

# What is the evidence that efforts to promote international norms and standards for transparency and accountability have an impact on behaviors of accountability actors?

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## I. INTRODUCTION

We conducted a systematic literature review of the research assessing the impact of international norms for transparency and accountability on actions taken by citizens and “accountability actors” to hold government accountable. For the purpose of this review, “accountability actors” are individuals or groups within government or in society, such as media or civil society organizations (CSOs), who take action to hold government accountable by establishing shared expectations for accountable performance, monitoring, and sanctioning government behavior. We focused on the norm-setting efforts of seven public sector multi-stakeholder initiatives: the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), the Open Government Partnership (OGP), the Open Budget Survey (OBS), the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT), the Construction Sector Transparency Initiative (CoST), the Medicines Transparency Alliance (MTA) and the Open Contracting Partnership (OCP).

Efforts to promote international norms and standards by nature often start at the national level with the aim of integrating standards into national laws and policies; however, many initiatives also aim to reach civil society and media, and enable or support these accountability actors to use the information and data related to norms and standards to hold their governments accountable.

The focus of this review is on evidence that these initiatives had an impact on the behaviors of these accountability actors, and we limit our review to published academic papers or academic working papers. Our review thus complements the 2015 report previously commissioned by TAI on the effectiveness of governance-oriented multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs), which focused primarily on “grey literature” and highlighted the gap in this literature on the impact of MSIs on the actions of accountability actors.<sup>1</sup>

This memo is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the methodology used for the literature review. Section 3 summarizes the evidence. Finally, Section 4 concludes by presenting some suggestions for future research. The list of articles reviewed is included in Appendix A.

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<sup>1</sup> Brockmyer, Brandon, and Jonathan A. Fox. “Assessing the Evidence: The Effectiveness and Impact of Governance-Oriented Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives.” *Transparency & Accountability Initiative, September* (2015). This report discusses only three documents that address the question of MSI impact on accountability actions -- Harrison & Sagoyo (2014), Petrie (2014), and World Justice Project (2015). Only one of these (Harrison and Sagoyo 2014) is an academic paper; it is also included in our review.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Our goal was to review the evidence on the impact of international standards and norms on actions taken by citizens, civil society, and government actors to hold the government accountable. Given the focus of the 2015 MSI report on stakeholder interviews and “grey literature” such as non-academic papers, civil society organization reports, and blog posts,<sup>2</sup> we undertook a systematic review of the academic research because it often focuses more on behavioral outcomes like accountability actions and assesses causal impact more explicitly.

We started with Web of Science, a large aggregator of articles published in academic journals, with inclusion being based on citation analyses and impact factors. Looking at papers in Web of Science ensures a minimum level of academic quality, but since there is sometimes a lag between the production of research papers and their publication in academic journals, Web of Science may not cover the most recent evidence. To incorporate more recent papers, we searched for papers in the Social Science Research Network (SSRN), a major online repository of academic working papers. In both cases, we searched for all papers that mentioned the name of each initiative, and then filtered out those that had no content relevant to our question. Table 1 below presents the number of papers found, and the number among those that were relevant, for each of the initiatives considered.

*Table 1. Number of papers found and included in the review, by initiative*

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Number of papers found</b>	<b>Papers discussing accountability actors</b>
EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative)	76	10
OGP (Open Government Partnership)	9	7
CoST (Construction Sector Transparency Initiative)	4	1
OBS (Open Budget Survey)	3	1
GIFT (Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency)	1	1
MTA (Medicines Transparency Alliance)	2	0
OCP (Open Contracting Partnership)	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>20</b>

Our experience with the taxation and accountability literature review indicates that although other available search engines (like Google Scholar or the repositories of international organizations) tend to identify a broader number of papers, these papers are either already covered by the Web of Science or SSRN or of significantly lower academic standards. Unfortunately, the quality of the papers in terms of believability (internal validity) and generalizability (external validity) found in Web of Science and SSRN on our seven initiatives of interest was already quite low, as discussed below. Therefore, we chose to focus our review only on the results stemming from Web of Science and SSRN.

## III. SYNTHESIS OF THE EVIDENCE

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<sup>2</sup> Ten percent of the documents (8 out of 79) reviewed in the 2015 Brockmyer and Fox report were academic papers published in peer-reviewed journals. See Appendix A.

The 20 papers reviewed vary with respect to the initiative they cover, the country or countries they study, the substantive question they focus on, and the methodology they use. In terms of the initiative, most papers focus on either EITI or OGP. Substantively, none of them focus specifically on our main question, how norm-setting efforts have affected the behavior of citizens and accountability actors, either within government or in society. Rather, the papers tend to focus on the effect of the initiative on governance outcomes generally (e.g. compliance with the initiatives protocols or measures of corruption), addressing the link between these initiatives and the behavior of accountability actors only insofar as it is seen as contributing to the broader success or failure of the initiative.

Methodologically, we found no studies that aim to provide evidence of causal impact. Three of them present quantitative analyses of cross-country data, but these studies are largely descriptive and do not employ strategies for identifying causal effects. Eight papers present qualitative case studies, mostly using secondary sources and, in three cases, using stakeholder interviews. The remaining nine papers are descriptive accounts of the evolution and/or impact of one of the initiatives in one or several countries, presenting no empirical work.

We could not find studies with methodological rigor addressing the question of this review, which is: what is the evidence that efforts to promote international norms and standards have an effect on accountability actors? The fact that, even when looking at databases of relatively high-quality papers, one cannot find studies addressing our question directly and with some methodological rigor makes it impossible to conduct a standard literature review discussing effects and mechanisms. Instead, here we synthesize the papers' views on how these international norm-setting efforts may affect the behavior of accountability actors (mostly civil society organizations).

In general, the reviewed papers are skeptical about the impact of the initiatives on the behavior of accountability actors, with many studies questioning the assumptions that underlie the argument that more transparency will lead to more active citizens and accountability actors. In the words of Harrison and Sayogo (2014), "it is not the case that participation and accountability inevitably follow the achievement of transparency reforms."

The papers reviewed suggest several obstacles for the impact of initiatives on accountability behaviors, including the absence of a strong civil society (Alstine 2014; Roberts 2015; Sovacool et al 2016; Sequeira et al 2016); a broad context of limited political accountability (Öge 2014; Troex and Soreide 2016; Yanguas and Bukenya 2016); the fact that these initiatives are voluntary and lack enforcement mechanisms (Sovacool et al 2016; Sequeira et al 2016; Yanguas and Bukenya 2016); the difficulties accountability actors face in processing the information released (Harrison and Sayogo 2014; Pino 2012; Yanguas and Bukenya 2016); the exclusion of civil society actors by governments (Aaronson 2011); and the fact that these initiatives are sometimes exogenously imposed rather than grown domestically (Roberts 2015).

To sum up, most studies seem to agree that because of internal and external constraints, "civil society often does not have the capacity to live up to the high expectations placed on it by these initiatives" (Carbonnier et al 2011).

The methodological limitations discussed above do not allow us to conclude much about the effect of these initiatives on the behavior of accountability actors. It remains possible that these initiatives are having modest yet important impacts that are not documented in the literature reviewed here.

A more comprehensive assessment of the impact of these initiatives will require that researchers (i) unpack theoretically the channels through which initiatives and the norms they establish may affect accountability behaviors; and (ii) test rigorously the key parts of the theorized causal chains. The section below presents some ideas about what such a research agenda might look like.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

First, researchers and practitioners working together can specify more clearly the hypothesized causal pathways through which international norms and standards could promote accountability behaviors, being specific about which actors, the determinants of their behaviors (motivation, ability, etc.) and the types of context in which they are acting.

We suggest three broad channels through which international standards of accountability and transparency may influence the behavior of accountability actors. First, they may *change accountability actors' beliefs (i.e. norms)* about what constitutes acceptable behavior *by* government, leading to greater dissatisfaction with the status quo and therefore greater action.<sup>3</sup> Second, transparency initiatives may empower accountability actors' with *greater access to information* about government performance that can be used as a political resource to hold it to account. Within the framework of the EITI, for example, civil society actors can access information about revenue in the extractive sector that can be shared with media and the public, allowing accountability actors to exert pressure on government when necessary. Lastly, by committing governments to adhere to international norms and standards, these initiatives may provide *new institutional avenues to hold government to account*.

While well-grounded in theories of accountability, more work is needed to assess whether these channels actually function as intended on the ground. The first step, in our view, is to collect better data on baseline levels of awareness and accountability behavior in countries of interest.<sup>4</sup> To this end, researchers could conduct surveys or semi-structured interviews with a broad sample of CSOs, media organizations, and other key stakeholders in a given country to assess the extent to which these actors are indeed i) aware of international standards initiatives; ii) able to access information ostensibly made available by these initiatives; iii) have channels through which they can exert pressure on government when necessary. This enterprise can serve as an initial step toward identifying barriers to greater action by accountability actors. The results of this preliminary, diagnostic research could then be used to identify interventions to increase accountability behavior and design research projects to test them.

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<sup>3</sup> Similarly, transparency initiatives may alter norms about what *accountability actors should do*. For instance, these initiatives may instill an expectation that civil society play a greater role in scrutinizing government, thereby leading to greater action.

<sup>4</sup> While many of the studies covered in this review *did* collect data from CSOs, stakeholders, and other accountability actors, most studies relied on convenience samples and/or collected qualitative rather than quantitative data. Moreover, they tended to focus on accountability actors' perceptions of government, rather than their efforts to hold government to account.

Another option – one that does not involve fieldwork or survey data collection – would be to conduct a content analysis of local newspapers to assess whether the adoption of international standards in a given country corresponds to greater discussion of the relevant issue area, as measured by topic counts. For example, after Ghana became compliant with the EITI in 2010, do we see an increase in the number of articles mentioning extractive industries? Do we see an increase in the number of articles mentioning extractive industries *and* referencing efforts by civil society to hold government to account? (Online databases such as AllAfrica.com or LexisNexis now include news sources from a broad range of countries going back several years, making these kinds of analyses feasible).

These are just a few preliminary ideas for research that could offer insight into how international standards for transparency and accountability influence accountability actors. Moving forward, researchers interested in gaining leverage on this question would do well to focus on particular initiatives in specific countries, and to combine local knowledge with more in-depth theorizing about the linkages between international standards and accountability actors.

## Appendix A. Papers Reviewed

Aaronson, Susan Ariel. "Limited partnership: Business, government, civil society, and the public in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)." *Public Administration and Development* 31, no. 1 (2011): 50-63.

Andrews, Nathan. "A Swiss-Army Knife? A Critical Assessment of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in Ghana." *Business and Society Review* 121, no. 1 (2016): 59-83.

Baltador, Lia Alexandra, and Camelia Budac. "Open Government—A Long Way Ahead for Romania." *Procedia Economics and Finance* 16 (2014): 557-562.

Bukenya, Badru, and Pablo Yanguas. *Building State Capacity for Inclusive Development: The Politics of Public Sector Reform*. No. esid-025-13. BWPI, The University of Manchester, 2013.

Carbonnier, Gilles, Fritz Brugger, and Jana Krause. "Global and local policy responses to the resource trap." *Global Governance* 17, no. 2 (2011): 247-264.

Corrigan, Caitlin C. "Breaking the resource curse: Transparency in the natural resource sector and the extractive industries transparency initiative." *Resources Policy* 40 (2014): 17-30.

Gondol, Jan, and Nicole Allen. "Open government partnership as a platform for advancing open education policy." *Open Praxis* 7, no. 3 (2015): 273-280.

Harrison, Teresa M., and Djoko Sigit Sayogo. "Transparency, participation, and accountability practices in open government: A comparative study." *Government Information Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (2014): 513-525.

Hilson, Gavin, and Roy Maconachie. "The extractive industries transparency initiative: panacea or white elephant for sub-Saharan Africa?" In *Mining, society, and a sustainable world*, pp. 469-491. Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2009.

Jiménez, Carlos E., and M. Gascó. "Y ahora... Gobierno Abierto. Nuevos términos en la constante búsqueda por la transparencia y la rendición de cuentas." In *Ponencia presentada en el XVII Congreso Internacional del CLAD sobre la Reforma del Estado y de la Administración Pública. Cartagena de Indias (Colombia)*, vol. 30. 2012.

Öge, Kerem. "The Limits of Transparency Promotion in Azerbaijan: External Remedies to 'Reverse the Curse'." *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 9 (2014): 1482-1500.

Pino, Hugo Noe. "The Impact of the International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Survey and Its Partner Institutions' Advocacy on Budget Transparency in Honduras." *International Budget Partnership Impact Case Study* (2013).

Roberts, Alasdair S. "Promoting Fiscal Openness." *Available at SSRN 2608967* (2015).

Sequeira, Ana Rita, Mark P. McHenry, Angus Morrison-Saunders, Hudson Mtegha, and David Doepel. "Is the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) sufficient to generate transparency in environmental impact and legacy risks? The Zambian minerals sector." *Journal of Cleaner Production* 129 (2016): 427-436.

Sovacool, Benjamin K., and Nathan Andrews. "Does transparency matter? Evaluating the governance impacts of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in Azerbaijan and Liberia." *Resources Policy* 45 (2015): 183-192.

Sovacool, Benjamin K., Götz Walter, Thijs Van de Graaf, and Nathan Andrews. "Energy Governance, Transnational Rules, and the Resource Curse: Exploring the Effectiveness of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)." *World Development* 83 (2016): 179-192.

Truex, Rory, and Tina Søreide. "Why multi-stakeholder groups succeed and fail." *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper Series, Vol* (2010).

Van Alstine, James, Jacob Manyindo, Laura Smith, Jami Dixon, and Ivan AmanigaRuhanga. "Resource governance dynamics: The challenge of 'new oil' in Uganda." *Resources Policy* 40 (2014): 48-58.

van Eechoud, Mireille. "Open Data Values: Calculating and Monitoring the Benefits of Public Sector Information Re-Use." *Published in T. Dreier et al.(eds.), Informationen der öffentlichen Hand-Zugang und Nutzung, Nomos: Baden* 2016 (2016): 107-144.

Yanguas, Pablo, and Badru Bukenya. "New approaches confront 'old' challenges in African public sector reform." *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2016): 136-152.