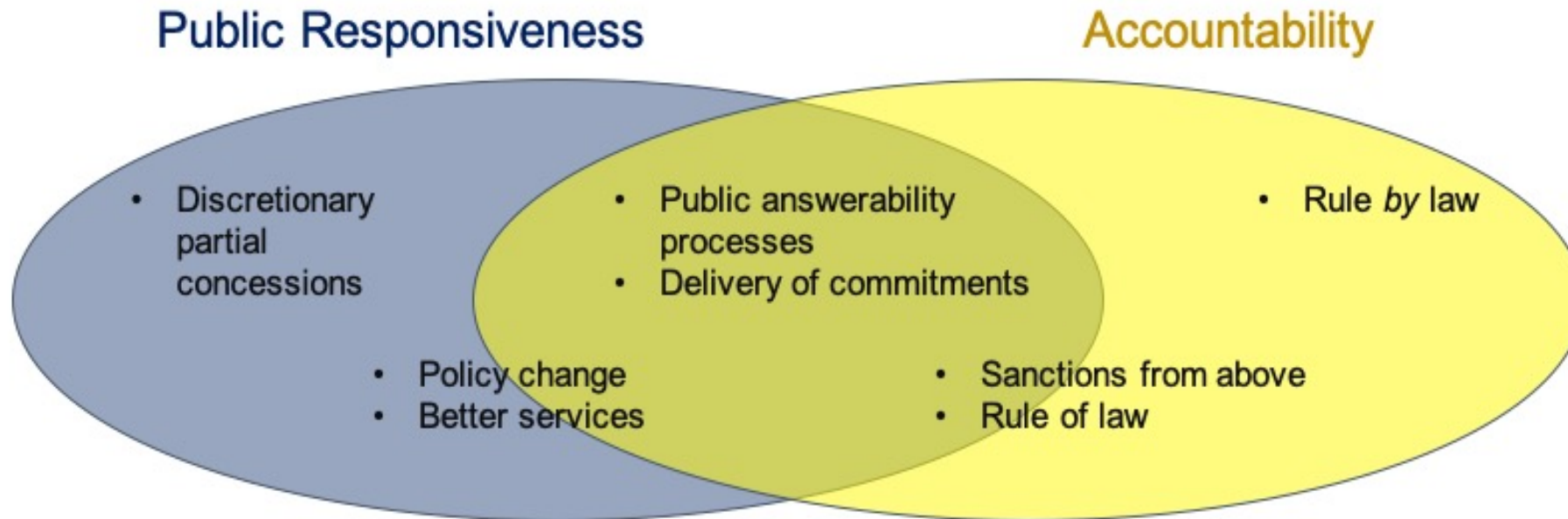
<b><i>Widespread assumptions</i></b>	<b><i>Problematic implications</i></b>
“You know it when you see it”	No need to define it with precision
“It means all things to all people”	Interpreted differently by different actors, in diff contexts
“Conceptual stretching”	Concept applied broadly to include apples, oranges & pears
“Magic bullet”	High expectations as solution to many governance challenges
“What counts?”	Low bar enables watering down & simulation
“Fuzzy proxies”	Measured very indirectly, without degrees of scope or intensity

# Related concepts *overlap* with accountability - but are not *synonyms*:

- **Good governance** — Technocratic authoritarianism can produce versions of “good governance” without accountability - while checks and balances can lead to gridlock
- **Democracy** — Theorists assume democracy *necessarily* involves accountability, but effective answerability + checks and balances may be lacking in practice
- **Responsive governance** — Authorities can *respond* to voice or pressure — but at their discretion, without having to answer for their actions
- **Responsibility** — Accountability requires clear identification of who is responsible for decisions, yet they may deny that responsibility (“passing the buck”)
- **Transparency** — Necessary but not sufficient for (public) accountability
- **Justice** — The punishment may not fit the crime

# Visualizing overlapping concepts

The key overlap between responsive & accountable governance involves public answerability



# “What counts” as accountability?

- *Accountability involves two key processes:*
- “**Answerability**” – Process or forum in which duty-bearers (decision-makers) must explain & justify their actions. This requires relevant info & involves taking responsibility.
- **Consequences** – Involves tangible responses, either sanctions or rewards (enforcement of standards)
- *Note:* The dominant approach to accountability is *retrospective*. In contrast, preventative approaches involve measures to reduce the likelihood of accountability failures.

# Accountability with adjectives

Governance analysts use spatial metaphors:

- > **Vertical** (*upwards* - as w/ principal-agent – to donors & governments - or from authorities *downwards* to citizens)
- > **Horizontal** (mutual/checks & balances – as with CPR institutions)
- > **Diagonal** (state-society power-sharing – as with multi-stakeholder forums that exercise authority)

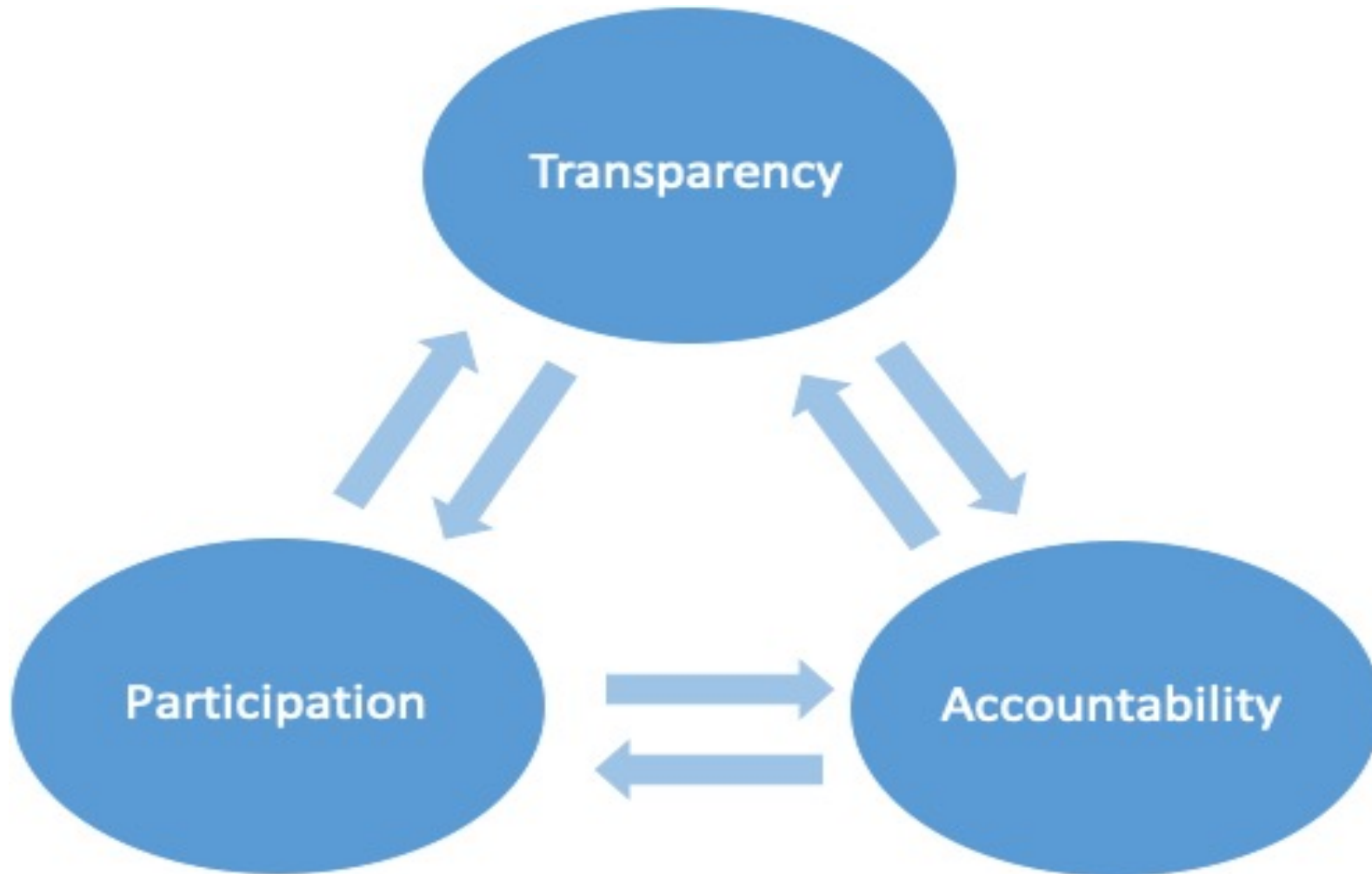
# Researchers' favorite theory of change

Models of causal chains driving accountability  
follow linear sequences





# What if the drivers of accountable governance is iterative/reciprocal rather than linear?



# What concepts can help to identify the *missing links* between participation & accountable governance?

Work in progress unpacks concepts relevant to connecting the dots - such as:

- Social accountability
- Strategy & tactics
- Transparency & right to know
- Checks & balances
- Countervailing power
- Advocacy
- Whistleblower

# What *is* social accountability (SAcc)?

- SAcc initiatives encourage stakeholder voice & action to promote responsive governance.
- This evolving umbrella category includes:
  - Citizen monitoring & oversight of public and/or private sector performance (e.g., scorecards)
  - User-centered public information access/dissemination
  - Complaint & grievance redress mechanisms
  - Participation in resource allocation decision-making (e.g., social funds)
  - Deliberative multi-stakeholder forums

# Research on SAcc shows its limits

- Transparency may not lead to accountability (info is often *not* power)
- Focus on organizing autonomous constituencies often missing
- Induced participation, limited to ‘invited spaces,’ is often captured or ignored
- Bottom-up monitoring of governance – by itself - often lacks bite
- Yet sometimes SAcc initiatives *do* matter
- What makes the difference?

# Unpack SAcc initiatives for accountable governance

- **Tactics vs. strategies** - What's the difference?
- In the social accountability field, these terms are often confused
- **Strategies** define goals and the pathway to reach them
- **Tactics** are the specific actions for carrying out such plans (tools)
- Therefore: *Strategies should drive tactics* (not so obvious...)

# *Tactical* approaches to SAcc:

- Tool-led interventions (often external)
- Main driver is information provision (assumed to inspire collective action that can influence public sector performance)
- Limited to citizen voice efforts (within existing institutions)
- Scale is limited to “local” arenas, voice does not reach upstream
- No investment in countervailing power for under-represented

# Strategic approaches to SAcc:

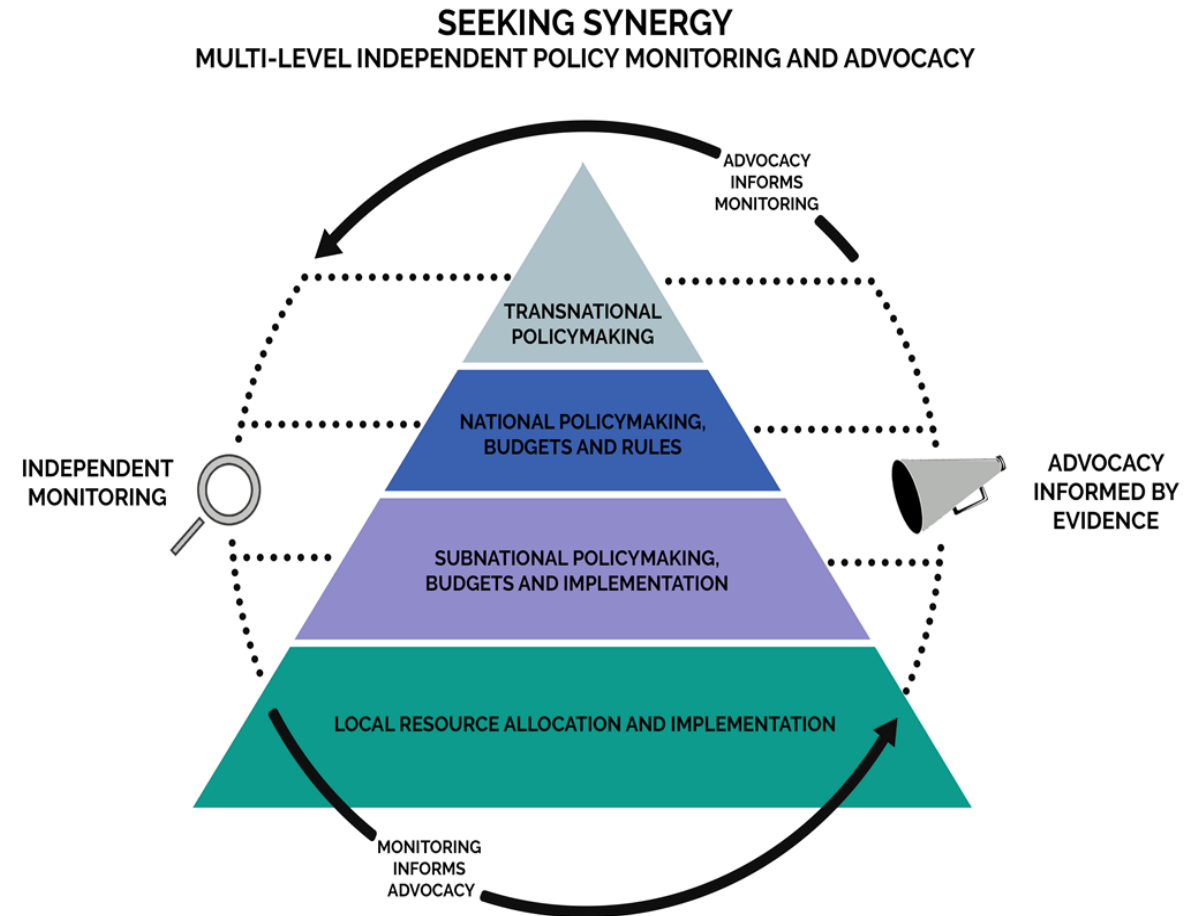
- Multiple, coordinated tactics
  - Can the whole be > sum of parts?
- Tangible actions to enable collective action
- Reforms that tangibly bolster institutional capacity to *respond* to voice
  - Voice plus “teeth” (defined as institutional capacity to *respond*)
- Multi-level approach (take scale into account)
- More campaign than intervention
- Build countervailing power for under-represented

# Example of a SAcc strategy:

## Vertical integration...

- Monitoring of authorities informs stakeholder advocacy
- Advocacy informs monitoring
- Multi-level approach – action at each level informs action at other levels
- Key to address the “squeezing the balloon” problem

## ....combines multiple tactics

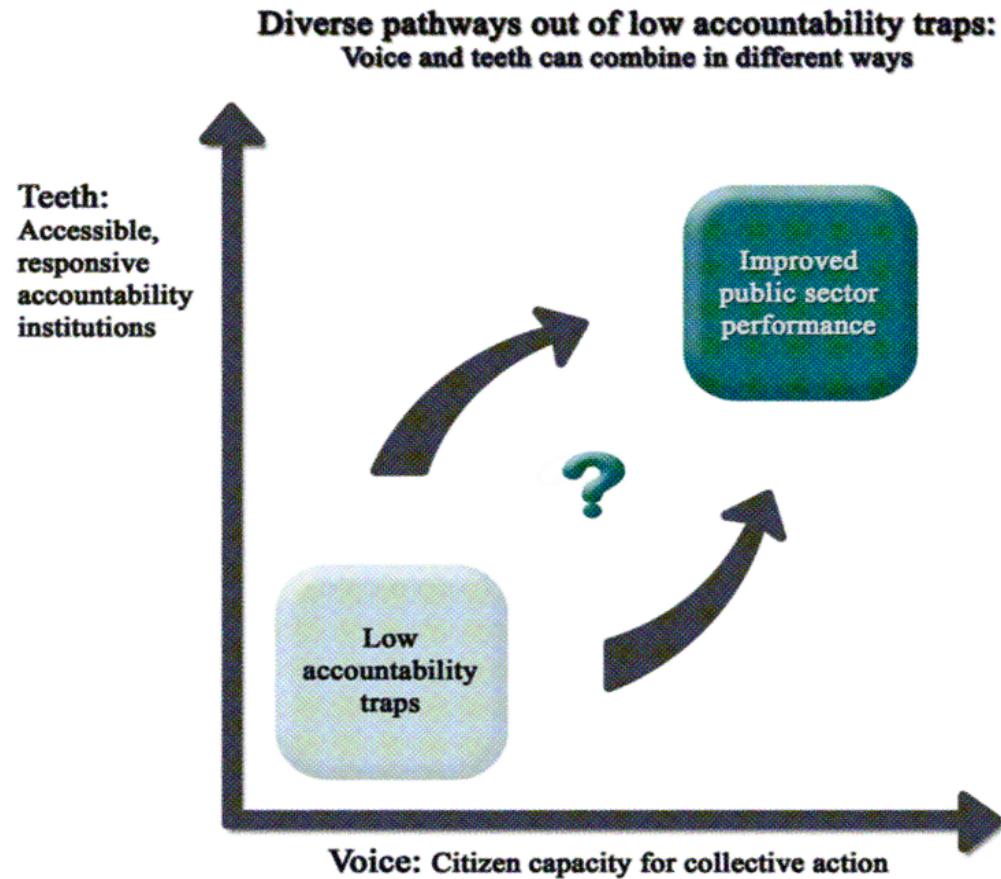




# ‘Voice’ and ‘teeth’ are shorthand...

- ‘Voice’ refers here to both the *aggregation* and *representation* of underrepresented stakeholders – including capacity for collective action
- ‘Teeth’ refers here to authorities’ capacity to *respond* to voice
- In other words: What can authorities (or allies) *deliver*?
- Challenge: How to trigger ***virtuous circles***, in which tangible actions enable informed voice & action, which in turn trigger and empower reforms, which can then encourage more voice?

# Connecting the dots between participation and accountability: voice *plus* teeth



**Sum up:**  
***What works in the SAcc field?***

**Voice needs teeth to have bite...**  
**.... but teeth may not bite without voice**