

International aid actions for accountability: Identifying interaction effects between programmes

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Funding information

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Grant/Award Number: 204427-101

Abstract

Motivation: Aid agencies that support public accountability reforms commonly do so in the same places and with similar state and civil society actors. However, the combined effects of their separate programmatic actions are rarely analysed.

Purpose: This study departs from conventional analysis of aid agency relationships that focuses on the macro level of donor co-ordination and harmonization. Instead, we look at the interactions that happen in practice between aid agency programmes on the ground. Through doing so we propose a new conceptual lens for understanding these interactions.

Methods and approach: We explore how programmes with overlapping public accountability goals interact in specific locations and with what effects, based on qualitative fieldwork on four recent programmes that overlapped in sub-national areas of Pakistan and Nigeria and supported by lighter-touch research on two programmes in Mozambique.

Findings: We identify three distinct categories of “interaction effects”—synergy, parallel play, and disconnect. These effects came about both with and without direct engagement between the aid agencies themselves. Synergistic interaction effects—aid agency actions reinforcing one

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another in pursuit of greater public accountability—were common. Parallel play—siloed working—was also common, risking missed opportunities to extend impact. The study identified one outright disconnect—where aid agency actions undermined each other.

Policy implications: Using this “interaction effects” lens in practice could inform and strengthen aid agency strategies—avoiding conflicting actions and siloed working—and achieving more through synergy with others, particularly in complex contexts. This applies both in programme design and in adapting to other aid programmes' actions in real time. Development programme research and evaluations would benefit from broadening their lens beyond single-programme studies to understand the combined effects of multiple actors.

KEYWORDS

accountability, aid, donor co-ordination, evaluation, governance

1 | INTRODUCTION

Aid programmes that support governance reforms are rarely analysed in the context of other aid agency programmes, although their goals and actions may overlap. That “context matters” has become widely recognized, but do governance programmes take account of what *other* aid agencies do? Such donor co-ordination and interaction are important in any context but are particularly vital where governance is weak or unstable, multiple authorities compete for legitimacy, and external donors may face volatility. In these settings it is essential to maximize the impact of aid for governance reform, recognizing that failure to do so could have severe consequences.

This article tackles whether and when aid-funded governance reform programmes reinforce or undermine each other, drawing on emblematic cases to offer an analytical lens to identify effects that overlapping aid programmes can have on governance reforms. The conventional approach to analysing relationships between aid programmes focuses on macro-level donor co-ordination. In contrast, we address broader processes of “interaction effects” that unfold at multiple levels. We go beyond programme *intentions* (goals and design) to how aid programmes are *implemented* in practice. The starting point is that different programmes' *actions* targeting the same actors can overlap, with or without direct contact between them. In this way we present an analysis that is perhaps closer to the ways that those actors at whom aid programmes are aimed often see the landscape. This study identifies overlaps between different aid programmes' actions and the interaction effects that such overlaps produce. It suggests that identifying interaction effects requires an alternative analytical lens that intentionally seeks them.

The conceptual lens we propose here emerged from an inductive theory-building exercise involving paired case-study comparison of governance reform programmes. Each programme focused on accountable governance and/or citizen empowerment in complex and challenging settings. They were all funded by official aid agencies and operated in overlapping sub-national territories in three countries. Research on these programmes found examples of three kinds of possible interaction effects.

- **“Synergy,”** where aid programme actions interact in mutually reinforcing ways, as observed in Pakistan and Mozambique where the actors and entities receiving aid programme funds within the paired programmes unofficially co-ordinated their management methods to seek efficiencies.
- **“Parallel play,”** where aid programme actions in shared issue areas and territories do not connect or converge in practice, noted in both Mozambique and Nigeria where neither programme took full advantage of the other's operating space, experiences, or opportunities presented.
- **“Disconnect,”** where a programme's actions undermine others, seen in Nigeria, where one aid programme's narrow focus on results undercut the other's long-term efforts.

These patterns would not be detectable when analysing programmes in isolation. Recognizing these three possible scenarios could inform strategies to maximize synergy and minimize disconnects between aid programme actions.

The article is structured as follows. We situate our work within the relevant literature in Section 2, describe our methodology and case selection in Section 3, and in Section 4 introduce the paired case studies. Section 5 presents our findings on interaction effects, first for each country's programme pair and then synthesized across all cases. Section 6 explores the potential implications and contributions of our theory-building exercise, assessing what value the interaction lens adds to aid programmes within and beyond the governance and accountability fields.

2 | SETTING OUT THE LANDSCAPE

Quality of governance is well established in international development practice as a cause of and solution to many development challenges. This concern crosses contexts, expressing itself differently across aid agency agendas. Many argue that political institutions that can gain popular legitimacy and build constructive citizen–state relationships are key in places experiencing violent conflict, where democratic practices are relatively nascent or unevenly developed, and where the state's territorial control is itself uneven (Brinkerhoff, 2005; Fragility Commission, 2018; Lemay-Hébert, 2009; Lemay-Hébert & Mathieu, 2014). While it is argued that enthusiasm for externally driven state-building has recently waned, particularly in post-conflict conditions, efforts to improve citizen–state interactions remain common in aid agency repertoires, including to improve public accountability (Brinkerhoff, 2016; Christie & Burge, 2017; Fooks, 2013).

Recent approaches see accountability reform as fundamentally a political challenge which must be approached adaptively (Christie & Green, 2019; Dasandi et al., 2019; McCulloch & Piron, 2019; Teskey, 2017). Accordingly, some argue for aid agencies to explore the “accountability ecosystem” to engage the wider range of actors involved in public accountability relationships (Halloran, 2015, 2021). The concept of accountability ecosystems involves interrelations between the full array of domestic pro-accountability actors, particularly (but not exclusively) formal accountability institutions, as well as civil society actors, including national and sub-national organizations (Halloran, 2021). This approach draws attention to the breadth and complexity of public accountability systems. Given that multiple aid agencies may also be operating concurrently within these ecosystems, this raises the question of whether they are doing so in a coherent way.

The co-ordination and coherence of aid agency actions has long been contentious in international development policy debates. Numerous international agreements on aid effectiveness, including the 2005 Paris Declaration, the 2008 Accra Accord, and the 2011 Busan Partnership Agreement, include commitments to address unco-ordinated donor actions. Evidence suggests slow implementation at best (OECD & UNDP, 2019; Olivé & Pérez, 2016; Ritchie et al., 2022). To avoid exacerbating conflict and undermining government legitimacy, the Busan process also endorsed providing aid to places most affected by ongoing conflict and violence (so-called “fragile states”), emphasizing both accountable service delivery and coherence in aid agency actions (Nussbaum et al., 2012; OECD, 2016). Again, evidence suggests these agreements encountered numerous practical and political problems (Faust et al., 2015).

The literature on aid co-ordination has tended to focus on macro-level incentives and disincentives (Bourguignon & Platteau, 2015; Emmanuel, 2010; Gehring et al., 2017; Torsvik, 2005). Analysis of policy coherence in development

is also at this macro level, for example exploring inconsistencies between individual donor countries' aid policies and their actions on trade and security (Sianes, 2017). A smaller body of work has explored specific donor co-ordination mechanisms, like joint-sector working groups (Teshome & Hoebink, 2018). The politics of aid literature (Eyben, 2007; Eyben et al., 2015) addresses tensions regarding donor co-operation, although rarely focuses on interactions in practice.

Given how frequently the field highlights coherence and co-ordination between agencies and how commonly agencies focus on public accountability reforms, it is remarkably rare to find assessments of the combined impact of accountability-oriented programmes operating at the same time in the same contexts. Programmes, whether funded by one or several aid agencies, are generally studied as individual cases. This meets aid agency incentives to understand what their financial support yielded, but can isolate the effects of individual aid agencies, obscuring others' actions and the potentially compounding or confounding effects (Crawford & Kearnton, 2001). Multi-programme studies in the field tend to compare across different contexts and timeframes (Holland et al., 2016; Lodenstein et al., 2017; Rocha Menocal & Sharma, 2009; Waddington et al., 2019; Westhorp et al., 2014). The few examples that explore different approaches in the same context only examine parallel or successive actions by the same aid agency (Balagamwala & Gazdar, 2014; Derbyshire & Williams, 2021; Kirk, 2017; Piron et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2019). Next, we describe how we adopted a vantage point that allows us to address this lacuna and uncover how aid agencies' actions for accountability interact in practice.

3 | METHODOLOGY AND CASE SELECTION

Our research started from the hypothesis that aid programmes on governance reform overlapping in geographical territories would probably have important interactions. We explored this in three countries—Pakistan, Nigeria, and Mozambique—selected on practical grounds from the five focus countries of the Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) research programme, which funded the work.¹ A4EA explores dynamics of social and political action to understand empowerment and accountability processes in national and sub-national contexts with recent histories of conflict—including related to aid. Although notably different, the three countries are all significant recipients of international aid and are therefore places where we might expect to see interactions between aid programmes. Aid agencies prioritize improving governance and citizen–state relations there because of ongoing conflicts in parts of each country.

In each country we selected one UK Department for International Development (DFID)²-financed programme that aimed to enhance state accountability to citizens.³ We paired each with another aid programme that overlapped for some of the implementation period and shared accountability goals. Aid agencies other than DFID funded the “pair” programmes in Nigeria and Mozambique. In Pakistan both programmes were funded by DFID.⁴

Insights from the four completed case studies in Pakistan and Nigeria led us to develop our conceptual lens on interaction effects, meaning that our lens emerged inductively, the result of theory-building based on case studies (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; George & Bennett, 2005) rather than an attempt to test theoretical propositions through case studies. Examples from Mozambique, where research unfortunately ended prematurely because of the COVID-19 pandemic, allow us to further illustrate the lens. Researchers used qualitative methods of interviews, focus groups, documentary review, and participant observation to gain perspectives from within each aid programme. Institutional ethnography inspired this approach (Campbell, 2010; Campbell & Gregor, 2002; DeVault, 2006; Rudrum, 2016). This emphasizes the importance of the standpoint of those inhabiting complex institutions (such as modern aid-funded

¹Closing space in the other two focus countries, Egypt and Myanmar, ruled out their inclusion in this study.

²In September 2020 DFID merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to create the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

³Funder of the A4EA programme.

⁴This resulted from carefully reviewing other programmes that might be suitable pairs and considering practical issues of access to programme practitioners, which were more significant in Pakistan owing to the political context.

programmes) and identifying how actions are co-ordinated in these institutions. Research participants included programme managers, aid agency representatives, practitioners in organizations funded through the programmes, and government representatives. Researchers focused on two sub-national areas in each country. This permitted comparisons across programmes in the same sub-national territory and between DFID-funded programmes and those of other aid agencies.

The focus on sub-national territories was informed by sub-national comparative methods which address the limits of national-level data and generalizations (Giraudy et al., 2019; Snyder, 2001). Our interest in examining interactions across sets of actions led us to seek them in the sub-national areas where programmes overlapped, where they were most likely to feature.

4 | THE COUNTRY STUDIES

Here we briefly introduce the objectives and ways of working of the two programmes selected in each country.

4.1 | Nigeria: PERL and SFTAS

The Nigeria research was carried out by Fatai Aremu (National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies) with Richard Burge (IDS and Itad) and Jonathan Fox (Accountability Research Center). It explored the actions of the Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) programme and State Fiscal Transparency, Accountability and Sustainability (SFTAS) project in the states of Jigawa and Kaduna.⁵

PERL is a GBP 100 million governance programme funded by DFID/FCDO [2015–present]. Its strategy combines supply- and demand-side governance programming, building on over 15 years of learning, experience, and partnerships (Piron et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2019). PERL operates at the national (federal) and sub-national (state) levels, focusing on three partner states. PERL teams operate at the state level, engaging directly with state government officials and civil society, the media, and state legislatures through linked teams operated by the implementers DAI, Palladium, and ODI.

PERL aims to catalyse governance reforms that improve service delivery by bringing government and citizens together to address governance challenges. It is designed as an adaptive programme. Its theory of change is based on evidence that reducing corruption and strengthening public accountability is a collective action problem that requires engagement by multiple stakeholders, inside and outside government. The programme covers a broad range of governance issues, including aspects of budgetary and personnel management, and sectoral issues affecting the delivery of key public services.

SFTAS is a four-year USD 750 million World Bank-funded loan, launched in 2018. It is a supply-side, performance-based financing governance programme aimed at state governments, using a payment-for-results approach. SFTAS influences state actors by providing them with financial incentives to change policies and practices in relation to accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement in fiscal processes. Funds are disbursed to state governments upon attaining specific, agreed achievements known as disbursement-linked indicators (DLIs). These indicators, assessed annually by a third party, are designed to gradually escalate their scope and ambition each year (SFTAS, 2019). In contrast to PERL, which engages directly with both government and civil society actors in sustained relationships, SFTAS relies upon each participating state to establish a State Steering Committee comprising state government officials. It encourages state governments to bolster the enabling environment for the public to exercise voice and claim accountability.

While most of SFTAS's nine sets of goals, operationalized through DLIs, are inward-facing public-sector financial reforms, two are both inward-facing and outward-facing in that they are designed to inform citizen engagement. DLI

⁵This work is published separately in Aremu (2022) and the present section draws largely on this source.

2 focuses on increased openness and citizens' engagement in the design of state government budgets (participatory budgeting) and DLI 6 encourages increased transparency in public procurement (open contracting). Because these goals combine supply-side measures with demand-side reforms that enable public action, in theory, they both build on and overlap with PERL's long-standing strategy. Explicit in SFTAS's design was the intention to "crowd in" complementary support, including PERL technical assistance (World Bank, 2018a, p. 19).

4.2 | Pakistan: AAWAZ I and CDIP

The Pakistan research was carried out by Ayesha Khan and Komal Qidwai of the Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR) and explored the AAWAZ I and CDIP programmes. The research investigated these successive programmes at their points of intersection in the D.I. Khan District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province and the Multan district in Punjab province.⁶

AAWAZ Voice & Accountability Programme Phase I (2012–2018) was a demand-side intervention with a budget of GBP 39.1 million. Funded by DFID and implemented at the sub-national level exclusively in KP and Punjab provinces, it was implemented by the international agency DAI Global (DAI) with four national non-government organizations (NGOs) as downstream partners: Sungi, Aurat Foundation, South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK), and Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO). It aspired to help build a more stable, inclusive, and tolerant democracy in Pakistan with democratic processes that were open, inclusive, and accountable to citizens. Its empowerment and accountability goals were to improve women's ability to participate safely in politics and public spaces at federal, provincial, and local levels, and improve citizens' and communities' ability to resolve disputes peacefully and make effective demands on government for improved service delivery.

AAWAZ I supported citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) to demand accountability in several ways. It established local-level "Aagahi" citizens' centres providing training and awareness-raising in communities, set up elected forums from village to district to provincial levels, provided human rights training (especially on domestic violence to men and women), supported women and excluded groups to raise their demands with public officials, helped women to obtain identity cards and register to vote, and trained women to become candidates in local elections. It worked with media actors to raise citizens' awareness of their entitlements.

CDIP (Consolidating Democracy in Pakistan) (2016–2019, extended to 2021) was a demand- and supply-side intervention with an initial budget of GBP 31.5 million funded by the UK government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and DAI implemented Phase 1 and the beginning of implementation overlapped with the end of AAWAZ I. The programme endeavoured to help build a democratic system in which government institutions became more capable, parliament more accountable, and the state more responsive to peoples' needs and aspirations. Empowerment and accountability goals included improving transparency and inclusiveness in election management and oversight, parliamentary processes, and political parties. CDIP also sought to expand democratic space with improved policy dialogue, political debate, and public discourse.

CDIP was designed to balance demand-side work creating and strengthening citizens' voices with supply-side initiatives targeting government, political institutions, and politicians. It engaged CSOs, holding social media campaigns, seminars, and training which sought improved engagement and participation of socially excluded groups, including women, youth, minorities, and people with disabilities. It had a strong political participation component, aiming to increase women's voter turnout, inclusion in political party decision-making, and engagement in democratic processes to demand accountability and express voice. The programme also supported a series of legislative reforms to enhance and protect the rights of women and minorities.

⁶This work is published separately in Khan and Qidwai (2021), and the following section draws largely on this source.

4.3 | Mozambique: AGIR II and MASC

The Mozambique research was carried out by Euclides Gonçalves (Kaleidoscopio) and Rosie McGee (Institute of Development Studies) and explored the AGIR II and MASC programmes. Although the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed research activities in Mozambique, we bring in relevant findings in our later discussion, warranting a brief introduction.

AGIR II (Action for inclusive and responsive governance) was a six-year demand-side intervention carried out between 2014 and 2020, following an earlier phase. Its purpose was to strengthen Mozambican civil society capacity to participate in and influence decision-making to generate more inclusive and participatory democratic governance. A multi-donor-funded programme led by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) with contributions from the Dutch and Danish governments, AGIR was implemented at the sub-national level by four international organizations and supported 108 Mozambican civil society partner organizations, with flexible core funding and resources for bounded “small projects” (Kruse et al., 2018).

The Civil Society Support Mechanism (MASC) is a demand-side intervention launched in 2007 as a donor-led programme that then transitioned to become a Mozambican foundation. Spearheaded by DFID, MASC has received financing from Irish Aid, the European Union (EU), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Danida, the Norwegian Embassy, and USAID (Department for International Development, 2018; Fundação MASC, 2022). MASC, still actively operating, aims to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society participation in Mozambique, providing grants and capacity-building support to district, community-based, and faith-based organizations, associations, and civil society platforms from each of the country's 11 provinces (Fundação MASC, 2015).

5 | FINDINGS: AID PROGRAMME INTERACTION EFFECTS

Different international aid programmes that involve overlapping issues, actors, and territories can have interaction effects in those arenas. Interaction effects are defined as the results of those overlaps in aid programme actions.⁷ They can happen *with or without* direct contact between those working in aid agencies, precisely because of their overlapping arenas and possible effects on third parties.

This study accounts for both direct and indirect interaction between aid programmes and their implementors, raising the question of how to define what counts as an aid programme. For this analysis, the definition of “aid programme” is limited to the international funding agency and its immediate implementing contractors or government implementing agencies. Direct contact between aid programmes refers to interactions between these actors. Indirect contact refers to interaction between other related actors, such as programme grantees or those they seek to influence. The mix of direct and indirect interaction effects varies; not all cases have both.

We argue that the overlaps between aid programmes' actions can have three possible kinds of interaction effects:

Synergy: One programme's actions reinforce the other's.

Parallel play: Aid programme actions co-exist within a shared issue area or territory, without reinforcement or convergence⁸ (null category).

Disconnect: The actions of at least one programme undermine the other.

These categories emerged inductively from our research and, in turn, led us to develop a lens that brings together the distinctions between direct and indirect interactions, and the three kinds of interaction effects observed. In the analysis that follows we use this original conceptual lens to assess the overlaps in actions that we found in Nigeria and Pakistan, arriving at five propositions. This is captured in Figure 1.

⁷We borrow the term interaction from statistical analysis, where it describes the joint effects of multiple variables. It is also used in development evaluation to describe interactions between aid programmes and contextual features (Aston, 2021; Bamberger, 2021).

⁸This refers to the child development term used to describe when young children play independently in the presence of or adjacent to each other without attempting to influence one another's behaviour.

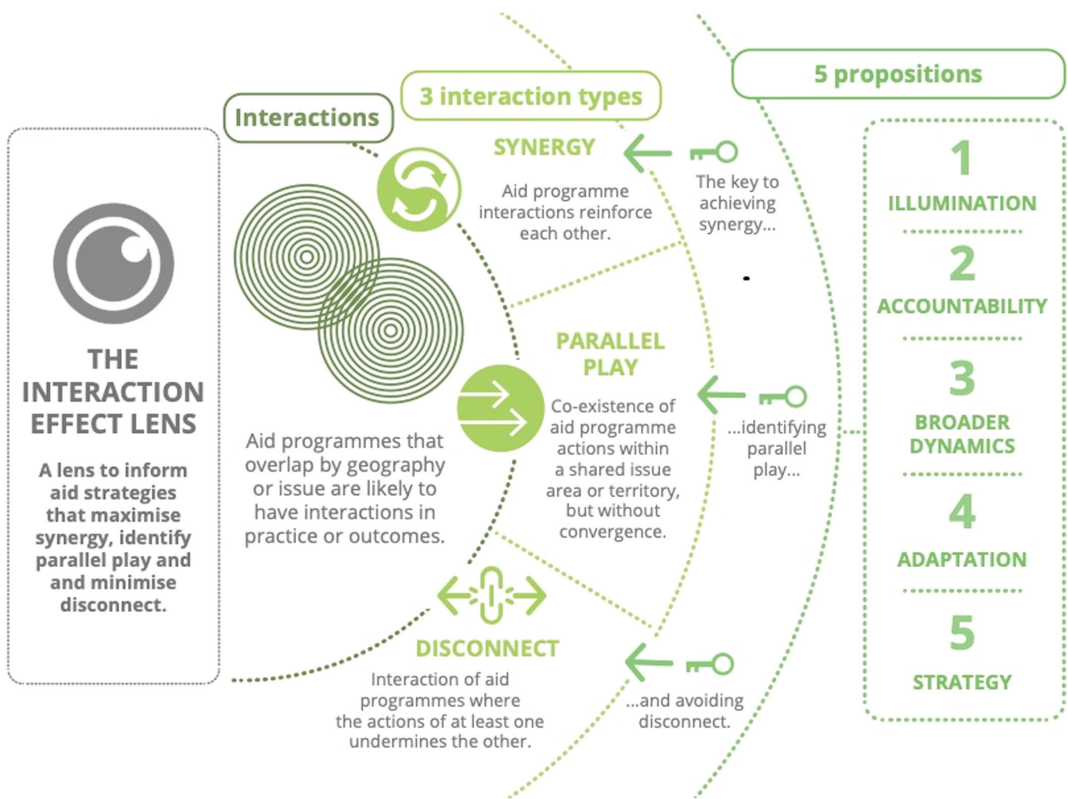


FIGURE 1 The interaction effects lens. Source: Authors' own work.

5.1 | Nigeria: Synergy, Parallel Play, and Disconnects

The Nigeria research identified all three categories of interaction effects between aid programmes, and both direct and indirect impacts.

Three experiences of *synergy* stood out—one involving direct engagement and the other two indirect.

One aid programme's technical support enabled state governments to become eligible for another aid programme's grants.

In an example of direct interaction, when the World Bank faced delays in providing technical assistance for SFTAS, PERL staff described to us how they stepped in and provided the necessary capacity building that enabled states to meet the SFTAS programme's specific targets. PERL's contribution enhanced the rollout and implementation of SFTAS efforts to encourage state governments to meet the assessment criteria to qualify for grants, rewarding public-sector reforms (for more on specific contributions see Aremu, 2022, and PERL, 2020a, 2020b, 2020d, 2020e). PERL's technical support role was recognized explicitly in the original SFTAS project plan, which used a term capturing this synergy; "crowding in":

Crowding in complementary support from other development partners for the implementation of the proposed operation is foreseen, notably from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Union (EU). DFID, through its Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) project, will continue to provide critical TA [technical assistance] support to several states during the implementation of this Program. (World Bank, 2018a, p. 19)

PERL staff confirmed that this PERL–SFTAS engagement was mutually beneficial, with PERL producing assessments of its contribution to state's progress on each DLI target, and highlighting the value of the discretionary funds that achieving these benchmarks brought (PERL, 2020a, 2020b).

One long-standing aid programme's past support for state government reforms laid the foundations for their eligibility for grants from the other programme.

Indirect interaction effects involved PERL's longer-term track record in supporting state governance reforms, including predecessor DFID-funded programmes that promoted both multi-sectoral coalition-building and technical support. PERL's predecessor programme's support to Kaduna and Jigawa contributed to their notable transparency reforms prior to SFTAS, which laid the ground for those states' eligibility for SFTAS grants. While there is stronger evidence of synergy between PERL and SFTAS state transparency and accountability, PERL's long-term efforts also bolstered the capacity of civil society actors in the states to engage with the SFTAS-backed fiscal governance reforms, including notably through enabling participatory budgeting, especially in Jigawa and Kaduna. These budget preparation processes encouraged collaboration between civil society, state officials, and legislators, and developed feedback mechanisms on budget implementation and monitoring (Aremu, 2022, pp. 29–33; PERL, 2020d).⁹

Both aid programmes included goals that reinforced national and state government commitments to the multi-stakeholder Open Government Partnership (OGP).

An area of mutually reinforcing interaction effects between the two aid programmes involves their shared goal of supporting Nigeria's commitments to the OGP. With its emphasis on incentivizing state open government reforms, SFTAS was explicitly designed to bolster OGP implementation, as stated in its rationale (World Bank, 2018a, p. 7). PERL also supported implementation of OGP commitments by seconding staff to the Nigerian OGP Secretariat, who engaged directly with SFTAS.

Nigeria's 2019 OGP National Action Plan includes two specific commitments aligned with overlapping SFTAS and PERL goals: participatory budgeting (goal 15) and open contracting (goal 16). The participatory budgeting goals include: "ensure that budget planning, approval, implementation, monitoring, reporting, auditing meet the needs of citizens and that citizens have open access to budget information" (Nigeria Open Government Partnership, 2020, p. 16). The open-contracting goals include: "Improve accountability and transparency of public procurement processes, promote wider stakeholder participation and better service delivery through the implementation of OCDS" (international standards) (Nigeria Open Government Partnership, 2020, p. 22). Kaduna's sub-national level OGP Action Plan further bolstered its commitment to open government, involving both budget planning and procurement (Kaduna Open Government Partnership, 2018).

Three areas of *parallel play* between aid programmes were discernible—one involved direct engagement and the other two were indirect.

An attempt by one long-standing programme to influence another programme's benchmarks was not accepted.

The clearest case of parallel play between the two aid programmes was at SFTAS's design stage. Of the project's nine DLIs, only two refer to citizen participation (DLI 2 and DLI 6) and only one explicitly encourages citizen engagement (DLI 2). This limitation is partly explained by the fact that the SFTAS model is basically a supply-side public financial management (PFM) programme promoting mainly inward-facing changes, rather than emphasizing the engagement of citizens (or their legislators) in fiscal governance. PERL staff report that their programme attempted to encourage the World Bank to use more ambitious citizen-engagement benchmarks for its DLIs. One of the PERL actors involved in discussions with SFTAS during its design stage felt that SFTAS "was a bit blind on the legislative side [and] heavy on the government side," in the words of a PERL-ECP advisor in October 2020. From a PERL perspective, the DLIs could have more meaningfully captured the role of citizens and their engagement with fiscal governance across all DLIs, not just two. Even within those two, evidence of citizen participation in public hearings in the legislature does not feature in SFTAS DLIs' eligibility criteria. While there will have been many more inputs to

⁹For recent reporting on open budgeting in Jigawa, see Jigawa State Directorate of Budget and Economic Planning (2019).

and drivers of decisions in the SFTAS design than the views of PERL, this example represents a missed opportunity for greater synergy.

Though a long-standing aid programme identified a newer one's incentives for state governments as a reform opportunity, it had uneven influence over state actor capacity to meet the benchmarks for disbursement.

This is a case of overlapping aid programme goals that did not involve direct contact in practice. PERL's deep embeddedness with reformers in state governments and civil society, plus its efforts to engage with SFTAS, meant it was positioned to provide technical support for efforts to meet SFTAS' annual indicators which would allow state governments to meet the annual grant-funding criteria. Early in SFTAS, national-level PERL staff identified the World Bank-backed reform agenda as a potential target for action in the states (see PERL, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e).

The SFTAS-backed public-facing reforms (participatory budgeting and open contracting) are "bread and butter" for PERL, which had worked on them for years. Yet the first two years of SFTAS' third-party reviews of the two states' SFTAS targets registered uneven performance. DLI 2's targets were especially modest, relying on posting online reports on citizen engagement in budget consultations. Both states missed these targets in 2018, and Jigawa did so again in 2019. In spite of PERL's long-term efforts to strengthen citizen engagement in budget processes in these two states, reports of those efforts were not posted. Moreover, Jigawa and Kaduna were ranked first and second respectively in terms of their performance on budget transparency among all Nigerian states in a 2018 survey (Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre, 2019). Federal-level PERL staff reported that the "null score" was simply a matter of the state governments failing to publish online the public budget consultation by the SFTAS deadline—but for Jigawa, the state government did not publish reports on consultations in year 2 either.

In the case of the SFTAS public procurement/open contracting goal, a reform process PERL actively supported for years in both states, Jigawa missed two out of two performance ratings in 2018 (6.1 and 6.2). Kaduna met both targets in 2018 yet missed one of two of the same targets in 2019 (6.1) (World Bank, 2018b, 2020). This is a puzzling third-party monitoring finding, since that 6.1 target focused on state procurement laws and Kaduna's law did not change between 2018 and 2019. Another issue with the third-party monitoring is that it registers Jigawa as having met the open-contracting data-disclosure goal in 2019, when in fact that platform was just beginning to be operational, with little information by the end of 2020.¹⁰ Of the two public-facing SFTAS targets, the two states missed five of their 14 components over two years (World Bank, 2020). That said, both states' performance was stronger in 2019. The uneven performance suggests that PERL could have been more consistently proactive in encouraging state governments to meet the targets formalized in 2018 (World Bank, 2018b). Meanwhile, aside from SFTAS benchmarks, in practice the Kaduna open-contracting portal—designed by a leading national CSO in the field (Public and Private Development Center)—made major progress by 2020, including high levels of usage (Budeshi Hub, 2020).

The overlapping aid programmes differed in their criteria for assessing progress on the same fiscal governance reform issues.

SFTAS and PERL apply different criteria to assess progress on fiscal governance reform in both Kaduna and Jigawa. Comparing PERL's assessments on fiscal governance (through three distinct but connected PFM-related assessments) and the SFTAS assessments of its DLIs (which are similarly PFM-related) gives a mixed picture. The SFTAS assessments led to the release of SFTAS grants for each DLI target achieved. PERL derived an average score from its three PFM-related assessments and compared this with the proportion of SFTAS grants received (i.e. what DLI results were met through the independent verification assessments). The assessments for 2018 were aligned in Kaduna and very different in Jigawa. PERL staff attributed this to the failure of the state to meet reporting deadlines, though the lag persisted in the following year, suggesting other bottlenecks. To summarize, PERL's substantial support for citizen engagement did not directly lead the Jigawa state government to meet its quite modest SFTAS reporting targets.

An area of *disconnect* between the two programmes also stood out.

¹⁰By mid-2021, the website included much more contract data (Jigawa State Due Process & Project Monitoring Bureau, n.d.).

A state government met one donor programme target with a new procurement law that ignored and potentially undermined the other donor programme's long-term open-contracting efforts.

The 2019 SFTAS-induced procurement law in Jigawa is a significant case of a disconnect between two aid programmes, despite their shared goals (see Aremu, 2022, pp. 37–38). The key SFTAS benchmark for procurement reform offered one of its largest grants to states whose laws aligned with a United Nations template (known as the UNCITRAL Model Law). Before SFTAS, PERL had a very substantial track record in Jigawa, working with both civil society and the state government to build collaborative oversight institutions and transparency practices to improve public procurement, but this was not codified into law. The state's Public Procurement Law, passed to meet the first SFTAS deadline by December 2019, did not recognize or consolidate the prior track record of reform practices, eliminating checks and balances by concentrating power with the governor. Despite the law's approval by the SFTAS third-party monitor, it lacked key elements specified in the programme benchmarks: an independent public procurement board and e-procurement.¹¹ The law also included new loopholes that could limit the CSO participation in oversight, established over many years by PERL (Aremu, 2022, p. 38). PERL in Jigawa did not engage the state government in a debate on the draft legislation to include safeguards and institutionalize existing public oversight practices (Aremu, 2022). The SFTAS “one-size-fits-all” model ended up rolling back PERL-led reform progress that had not been embodied in law, and PERL in Jigawa missed the opportunity to influence the state's development of the new law.

5.2 | Pakistan: Synergy

The Pakistan research identified synergistic interaction effects between the two aid programmes analysed, with both direct and indirect engagement patterns.

As noted above, the programmes shared the same donor and implementing agency, and overlapped during the end of one programme and the start of the other. These factors could explain the lack of explicit disconnects or parallel play, but taking this for granted or assuming that these commonalities would guarantee synergy between programmes overlooks complex intra-donor dynamics and assumes donors and implementing agencies are consistent across their portfolios.

Common use of human resources and social capital across the two aid programmes, accompanied by an adaptive approach, provided mutual benefits.

AAWAZ recruited and trained people whom CDIP then mobilized and hired, which significantly extended CDIP's reach for election registration and awareness campaigns. The shared human resources began at the top (Khan & Qidwai, 2021, p. 28). DAI implemented both programmes, working closely with staff to adapt on-the-ground strategies based on community and CSO feedback secured through strong communication channels. As AAWAZ closed, CDIP “used the human resources generated through the AAWAZ programme” (Khan & Qidwai, 2021, p. 51), hiring former field staff from AAWAZ's four main NGO consortium partners as CDIP Cluster Coordinators and recruiting AAWAZ-trained Agahi Centre Resource Persons as social mobilizers for voter registration and education campaigns (Khan & Qidwai, 2021, p. 51). The continuity in staffing between AAWAZ and CDIP enabled the transfer of operational experience and institutional memory, as well as social capital that had been steadily built with communities. This not only improved outcomes for CDIP but increased its value for money since DAI did not need to set up or train a mid-tier administration (Khan & Qidwai, 2021, p. 47). The two programmes only briefly overlapped, but DAI's adaptive approach, relying on inputs from consortium partners and field staff common to both programmes, also informed some design changes in AAWAZ in its final stage.

The structures and networks that one programme developed provided the foundation for the other programme.

CDIP launched its voter-registration work as AAWAZ wound down. Structures and personal networks developed for AAWAZ (for example identity card campaigns and voting education) were repurposed for CDIP's voter-registration

¹¹For details on SFTAS benchmarks for each DLI, see States Fiscal Transparency, Accountability and Sustainability (n.d.) and World Bank (2020).

programme. After AAWAZ ended, CDIP continued to build on and leverage AAWAZ's citizen outreach, mobilization networks, and programme model (Khan & Qidwai, 2021, p. 52). It did so by using AAWAZ's Aagahi Centres to register women voters and reach more than 100,000 citizens for civic voter education. These shared networks and structures provided CDIP with an advantage over other voter-registration efforts in the run-up to the 2018 election. Interview respondents credit DAI's adaptive programming approach as having motivated the strategy to use the AAWAZ-supported Aagahi Centres for CDIP voter registration (Khan & Qidwai, 2021, p. 47).

Sympathetic district-level government officials were primed to work with one programme because of the relationships independently developed by the other.

AAWAZ programme staff developed strategic relationships with some sympathetic government officials and non-state authority figures. Some of the same government representatives that had been active in AAWAZ forums then participated on CDIP district voter-education committees (Khan & Qidwai, 2021, p. 52). The continuation of opportunities to engage with elected officials from one programme to the next, as well as CDIP's establishment of citizen forums, helped to offset traditional elite capture of voice and accountability opportunities in local settings (Khan & Qidwai, 2021, p. 63). AAWAZ invested in these relationships to achieve its specific programmatic goals and not with the foresight that these could be leveraged for future programmes. Still, their prior establishment meant that CDIP could leverage the already existing linkages and build from them (at least in the short term and within the limits of these officials' influence) to gain more support for its activities.

The impacts of an aid programme were sustained after its end by the overlapping activities of another programme.

After AAWAZ ended, the activities of CDIP continued to reinforce the AAWAZ aims to further the political engagement of women and marginalized groups. For AAWAZ this had been a component of its broader approach to gender empowerment, whereas for CDIP increasing women's voter registration was a component of its commitment to increasing direct citizen participation in democratic processes. Aagahi Centre Resource Persons trained for AAWAZ developed skills and networks that they then leveraged for CDIP's voter-registration work. The interaction effects of the two programmes strengthened women's capacity to counter patriarchal and elite capture of democratic processes at the local level by providing them opportunities to engage with elected officials and participate in voting.

5.3 | Synthesis

Here we bring together findings from Pakistan and Nigeria and complement them with evidence drawn from AGIR II and MASC, the cases from Mozambique.

We observed three characteristics that were common in the examples of **synergy**. First, synergy emerged when **one aid programme clearly capitalized on the institutional memory and history of engagement by another programme**. This occurred in Pakistan where CDIP took up and built on programme infrastructure, human resource investments, and networks built by the earlier AAWAZ I; and in Nigeria where states proved eligible for SFTAS because of previous PERL support to state capacity and state-civil society coalitions. We also observed it in Mozambique, where local CSOs met AGIR's fairly demanding eligibility criteria for core support and project funding thanks to earlier MASC investments, which enabled them to gain formal registered status and develop their administrative and grant-management capacities.

Second, **organizations which were implementers and/or grantees of more than one programme created indirect synergies themselves, exercising agency** by co-ordinating their management methods to seek efficiencies, with positive effects for operations. This occurred in two consecutive programmes in Pakistan, where AAWAZ's implementer DAI then developed and implemented CDIP, basing it on foundational AAWAZ systems and structures to increase operational efficiencies. We also observed this in the two simultaneous programmes in Mozambique, where some grantees of both programmes integrated their approaches to managing them, without either of the donor's involvement.

Third, **programmes pursuing a deliberately adaptive approach allowed for more synergistic ways of working.** This is the case in Pakistan where AAWAZ created new spaces for citizen empowerment in parallel to non-functioning state spaces, and CDIP later repurposed the AAWAZ-supported Aagahi centres to underpin efforts to expand democratic political spaces. This is also the case in Nigeria, where PERL's adaptive design enabled identifying and responding to the SFTAS approach towards incentivizing public-sector reforms.

We found two scenarios in which **parallel play** emerged. In these, **programmes have not effectively taken advantage of the other's operating space or experiences, or of opportunities presented.** In Nigeria, the SFTAS "one-size-fits-all" model did not align with the depth of the PERL's adaptive support for citizen engagement. As a consequence, SFTAS did not position itself to take advantage of the opportunities that PERL had created by empowering citizens to hold state actors to account. We also found evidence for this more broadly in Mozambique, where AGIR and MASC worked in parallel without forging a common vision or joint efforts, thereby missing opportunities to reinforce one another's progress towards their shared objectives. Moreover, had AGIR's donors joined forces with the pre-existing MASC, together they might have added more to the collective countervailing force of Mozambican civil society. Instead, they created segmentation along the lines of different funding sources and competing donor identities. This finding does not discount the kinds of circumstantial factors—such as operating constraints or political economy factors—that could limit one donor or programme from leveraging the opportunities of another. The bottom line here is to point out that because of having operated in parallel, opportunities that could have proved advantageous to one or more of the programmes remained untapped.

We also identified parallel play **where one aid donor or implementor is so bound by its own rules, foundations, and procedures that it failed to recognize or interact with those of the other actor (e.g. design business case; donor reporting requirements).** We see this in Nigeria, where despite the two programmes' significant thematic and geographic overlap, opportunities were missed to collaborate on disbursement indicators. Such collaboration would have more strongly leveraged better SFTAS performance in both states as well as avoiding giving conflicting signals to the state governments about the importance of aspects as fundamental as public engagement with budget processes and citizen oversight of public procurement processes.

Disconnect occurred where **one aid programme's narrow results focus undermined another's long-term efforts, while the more adaptive programme was not adaptive enough to head off that threat.** The formulaic approach taken by SFTAS in Jigawa State in Nigeria to secure a procurement law led to the bar being set lower on public accountability standards than PERL's previous efforts had already established.

In Pakistan and Nigeria we identified a total of seven cases of synergy, three of parallel play, and one of disconnect (summarized in Table 1). If we add the more indicative, less thoroughly documented, findings from Mozambique, this rises to nine cases of synergy, four of parallel play, and one of disconnect. In the next section we conclude by discussing five propositions arising from the application of the interaction effects lens to these cases.

6 | CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study identified different kinds of interaction effects of aid programme efforts to bolster citizen action and accountability reforms by focusing on the effects of their overlapping actions in shared issue areas and sub-national territories. The patterns of these interaction effects included mutually reinforcing synergy, "parallel play," and disconnects. Five broad propositions emerge from using these categories of interaction effects as a lens to understand the effects of aid programmes (see Figure 1).

6.1 | Illumination

Applying the interaction effects lens to aid programmes can identify dynamics that would not be visible if any one aid programme were studied in isolation. The concept of interaction effects as a lens recalls the idea of "ways of

TABLE 1 Interaction effects in Nigeria and Pakistan.

Interaction Effects			
	Synergy <i>Interaction in which one programme's actions reinforce the other's</i>	Parallel play <i>The co-existence of aid programme actions within a shared issue area or territory, without reinforcement or convergence</i>	Disconnects <i>At least one aid programme actions undermine the other</i>
DIRECT INTERACTIONS: Contact between two or more aid programmes involving overlapping agendas and/or territories	<p>Nigeria: One aid programme's technical support enabled state governments to become eligible for another aid programme's grants.</p> <p>Pakistan: Common use of human resources and social capital across the two aid programmes, accompanied by an adaptive approach, provided mutual benefits.</p> <p>Pakistan: The programme structures and networks developed by one aid programme provided the foundation for the other.</p>	<p>Nigeria: An attempt by one long-standing aid programme to influence another aid programme's benchmarks was not accepted.</p>	
INDIRECT INTERACTIONS: Aid programme actions that involve overlapping issues, actors, and territories, without direct contact between each other	<p>Nigeria: One long-standing aid programme's past support for state government reforms laid the foundations for their eligibility for grants from the other donor.</p> <p>Nigeria: Both aid programmes included goals that grounded national and state government commitments to the multi-stakeholder Open Government Partnership.</p> <p>Pakistan: Sympathetic district-level government officials were primed to work with one programme because of the relationships independently developed by the other.</p> <p>Pakistan: The impacts of an aid programme were sustained after its end by the activities of another programme.</p>	<p>Nigeria: Though a long-standing aid programme identified a newer one's incentives for state governments as a reform opportunity, it had uneven influence over state actors' capacity to meet the benchmarks for disbursement.</p> <p>Nigeria: Two aid programmes differed in their criteria for assessing progress on the same fiscal governance reform issue.</p>	<p>Nigeria: A state government met one aid programme target with a new procurement law that ignored and potentially undermined the other aid programme's long-term open-contracting efforts.</p>

Source: the authors.

seeing"—a concept from the arts and humanities that stresses how a viewer's stance influences what they see (Berger et al., 1973). By broadening one's field of vision and questioning conventional assumptions, previously invisible patterns are rendered more visible. This lens allowed us to identify three distinct categories of interaction effects between the paired aid programmes and how they varied across the three countries. A similar perspective

adopted by Derbyshire and Williams (2021) enabled them to critically assess the extent and effectiveness of collaboration between DFID Nigeria's governance and sector programmes—yet their background study's finding about disconnects did not make it into the overall synthesis report (Piron et al., 2021), underscoring that a “way of seeing” is a deliberate choice. Furthermore, the “way of seeing” we offer here may be closer to the way that aid recipients themselves typically see donor actions. Cases of indirect synergy highlight their efforts to co-ordinate between donors and recognize the burden multiple donor relationships place on them to avoid disconnects.

6.2 | Accountability

The interaction effects lens for analysing aid actions for *accountability* draws attention to the relevance of the concept of “accountability ecosystems” introduced above. This research suggests that the scope of the concept should be broadened to explicitly include international aid actors, including those supporting sectoral aid programmes with accountability dimensions, not just those funding accountability-claiming by CSOs or accountability reforms within public institutions. For example, overlapping sectoral aid programmes not aligned with accountability reforms may result in parallel play or disconnects as well as synergies. This is corroborated by Derbyshire and Williams's (2021) research on DFID Nigeria, which found that although efforts to link sector-focused programmes in Nigeria generated positive gains, “there are also many instances of disconnection, where governance, health and education programmes have worked at cross purposes, to the point of duplicating and even undermining each other's work and impact” (Derbyshire & Williams, 2021, p. 9). Unlike this example, conventional evaluation approaches seek to determine only the impacts of specific aid programmes. This institutional priority tilts towards efforts to isolate the effects of specific aid agencies, which is in tension with the broader goal of understanding dynamics of citizen actions and accountability reforms.

6.3 | Broader dynamics

The interaction effects lens may be relevant for understanding the dynamics of aid programmes beyond the accountability and governance field. Some of our cases are aid programmes designed to strengthen governance reforms in order to achieve sector-focused objectives, such as improving education and health service delivery (e.g. PERL, Nigeria). This underscores the relevance of identifying the potential for synergy (and the risks of disconnects) between core public-sector reforms—as in the case of improvements in fiscal governance—and sector-specific initiatives. The Pakistan case studies show that donors and implementers saw sequential aid programmes overlapping in terms of issues and territories as “underpinning” sector-specific programming (e.g. in health and agriculture). Using our approach to identify interaction effects between public-sector governance and sectoral initiatives would open the lens even further—to see, for example, what happens when different donors are active in the same sector (e.g. health, agriculture, education).

6.4 | Adaptation

The interaction effects lens helps to extend the aid industry idea of adaptive management to include the possibility that one aid programme may or may not adapt to others' actions as well as to the political context and to ongoing learning about what works. Adaptive aid programmes are designed to manoeuvre around, within and with the political economy of social and political actors, state actors, and other powerful interests. This research included aid programmes widely seen as adaptively managed, notably AAWAZ and CDIP in Pakistan (Khan & Qidwai, 2021) and PERL in Nigeria (Punton & Burge, 2018; Williams et al., 2019). In the Pakistan case, AAWAZ and CDIP were both

designed with an adaptive management approach, which enabled synergies. In Nigeria, PERL made efforts to adapt to SFTAS in overlapping states and issue areas, although not far enough to avoid the disconnect noted above. Yet in the research and evaluation literature—as with the concept of the “accountability ecosystem”—the notion of adaptive management has been applied primarily to individual aid programmes—seen in isolation from other aid programmes even where they share similar goals. This bounded approach limits the prospects for identifying synergy between aid programmes, missed opportunities, and the risks of disconnects.

6.5 | Strategy

The interaction effects lens can inform aid strategies that maximize synergy while minimizing disconnects. The findings above demonstrate that synergy between different aid programmes is indeed possible—as are disconnects. Specifically, the most significant examples of synergy found include CDIP building on AAWAZ's skills and relationships in Pakistan and PERL's technical assistance to achieve SFTAS goals in Nigeria. The research also found one case of disconnect—involving public procurement in Jigawa, where SFTAS targets undermined PERL's previous progress. The category of “parallel play”—donor actions that unfold in shared issue areas and spaces without either synergy or disconnects—suggests the potential for greater synergy in all three countries. Had the research adopted a broader scope that included non-accountability-related donor interventions, it might have identified more cases of disconnect.

6.6 | Conclusion

The interaction effect lens points to several clear implications for development policy and actors. First, aid agencies need to be seen and to see themselves as political actors within the accountability ecosystem, and part of the context to which other donors and their programmes should adapt. They need to invest in the “peripheral vision” needed to see what is happening outside of their direct sphere of influence. Second, there is a need for research on and evaluation of aid programmes to explicitly look across multiple programmes. Recall that the conventional point of departure for analysing aid-funded governance initiatives is to study them individually—without addressing the simultaneous efforts of *other* initiatives to achieve similar goals, or to work with the same actors. Further multi-programme research could productively go beyond the observation and classification of interaction effects achieved here to explore what leads to these effects—for example, what drives more synergistic actions and orientations by aid agencies. Third, there is a need for more attention on the relevance of interaction effects for understanding the dynamics and impacts of aid programmes in practice—and the potential to use this lens to increase synergies and avoid disconnects.

This exploration looked beyond aid agency intentions and/or diplomatic co-ordination to make visible possible interactions between the results of the programmes they support their efforts—whether or not the programmes engaged with one other directly. It also demonstrated how programme research and evaluations could benefit from broadening their lens beyond single-programme studies to understand the combined effects of multiple actors. We found that patterns of interaction effects range from mutually reinforcing synergy and “parallel play” to disconnects. The broader “way of seeing” offered here allows researchers to ask: when and why is the whole greater than the sum of the parts? This seems an especially relevant question to ask in the contexts we studied—where multiple aid agencies and their myriad programmes are attempting to improve governance in difficult conditions, where the legitimacy of governance actors and practices is more in question, and where the costs of failure might therefore be higher.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the time and insights offered by research participants and stakeholders, and thank John Gaventa and Anuradha Joshi for their helpful reviews of previous drafts. Authors are listed in reverse alphabetical order.

FUNDING INFORMATION

The Action for Empowerment and Accountability research programme and this article were funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office –FCDO, formerly DFID) project number 204427–101. The opinions are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the UK government.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

This article draws largely from published case studies completed as part of the same project. Additional data supporting the findings are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This article reports analysis of primary data. The ethics of data collection and analysis were approved by the University of Sussex Research Ethics Committee. Persons from whom data was collected gave their free, prior, and informed consent and the data and analysis has been anonymised to protect their identities.

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How to cite this article: Nadelman, R., McGee, R., Khan, A., Gonçalves, E., Fox, J., Burge, R., Aremu, F. A., & Anderson, C. (2023). International aid actions for accountability: Identifying interaction effects between programmes. *Development Policy Review*, 00, e12680. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12680>