

# The Raffles Review

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## More Meat for the Sandwich



### SOURCE

[Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?](#)<sup>1</sup>, by Jonathan A. Fox; published in *World Development* Vol. 72, 2015.

### BIG IDEAS

- This study reinterprets the evidence on the impact of social accountability (SAcc) initiatives by distinguishing ‘tactical’ from ‘strategic’ approaches. The aim of doing so is to move beyond an assessment of the impact of SAcc initiatives as ‘mixed’ and to advance understanding and inform the development of SAcc approaches.
- Strategic approaches: “...deploy *multiple* tactics, encourage enabling environments for collective action for accountability, and coordinate citizen voice initiatives with reforms that bolster public sector responsiveness.”
- Tactical approaches, in contrast, concentrate solely on citizen voice, are exclusively locally-focused, and assume that information provision alone will lead to collective action that can influence the performance of the public sector.
- Strategic approaches offer more promise than tactical approaches.
- Major conceptual frameworks (principal-agent, long/short routes, supply/demand side, horizontal/vertical/diagonal accountability) are insufficient for understanding SAcc approaches more fully; new conceptual propositions are needed.
- Fox re-examines evidence on both the lack and presence of impact of SAcc initiatives. With respect to three important studies (Olken 2007, Banerjee et al. 2010, Mansuri and Rao 2013) he argues, based on 15 interviews conducted with professionals at the World Bank, that there is a difference between what the studies show and what many understand them to show.
- More specificity is required in the propositions SAcc studies seek to address – e.g. rather than “ ‘community voice can (by itself) influence public service providers’ ”, “...what *kind* of community oversight can address state failure?”
- Fox introduces additional propositions concerning the impact of SAcc initiatives for discussion, notably that “Sandwich strategies can shift power with state-society synergy”.<sup>2</sup> He writes, “The term “sandwich strategy” is shorthand for these coordinated coalitions among pro-accountability actors embedded in both state and society (Fox, 1992).”

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aims to ruffle your thinking!

This weekly offering summarises  
insights on public service  
matters to challenge  
assumptions and question  
the status quo.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

- One proposition is that sandwich strategies can lead to greater accountability through coalitions of actors from society and state empowering each other.

<sup>1</sup> Used under a Creative Commons [license](#). This issue of The Raffles Review provides highlights from the article.

<sup>2</sup> Fox notes the influence of Peter Evans’ (1996) “state-society synergy” framework.