Citizens across the world are calling for greater citizen-state engagement. Social accountability (SA) has steadily gained prominence for its intrinsic value as well as for its potential to bring about a range of development outcomes. But how and when does social accountability support service delivery as well as institutional outcomes such as state legitimacy and citizen trust? This book provides a framework to assess the contextual drivers of social accountability effectiveness based on a definition of SA as the interplay of citizen action and state action, supported by civic mobilization, interface, and information. The proposed framework provides practitioners with a systematic way to assess context for SA in order to design, implement, and monitor SA approaches tailored to a specific context and issue. The book also applies the framework to challenging country contexts. In doing so, it addresses key knowledge gaps on how policy makers, practitioners, and development institutions can best support development outcomes through social accountability and citizen engagement.

"At last, we have in one place, a comprehensive picture of our current knowledge about social accountability! This book presents cutting-edge analysis, provides a synthesis of the evidence, and advances our thinking on three key fronts. Foremost, the authors take the whole issue of context seriously, examine in micro detail the various contextual factors that matter for social accountability work, what we know about them, and how they unfold in a variety of empirical cases. Further, they amplify the range of potential impacts of social accountability work and show how tracing each impact, however small, is important, as a small impact today provides the starting point for a greater impact in the future. Finally, no blueprints are offered for how to do accountability—rather this is a rich set of key operational questions and signposts that will guide practitioners, researchers, and policy makers alike. This book is bound to shape accountability work for years to come."

— Anuradha Joshi
Fellow and Cluster Leader, Governance Team, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, U.K.

"The social accountability book builds on the latest research to develop a comprehensive new conceptual framework, including original case studies of remarkable new citizen engagement initiatives in places where one might least expect to find them. Opening the Black Box will help both analysts and practitioners to identify and understand the moving parts involved in strategies to build pro-accountability state-society partnerships."

— Jonathan Fox
Professor, School of International Service, American University, Washington DC
Social Accountability and a Country’s Social and Political Characteristics

This chapter reviews the evidence pertaining to the broad contextual elements that bear on the form and effectiveness of social accountability (SA). The evidence is structured along the two institutional spheres of political and civil society and their interactions (state-society and intra-society). These spheres are distinguished for clarity of analysis, but they are not exclusive of each other (chapters 5 and 6 delve more deeply into the interactions between these spheres). Three additional factors cut across these spheres and need special attention: cultural norms, global factors, and the political settlement that, in any state context, can determine key characteristics of political society as well as the nature of state-society relations. These relationships are presented in figure 3.1.

Three major findings emerge from reviewing the broad contextual determinants of SA effectiveness.

First, political and power relations are at the forefront of understanding and operationalizing SA. The findings point to the critical importance of power and political relationships in shaping SA processes and outcomes, challenging the tendency to promote SA as a “technical” process that operates in and through formal institutional frameworks. The evidence suggests that civil society (CS) is not immune to power relations: CS actors may have incentives to maintain, as well as challenge, accountability failures; and civil society organizations (CSOs) may find very little room to maneuver given the broader politics of patronage and exclusion (Citizenship DRC 2011; Evans 2010; Gurza Lavalle, Houtzager, and Acharya 2005).

Second, links and networks have to be built between pro-accountability state and society actors. Much attention has been focused on
individual actors from the “state” or “citizenry,” such as CS strengthening. However, what seem to be particularly important are the relations and interactions between the different actors and the incentives that flow from these relations. The findings urge us to go beyond the supply-demand, principal-agent, and state-citizen dichotomies and instead to understand the more progressive and regressive coalitions that cut across state and citizenry, which are rarely homogeneous entities. In Booth’s view, “Governance challenges are not fundamentally about one set of people getting another set of people to behave better. They are about both sets of people finding ways of being able to act collectively in their own best interests” (Booth 2012a). On the one hand, he cautions against supply-side, principal-agent approaches that tend to assume that there is political commitment to reform and that the problem is mainly about compliance and information asymmetry down the chain of command and, on the other, against the demand-side, principal-agent logic, which treats citizens, voters, or service users as (homogeneous) “principals,” seeking to get compliance from politicians and civil servants (Booth 2012b).

Third, a sharper focus is needed on the dynamics of inequality and exclusion. Poverty, inequality, and exclusionary dynamics shape the extent

Figure 3.1 Main “Macro” Contextual Factors for Social Accountability Effectiveness

-Political society
  - Commitment and capacity of bureaucrats, elected officials, and political parties to promote and respond to social accountability
  - Nature of rule of law

-State-society relations
  - Social contract
  - Path dependency of existing structure and state-society relations
  - Character of formal and informal state-society accountability and bridging mechanisms

-Civil society
  - Nature of socioeconomic inequality and exclusion
  - Capacity and commitment of citizens and civil society organizations to demand accountability
  - Authority, credibility, legitimacy of civil society organizations
  - Capacity to network within and across state-society

-Political settlement

Global factors and cultural norms
to which many citizens can engage effectively in or benefit from SA claims. This implies the need to put inequality-mitigating measures at the center of all SA thinking and implementation, rather than addressing these issues in a piecemeal or ad hoc manner or assuming that by doing an SA intervention these needs are automatically addressed. Furthermore, it may also be useful to focus not only on inclusion in processes, but also on outcomes, which would entail giving more attention to services that are naturally nonrivals.³

**Actors and Dynamics in Political Society: Important Factors in Explaining the Form and Effectiveness of SA**

*Political society is broadly understood as the arena within which people perceive and encounter the state on an everyday basis and that creates and maintains different patterns of political rule. It is the “place where public demands get tackled by specific political institutions” (Hyden and Court 2003, 18).*

*It is constituted by a loose community of recognized elected politicians, political parties, local political brokers, councilors, and public servants, and it forms a set of institutions, actors, and cultural norms that provide the links between the government and the public.*

What we currently know suggests that the nature of the state—the actors and dynamics of the political society that govern and interact with state institutions—are as important as, if not more important than, civil society in explaining the form and effectiveness of SA. Some key issues are evident.

First, the commitment of key actors, both bureaucrats and elected officials, is critical not only to promote SA, but also to respond to SA demands. This commitment includes the commitment to “answer” accountability demands as well as the commitment and willingness to stimulate such demand by pushing for accountability reforms and even stimulating social actors to mobilize to make demands on government (Houtzager and Joshi 2008). In this regard, influential elected officials play a critical role, because they are more susceptible to popular pressure and in a position to shape the behavior of public officials and service providers through sanctions and other forms of supply-led accountability (Bukenya, Hickey, and King 2012). This is significant and points to the need to think about ways of linking social accountability interventions with forms of political
accountability, particularly through making links to supply-led enforcement mechanisms and involving elected officials in the design of demand-led initiatives. Conversely, some circumstances might lower the need to engage on accountability, among them the importance of “unearned revenues” (for example, natural resources or international aid; see the section on global factors).

It is therefore important for SA practitioners to understand the level and drivers of political will within a given context and to act accordingly. This also entails understanding the terms of the existing political settlement (see box 3.1) and the incentives that this places before the elites to act in favor of certain interests over others—that is, the interests of those groups that

### BOX 3.1

**Political Settlement and Social Accountability**

> Political settlement can be defined as a combination of institutions and a distribution of power between organizations (for example, political parties, military, and bureaucracy) that is reproducible over time. Once a particular political settlement emerges, the relative power of different organizations is relatively stable and evolves along predictable paths (Khan 2010).

Social accountability approaches operate within a specific political settlement. The developmental character of the settlement is important—that is, the extent to which its legitimacy and stability are based on furthering broad-based development, along with some degree of redistribution and social development. It is closely related to the level of elite predation. As Devarajan, Khemani, and Walton (2011) note,

> If politicians, and especially leaders, do not have the incentives to deliver on development, putting extra pressure on bureaucratic state agencies is likely to have limited, or local, effects. When the political leadership has some commitment to development, civil society may have a role to play in how internal state mechanisms work.

Relatedly, the extent to which the settlement is “inclusive” may shape the constraints and opportunities for SA. Settlements manifest themselves in “the structure of property rights and entitlements, which gives some social actors more distributional advantages than others, and in the regulatory structure of the state” (Di John and Putzel 2009). As such, the way in which entitlements are distributed and certain groups are included or excluded in a given context will shape SA dynamics.

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are required to sustain a particular political settlement. The need within ruling coalitions to maintain certain types of relationships both horizontally (with other elite factions) and vertically (with organized social groupings) in order to preserve stability and survival can create strong incentives and room for maneuver to respond or not to given demands, and these may vary by sectors or over time (Bukenya, Hickey, and King 2012).

Second, capacity is seen as important for SA outcomes in a variety of ways, with the capacity to forge and maintain relations with different social actors emerging as key. The effectiveness of SA partially depends on the organizational, technical, and political capacity of the state to respond to demands. The presence of functioning state institutions is often, but not always, a key condition for accountability reforms (Mansuri and Rao 2013). But the developmental capacity of the state needs to be defined not only in terms of its organizational competence (for example, the levels of human, financial, and technical resources) but also, and perhaps more important, in terms of its capacity to forge and maintain synergistic relations with different social actors (vom Hau 2012).
Evidence does not suggest, however, that there is no role whatsoever for SA in low-capacity environments. SA might just take on a more modest form of citizenship formation, trust building, state formation, or local associational development (Gaventa and Barrett 2010). State capacity can be a valuable outcome of SA processes: capacity, especially relational capacity, is built through practice.

Third, the categorization of countries as more or less democratic, with the assumption that SA will be more effective in more democratic settings, is challenged by the evidence. This finding is also linked to the definition used to label countries as “democratic” (see Fox 2007), and transitions to accountability are distinct from transitions to democracy. Moving away from superficial criteria to focus on broader forms of state-society relations within which accountability resides (that is, the citizen-state interface in our analytical framework) and the types of political institutions that mediate the relationship between broad democratic procedures, such as elections and public policy processes, is more helpful in this case (Bukenya, Hickey, and King 2012).

Nevertheless, more democratic systems tend to have a wider range of accountability mechanisms and intra-state checks and balances that may be triggered by SA (box 3.2). They also offer the opportunity to gain more traction around accountability issues through elections (McGee and Gaventa 2011). The presence of certain legal accountability mechanisms and the extent to which they are legitimate and enforceable in a given context will shape the form and prospects of different types of SA. For example, legitimate constitutional provisions can provide a basis for making and justifying SA claims or SA can play a key role in triggering existing accountability mechanisms within the state. As McGee and Gaventa (2011) note, “In a regime lacking the essential freedoms of association, voice, or media, citizen-led TAI[s] [transparency and accountability initiatives] do not have the same prospects for success as in societies where these conditions exist.” Highly democratic contexts tend to permit the widest range of SA approaches to emerge.

The literature suggests that the broad level of democratization only tells part of the story and that positive outcomes of civic engagement are not necessarily linked linearly to the level of democratization in a given setting (Gaventa and Barrett 2010). While the presence of formal democratic institutions and frameworks is important in many contexts, in others it is the informal institutions and the underlying political settlement that explains what happens and why (Crook and Booth 2011). Different forms
Does Social Accountability Support or Hinder Political Accountability?

SA complements political accountability (the responsiveness of government policies to the preferences of the electorate) in two ways. First, through the logic of elections and political competition, it creates incentives for elected officials in certain contexts (especially “new” democracies) to explore mechanisms for engaging with citizens outside election cycles as part of “top-down good governance drives.” Second, as documented in Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2002), social accountability movements or campaigns across Latin America demanding justice and the rule of law managed to put sufficient pressure on key politicians to change their incentive structure: doing justice, instead of covering up wrongdoing in exchange for favors, became the better strategy for advancing their political careers.

SA mechanisms can also displace structures for political accountability. By creating user committees or parallel structures to local-level councils with the intention of better engaging citizen voice in holding service providers accountable, SA may, in fact, undermine the authority of elected local leaders who were neither consulted nor invited to join these new groups and potentially displace other forms of accountability that could be considered more democratic, legitimate, and effective (Brett 2003; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Hickey and Mohan 2008). Moreover, they may have the unintended effect of strengthening existing power structures, thereby reinforcing inequality for the very reasons that democratic decentralization (Crook and Sverrisson 2001; Manor 2004) and induced participatory movements (Mansuri and Rao 2013) have been blamed for reinforcing inequalities. In such cases, the more articulate, better-educated elites within the wider local community often become the representatives of citizen voice for SA mechanisms, voicing demands not for public goods but for special interests. This dilemma does not arise when local elites work with decentralized administrations to obtain better services or greater social inclusion for their community (Yilmaz, Beris, and Serrano-Berthet 2008). When this is not the case, however, there may be only the illusion of deepening democracy and political accountability or simply no real change attributable to SA mechanisms (Banerjee et al. 2008).
of accountability, sometimes around a social contract, might form within semi-authoritarian environments (Stasavage 2005; Tsai 2007). Direct and participatory forms of democracy may be less relevant in explaining why SA processes achieve their objectives than other variables such as the role of political representation and political parties (Brautigam 2004). This aspect is discussed further in chapter 5.

Influence of Civil Society

Civil society is commonly understood as the arena outside of the family, the state, and the market where people associate to advance common interests—where citizens become aware of and may raise issues to get the attention of public authorities. The term “civil society” refers to both organized and unorganized citizens acting independently from government, political parties, and for-profit organizations in order to transform society and governance. Civil society includes religious and professional organizations, labor unions, grassroots organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but also reaches beyond these groups to include the participation of citizens outside of formal organizations (Ackerman 2004, 2005).

In analyzing the role of CS in supporting SA, two common pitfalls must be avoided. First is an overly simplistic view that civil society is an autonomous arena that is free from the logic of how power and politics operate and that it will automatically challenge existing accountability relations. The willingness of CS to challenge existing accountability relations is shaped by a variety of factors, including its incentives, interests, past experiences with SA, and relationship with powerful actors. The literature suggests that civil society is neither homogeneous in its willingness to challenge the accountability status quo and be a force for change nor a panacea for challenging entrenched accountability problems. In some cases, strengthening CSOs has undermined more legitimate forms of accountability or bolstered existing power structures (Banks and Hulme 2012; Booth 2012b). As Whitehead (2002, 77) notes, “Those with abundant social capital and the densest associative life can also use it to defend their privileges and to marginalize the less well-endowed majority.”

A second pitfall is a focus on CSOs’ technical and organizational capacities, as opposed to their political capabilities and ability to mobilize citizens and build alliances across society and state-society boundaries.
The former, including their capacity to manage and use information for different constituencies, does matter, but probably less than their political capabilities (box 3.3).

What emerges as a fundamental characteristic that explains the success or failure of SA demands is the extent to which CSOs are capable of exerting influence over the often-contested and politicized decision making. This capacity is determined by three interrelated elements.

- **The capacity of civil society organizations to mobilize citizens and build alliances across society.** This is closely related to the degree to which CS is fragmented or unified around an SA goal, and it highlights the key role of broad-based alliances across classes and social categories.

- **The capacity of civil society to build and link up with networks and ally with pro-reform actors within the state.** This capacity is perhaps the most critical variable in explaining the success of SA. A key issue is the nature of the political capability of CS, which includes political literacy and civic mobilization, networking, coalition building, and negotiation

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**BOX 3.3**

**Capacity, Willingness, and Political Maneuvering: Nijera Kori in Bangladesh**

Nijera Kori, a Bangladeshi NGO, focuses on civic mobilization for rural and landless citizens. It has achieved the following:

- An increase in wages wherever Nijera Kori groups have engaged in successful collective bargaining
- A reduction in bribes paid to health officials
- An increase in more regular teacher attendance wherever its members have become school committee members.

Nijera Kori has succeeded because of two important elements. It was equipped to engage the state in sustained bargaining and simultaneously to mobilize and represent marginalized groups. It also influenced politics, educating its members about their constitutional and voting rights and encouraging them to approach their elected representatives and government officials.

Sources: Kabeer 2003, 2005.
skills in the interaction with actors from the political society. Therefore, assessing the strength of CS alone might be less useful than identifying and assessing the nature of the relationships and networks across state and society and supporting their strengthening in more progressive directions (Unsworth and Moore 2010). The capacities of CSOs to be effective in a politicized and relational realm have less to do with their autonomy than with the relationships and networks they are able to forge with actors from within this realm but also within political society (Evans 2010; Gurza Lavalle, Houtzager, and Acharya 2005). These capacities can be built up over time through successive rounds of bargaining with the state (Houtzager and Joshi 2008, 2012).

- The authority, credibility, and legitimacy of CSOs. SA initiatives have tended to be more successful when the lead CSOs are perceived as credible and legitimate by both the citizenry and state actors who are being mobilized. In addition, CSOs that are able to draw on popular support and be accountable to their own constituents, as opposed to being upwardly accountable to donors, seem to be more effective in achieving SA goals. This type of CS is not limited to professional NGOs—it includes other sources of popular agency, including trade unions, social movements, and religious organizations (Banks and Hulme 2012; Hickey and Bracking 2005).

The sustainable financial capacity of CSOs is very relevant to this third point. Sustainable financial capacity is a key factor contributing to and enabling SA interventions: there are interesting examples of legislation to support this. For example, in Albania, the government and CSOs concluded an agreement to facilitate resource mobilization for CSOs, and the government enacted legislation to encourage philanthropy and financial contributions to CSOs. The issue of financial independence is complex: there are many examples of donor- or government-funded CSOs considered as legitimate and independent, but some of the case studies in chapter 7 provide examples of negative perceptions of donor-funded NGOs.

The legal and regulatory frameworks providing for rights such as freedom of expression, of association, and of information and their degree of implementation will have an impact on what is feasible for individuals or groups engaged in SA. Increasingly, the ecosystem for SA is part of the World Bank Group policy dialogue, and its development policy lending (DPL) supports fundamental changes in a country’s accountability systems (see box 3.4).
Supporting the Ecosystem for Social Accountability with DPL Operations

In several cases, World Bank–supported development policy lending has been instrumental in supporting the ecosystem for stronger social accountability. World Bank–financed DPLs have supported the enactment of right to information and freedom of access to information legislation and, in some cases, its implementation regulations (for example, Latvia, 2000; Karnataka State, 2001; India, 2004; Ghana, 2009; and Tunisia, 2011). DPLs have also supported budget transparency. Some prior actions have involved the publication and active dissemination of budgets (for example, the 2002 Oil Fund Budget in Azerbaijan and the 2003 Budget Law in Chad). Others have supported the publication of budget data (for example, the monthly online posting of disaggregated central government expenditures and subnational accounts in Ecuador and the online publication of updated month-end accounts of local bodies in rural Orissa, India). In particular, in connection with extractive industries (for example, online reports on the use of mining revenues in the Central African Republic and the management of oil resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo). Some prior actions have gone a step further, not only encouraging the regular publication of budgets, but also actively disseminating information on budgetary allocations for specific service delivery units (for example, a public information campaign to disseminate data on budgetary allocations in Guinea’s fiscal 2001 Budget Law for schools and primary health care centers in Conakry and the administrative region of Kindia).

The Tunisia DPL series illustrates the use of such an instrument to support a transition government. The DPL promotes improved transparency and accountability and greater public participation in policy making. In 2011, the interim government introduced reforms aimed at improving accountability in public service delivery—for example, through participatory monitoring of public service delivery by third parties. This reform was supported simultaneously by two others: the Law of Associations was revised to remove any room for discretion in registration procedures, and a Decree Law was adopted, giving the public the right to access information, including economic and social data, held by public bodies. Efforts to strengthen accountability in social services were reinforced by measures on the supply side in 2012, through accreditation agencies for health and higher education. The DPL supports the adoption of

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Relatedly, the role of a free, pluralistic media in supporting SA cannot be stressed enough. Many SA approaches rely on the media to disseminate and support their demands. The media have a crucial role to play in processes of accountability and citizen engagement. Its independence from government authorities and from commercial pressures that can bias content and limit its reach is a prerequisite if the media are to play such a role (Odugbemi and Lee 2011; World Bank 2003). In many contexts, the media do not enjoy such independence and are unable to perform a direct watchdog function on government. Yet their role remains important in enabling civic mobilization and in providing a public sphere that can itself become an interface between citizens and the state. Meaningful participation by citizens requires informed participants. In this regard, the criticality of information becomes all the more imperative, since imperfections of information create agency problems for citizens (Hirschman 1970). Box 3.5 discusses opportunities and challenges for the media in facilitating SA.
Media have several potential roles to play in facilitating SA.

**Media as a strategic intermediary.** News media, including both traditional forms (print, broadcast) and new (bloggers, social media, and citizen-journalists) can be strategic intermediaries for enabling inclusive citizen engagement. Broadcast and print media in particular reach even the remotest communities (including fragile and conflict-effected states and lower-income countries) at rates far greater than Internet penetration. The media can thus serve as a public platform for amplifying citizen voice in diverse communities (including, particularly, the poor and marginalized) and enabling broad public participation, discussion, and debate on issues that citizens themselves identify as salient to their livelihoods.

**Media as platform and barometer (for public opinion).** Media can also serve as a barometer for gauging public opinion, stress-testing decisions, and, in this way, helping to close feedback loops to government and service providers by focusing attention on issues of concern to the public that require action. In some lower-income countries and middle-income countries, media can further enable mass public consumption of data, raising public awareness, promoting a fuller understanding of specific accountability issues, and, ultimately, fostering data-driven decision making at all levels.

**Media as a primary user of government data and the transmission of data.** Media are a crucial user and reuser of government data, including demystifying government information for broad public access and understanding of key issues and enabling the public to voice their priorities and perspectives and become more active agents of their own development. As more central and local governments around the world open up their budget data and implement access to information legislation—for instance, as part of the Open Government Partnership—the media’s role in facilitating the demand by citizens to use open data is key for greater transparency leading to greater accountability.

**New media as empowering previously excluded and weaker sections of society.** New technologies and broader access to information are shifting the distribution of power (see chapter 4). The role of social media (such as Facebook, Twitter) in social movements in pursuit of accountability (for instance, during the Arab Spring) has attracted growing attention (Gerbaudo 2012; Howard et al. 2011; Khondker 2011). In particular,
Intra-society relations can be understood as the field of power relationships that shape social interactions and popular agency within society. They are particularly relevant in understanding some of the barriers that prevent people from participating effectively in, and deriving benefits from, SA, as levels of inequality and social exclusion have been found to play an important role in shaping SA outcomes.

Two key subdimensions of intra-society relations are citizens’ individual capacities and the nature of socioeconomic inequality and exclusion. Better-off citizens generally—although not always—tend to benefit more from SA processes, and socially excluded groups can be marginalized in such activities. The capacity of citizens to engage in SA initiatives and to hold public officials to account is closely shaped and differentiated by digital media combined with the growth in numbers of mobile phone users have significantly lowered the transaction costs of informing and in some cases mobilizing disparate groups of individuals to engage in collective action.

However, challenges to media accountability remain. All types of media struggle to enforce their rules on ethics and control the quality of information. The absence of media accountability systems may worsen the environment for social accountability by spreading misinformation. Media can stifle citizen “voice” that is challenging a dominant discourse promoted by the state and can fuel conflict (for example, the role of Radio Mille Collines in the genocide in Rwanda), even when its ostensible aim is to communicate information on issues of economic development, such as health and education services.

Overregulation of the media, however, can be equally detrimental to SA initiatives, as a controlled media can weaken state accountability.

The relationship between the media and good governance is particularly fragile in transitional democracies, where the roles, expectations, and norms that shape the primary relationship between the government and citizens are still disputed among the actors involved in communicating public issues (Voltmer 2013). The tension between the need for an open media and the push to have media subservient to particular values or institutions of state power is central to the “conservative dilemma” and heightened by the growth of the Internet and social media (Shirky 2011).
power relations involving inequality and exclusion along multiple lines (for example, education, class, ethnicity, and caste). It also depends on the density and nature of the existing social networks.6

Citizenship-based activities are strongly circumscribed by the level of agency that different individuals are able to exert within particular contexts (Hickey 2010; Mansuri and Rao 2004, 2013). The ability of individual citizens to engage in SA are notably influenced by their income, education, and, more broadly, their political capabilities. A wide body of evidence illustrates that many SA and broader participatory initiatives have struggled to benefit the poor and, in particular, the poorest (Bukenya, Hickey, and King 2012). Poorer individuals tend to lack the time and technical skills needed to engage; they may have limited political awareness and literacy—for example, limited awareness of certain entitlements or limited recognition as citizens; they may lack networking and negotiation skills; and they may be dependent on personal relationships for access to critical goods and services. Writing on the social embeddedness of agency, Cleaver (2004) identifies several obstacles, including social status, confidence, time, and a lack of able-bodiedness.

This is closely related to the willingness of citizens to pursue SA goals and challenge the state. The drivers of such willingness seem to be related to the previous experiences of citizens with state-citizen bargaining; their perception of the significance of the accountability issue in question; their calculations of risk and incentives that potentially jeopardize their means of survival by challenging existing relationships, particularly when they are dependent on patron-client relationships (box 3.6); and the prevailing culture of legitimacy and accountability that may or may not encourage challenging the status quo. While it is useful to separate capacity and willingness for analytical purposes, the literature suggests that the success of SA often depends on citizens having a high degree of both.

The impact of inequality on SA is, however, arguably ambiguous. In countries like Brazil, India, and South Africa, it is the perception of inequalities that has stimulated aggrieved citizens to call on the state to do something. Some studies, though, note that the degree of fractionalization along religious, ethnic, and class lines, among others, can negatively affect the capacity of citizens to undertake collective action (Bukenya, Hickey, and King 2012). Therefore, what might be of key importance is the popular perception of the fairness and legitimacy of inequality levels along with perceptions of whether it is the state’s responsibility to rectify them (World Bank 2012).
In an overarching sense, the capacity and commitment to deliver accountable forms of governance are located within the character of state-society relations. Efforts to promote social accountability are an attempt to institutionalize more democratic and developmental relationships between state and society and are closely shaped by the existing character of these relations. What matters for SA are the forms of the social contract, the history of state-citizen relations in state formation and service provision, the character of formal and informal state-society accountability and bridging mechanisms, and the depth and character of networks between state and society actors.

**Social Contract**

To make accountability claims, “There must be an ... assumption about responsibilities of the state, as well as the ... entitlements of citizens” (Newell and Wheeler 2006). This can be conceptualized as the presence and character of a social contract around specific public goods, which can be strengthened over time through successive rounds of state-society bargaining (Joshi and Houtzager 2012). Different forms of social contract will emerge in different contexts, depending in part on the balance and
interaction between democratic and more clientelist forms of politics. Elections can provide a window of opportunity for politicizing certain demands and beginning to forge new public agreements around them (de Waal 1996).

The broad notion of social contract can be broken down further by examining the agreements or settlements that exist around different sectors (Skocpol 1992). This is critical, as what is expected by citizens and what states are prepared to commit to delivering vary according to the particular goods and services under discussion, to their level of popular and political importance, and the history of state-society bargaining around them (Houtzager and Joshi 2008).

Assessing the possibilities for locating social accountability interventions within existing social contracts and deepening them as a result could therefore start from an analysis of how the rights of citizens to different resources and public goods (for example, education, land, health, and social security) have been differentially distributed to different individuals and groups over time and on what basis. Recent calls to “work with the grain” of governance in developing countries (Booth 2012b) suggest that it might be wise for external actors to promote social accountability initiatives where a degree of commitment already exists rather than seek to create new contracts. Box 3.7 offers some brief examples.

However, the notion of social contracts derives from a particular history of state formation in the West (Hickey 2011). In some contexts, state-society relations are largely informal and driven by the logic of patronage. The dominant theory of change at play here suggests that the social world consists of autonomous, well-informed, and active citizens who are capable of making demands on public officials who, in turn, are capable and, potentially, incentivized to respond accordingly. This theory of change is glaringly at odds with the realities on the ground in many countries (Booth 2005, 2012b).

**History of State-Citizen Relations in State Formation and Service Provision**

SA initiatives tend to be more effective in countries with a strong history of civic engagement. A history of CS activism can support the creation of “a repertoire of activism, replete with skills, networks, and tactics on which these later campaigns could build” (McGee and Gaventa 2010; also see Goodin and Tilly 2006; Joshi and Houtzager 2012; Shankland 2010). Moreover, the extent to which the experience of citizen engagement has
been positive or negative shapes the willingness of citizens to engage in current SA initiatives, particularly because engaging in SA may divert the resources of actors from other activities.

**Character of Formal and Informal State-Society Accountability and Bridging Mechanisms**

Formal and informal state-society accountability and bridging mechanisms cover multiple mechanisms ranging from the media and legal redress mechanisms to participatory spaces and customary institutions. The extent to which such mechanisms are authoritative, legitimate, and effective has been found to shape the prospects for SA effectiveness. Equally, in spite of the relatively limited evidence base, it seems that informal accountability institutions—and their interaction with formal mechanisms—are important in shaping SA outcomes. In many developing-country contexts,
informal rules are prevalent and “often involve patrimonial structures of exchange, which rely on different logics of accountability and appeal to different narratives of legitimacy” compared to the more “democratic,” formal SA models (Harris, Kooy, and Jones 2011). Also, in contexts where formal accountability mechanisms are weak, SA activities may play a role in improving services by, for example, leveraging informal networks or through symbolic acts or protest (Unsworth and Moore 2010).

Depth and Character of Networks between State and Society Actors

A key variable in explaining the effectiveness of SA interventions is the existence of pro-reform state-society networks. Such networks do not, however, form overnight—they form over time through interaction and rounds of bargaining, and they can be reshaped, co-opted, or changed by numerous internal and external drivers (Fox 2007; Sorensen and Torfing 2005).

Importance of Cultural Norms

Culture is concerned with identity, aspiration, symbolic exchange, coordination, and structures and practices that serve relational ends, such as ethnicity, ritual, heritage, norms, meanings, and beliefs (Rao and Walton 2004).

As culture informs relationality—that is, the relationships among individuals within groups, among groups, and between ideas and perspectives—the cultural context can profoundly influence the nature of relations within civil society, political society, and state-society relations that this chapter outlines as the macro context for SA.

The World Development Report 2015: Mind and Culture (World Bank 2015) explores three ideas that have a bearing on SA:

- Bounds on rationality, which limit the ability of individuals to process information and lead them to rely on rules of thumb
- Social interdependence, which leads people to care about others and respect the social norms of their communities
- Culture, which provides mental models that influence what individuals pay attention to, perceive, and (mis)understand.

Social interdependencies and cultural processes (such as kinship or other traditional networks) can have a positive influence on the
coordination of collective action or drive moral systems that give citizens incentives to be moral agents of SA, but they also depend on the social configuration of local communities. Tsai’s work on accountability of village-level officials in China shows that informal mechanisms for accountability worked well when these officials belonged to embedding and encompassing social organizations such as temple groups (Tsai 2007). In such cases, fear for their reputations made them act in the interests of their constituents; social groups lacking this characteristic, such as church groups or lineage groups that did not include the entire village, did not induce accountability. In fact, the ways in which power and agency work within communities may be underlined by the very same cultural processes that nurture the patronage systems driving social exclusion, limiting the voice of certain social groups, and causing “relational deprivation” (Sen 2001).

When the state of Ceará in Brazil recruited a new cadre of grassroots workers—documented in Tendler’s seminal account (Tendler 1997)—the importance of their work was impressed on them in human and moral terms. The results were high morale and an esprit de corps among the recruits, who demonstrated a commitment to their work that made the citizen-state engagement successful.

Accountability is understood differently depending on the prevailing norms. In many societies, the distinction between public and private spheres of conduct is often blurry and subjects both spheres to a moral code that may draw on the pervasive moral economy or norms within tribal structures. At times, demands for accountability “from below” may penalize the breach of patron-client relations rooted in authoritarian elite, religious, or spiritual codes of conduct, cultural traditions, and customs rooted in moral traditions.

Cultural values can further inform the organizational norms that influence how state agencies respond to citizens. In two case studies, both focusing on dam construction in China’s Sichuan Province, Mertha (2008) shows how an appeal to cultural values and norms can be more effective than protests. In Pubugou, citizens staged protests against the groundbreaking of a dam, demanding compensation and more input in decision making. The government characterized the protests as a threat to social stability, suppressed them, and went ahead with building the dam. In Dujiangyan, in contrast, activists framed the building of a dam as an issue of environmental protection and cultural
preservation, enlisting the support of bureaucratic agencies also interested in cultural and environmental preservation. This framing was instrumental in their success.

**Importance of Global Factors**

*Global factors relate to the way in which global actors and processes can support or undermine accountability for development and SA.*

Donor accountability and donor-state relations, especially in highly aid-dependent countries, can be important in a variety of ways: (a) aid conditions may create or limit space for national deliberation and accountability over appropriate policies and measures; (b) donor agencies, when taking too much responsibility for service provision, may undermine the emergence of a state-citizen contract; (c) aid flows may provide (dis)incentives for political elites to be more responsive to local citizens and to engage in tax bargaining; and (d) direct aid flows to CS could undermine citizens’ independence, effectiveness, and downward accountability (Banks and Hulme 2012; Booth 2012b; O’Neill, Foresti, and Hudson 2007).

The accountability of “international” power holders beyond the state is increasingly pertinent. Multinational corporations or international NGOs have both been found to shape domestic accountability, especially when the state is unwilling or unable to regulate their activities; their impact can be positive or negative (Bebbington, Hickey, and Mitlin 2008; Garvey and Newell 2004). There are various examples of multinational corporations that have violated poor communities’ rights, leading to forms of SA that target the corporations rather than just the state.

More broadly, international economic and political processes are understood to shape domestic accountability. They include, but are not limited to, (a) the level of a country’s global economic integration, as more extreme forms of globalization can undermine accountability by limiting the state’s capacity to debate and determine social and economic policy democratically (Rodrik 2011; Scott 2012); (b) international trade and financial flows (such as trade in illicit goods or money laundering), which can shape the incentives of political and economic elites to pursue anti-development practices; (c) international human rights norms, which can pressure certain states to open spaces for greater accountability; (d) international initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (see box 3.8).
EITI and Engagement with Civil Society

The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is a global initiative in which signatory companies and compliant countries publish payments and revenues in the extractive industries, with civil society playing the role of third-party monitor. There are currently 29 EITI-compliant countries and 16 countries awaiting admission. Representatives of civil society, government, and industry have formed a Multi-Stakeholder Working Group (MSG) and collectively manage the process of complying with the requirements for EITI candidacy through a dedicated EITI national secretariat.

EITI primarily facilitates transparency with respect to extractives revenues, yet a new standard requires that EITI reports also include more detailed payment information to show how extractives payments reach the subnational level through subnational government transfers and to report companies’ social contributions.

Since October 2011, a multidonor trust fund managed by the World Bank has provided direct support to CSOs in the form of country-level grants to implement civil society–led activities that can (a) increase the participation of CSOs in the MSG (ownership and contribution), (b) broaden the range of CSOs that participate in the EITI, and (c) increase the use of EITI information for greater accountability.

The program has demonstrated the ability of participating local CSOs to advocate and influence the national dialogue on the governance of extractive industries. Participants have been able to identify and prioritize key issues to advance transparency and accountability in the extractive industries at the local and national levels. For instance, through such engagements, participants have learned how to assess the amount of local revenues that should be collected and to identify the groups or agencies that should report these revenues.

Although capacity gaps are often cited as a weakness among CSOs in EITI-implementing countries, when CSOs in the targeted countries receive sufficient financial resources and technical assistance, they have been able to conduct effective advocacy campaigns that advance EITI implementation. The program encourages CSOs that are MSG members to reach out to community-based CSOs (for example, in Kazakhstan, Mozambique, Niger, and Tanzania). The objective is to train the greatest number of community representatives possible, who will then share the information within their extended networks. Some projects have a communication component that is targeting

(continued next page)
or the Open Government Partnership (see Unsworth and Moore 2010; World Bank 2011); and (e) transnational global citizen movements (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the evidence on the two institutional spheres of civil and political society and their interactions as well as the issues around global factors and cultural norms. These are essential elements to be considered in understanding the drivers of SA effectiveness. What is missing is an overarching framework with which to assess contextual elements of SA both in general (country-level analysis) and with respect to specific issues and problems (absenteeism in primary health). That framework is the subject of chapter 4. Box 3.9 summarizes the key takeaways of this chapter.
Key Takeaways: Social Accountability and a Country’s Social and Political Characteristics

SA is shaped by the two institutional spheres of political and civil society and their interactions (state-society and intra-society). Three additional factors cut across these spheres and require special attention: cultural norms, global factors, and the prevailing political settlement (see figure B3.9.1).

Three major findings emerge from a review of the broad contextual determinants of SA effectiveness. First, political and power relations are at the forefront of understanding and operationalizing SA. Second, links and networks have to be built between pro-accountability state and civil society actors. Third, closer attention should be given to the dynamics of inequality and exclusion.

The following are the important messages of the chapter:

- Actors and the dynamics of political society might be the most important factors in explaining the form and effectiveness of SA in a given context.

Figure B3.9.1 Main “Macro” Contextual Factors for Social Accountability Effectiveness
The role of civil society in promoting SA is fundamental, but the prevalent, overly simplistic view that civil society is autonomous and somehow immune to the influence of power and politics is naive. CSOs and the media need to be viewed as politically embedded institutions. It is not their technical capacities alone that influence SA.

The history of state-society relations and the nature of the existing social contract mediate the effectiveness of SA. One goal of SA mechanisms could be to change perceptions of the responsibilities of the state and the entitlements of citizens, which are fundamental to any social contract.

Distinct from the notions of political society, civil society or state-society relations are cultural factors that can profoundly influence the relationships among individuals within groups, among groups, and between ideas and perspectives.

The role of external actors (especially donor agencies) and external processes (for example, trade) or institutions (for example, EITI) can influence SA processes, with both positive and negative consequences.