Working Within Constraints: Examining the Effectiveness of Local Network Governance in Addressing Complex Social Challenges

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Abstract

Despite sustained efforts, the pervasiveness of complex social challenges continues to confound governments at all scales. While the local manifestations are unique to socio-political and geographic context, issues such as homelessness, poverty, and food insecurity are global in nature. The centrality of local government in identifying and addressing complex social challenges is at the forefront of global agendas like the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is broad agreement on the importance of local governments, yet, how to equip them with the resources and autonomy required to meet complex social challenges remains contentious. Indeed, governance reforms are often based on normative arguments void of nuanced discussion about unique contextual considerations. Prescriptions from the Global West, without significant adaptations, are prone to failure when transplanted to different socio-political environments.

This research investigates the effectiveness of local government facilitated network governance that leverage local institutional actors to overcome inherent resource and capacity constraints. Employing an institutionalist perspective, this research focuses specifically on governance networks that include civil society actors in a meaningful way yet center the role of local government. The objective of this dissertation is to empirically examine local governance in cities around the world and investigate the question: how are local governments leveraging local institutional actors to identify and address complex social problems? To meet its objective, this dissertation examines the role of local government in catalyzing network governance relationships, based on open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability, to identify local challenges and address them in locally relevant ways that leverage the resources within local institutional actors.
This dissertation employs qualitative methods in distinct geographic and socio-political environments. The research began with a broad focus on policy documents from participants in a multilateral collective and then narrowed into case studies in two distinct locations, Ghana, and Canada. Overall, this dissertation demonstrates that local governments are under-utilizing local governance actors and when they do catalyze networks there is insufficient transparency and a default to hierarchical accountability. As the complexity of the social challenge increases, governance networks benefit from being facilitated by non-governmental institutions.

**Keywords:** Local Government, Open Government, Network Governance, Urban Governance, Civil Society, Canada, Ghana
Summary for Lay Audience

Complex social challenges, such as homelessness, poverty, food insecurity and precarious employment, are pervasive in countries around the world. Even though local governments are not often constitutionally or legislatively responsible for identifying or addressing these challenges, major global agendas, like the New Urban Agenda (NUA), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Open Government Partnership (OGP), expect them to take a central role. A big question is how to equip local governments to meet the increasing complexity of social challenges. Global governance reforms have historically been based on assumed benefits, versus acknowledging context-based limitations. Without significant adaptations, reforms from Western implementers are prone to fail when brought to different contexts.

This dissertation begins from a place where local governments operate with resource and capacity constraints, but are responsible for addressing social challenges, and therefore, need to leverage local networks of civil society actors. The research uses open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability, to examine how local governments use network governance relationships to identify local challenges and address them in locally relevant ways, using existing resources within their network partners.

Beginning with a broad focus on policy documents from participants in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local Program, this research then narrows into case studies in two distinct locations: Ghana and Canada. Overall, this dissertation demonstrates that local governments are under-utilizing local governance actors, and when they do catalyze networks, their effectiveness is limited by a lack of transparency and a default to hierarchical accountability. As the complexity of the social challenge increases, more harm is caused by local
government control and leadership. Promising examples of network governance found in this research exist outside of the control of local government, and are facilitated by non-governmental organizations, such as academic institutions or civil society organizations.
Co-Authorship Statement

The following thesis contains a manuscript that has been accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Chapter Four was developed from a previously submitted article that was initially written for this thesis. The citation for the article is:

**Chapter Four:**


Chapter Four was written by Merlin Chatwin with Dr. Mary Francoli as the co-author. Chatwin was the principal author and performed the research design, data collection, and analysis.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The driving motivation for this dissertation is to uncover opportunities for local institutions to better meet the complex social challenges of underserved and vulnerable people in cities. The seeds of this comparative research were planted while I was working with local governments in Ghana to increase revenues from property rates and other taxes to facilitate local development initiatives. The word for ‘democracy’ in Akan-Twi (the most widely spoken local language in Ghana) is ka-bi-ma-menka-bi, which roughly translated means, “I speak and then you speak” (Awal & Paller, 2016). It is a call for a spirited exchange of civic and political ideas between equals and a desire to ensure that those most affected by government decisions are included in the decision-making process. In a country with a maturing democracy and economy, Ghanaian local governments struggle to live up to this ideal, and significant capacity and resource deficits impede their ability to meet the complex social challenges of the most vulnerable residents.

After returning to Canada and working with local governments as a researcher and a practitioner, I noticed similar struggles to identify and address complex social challenges. Although Canada is considered a mature economy and democracy, local governments are often tasked with responsibilities that exceed their resources and expertise. Extensive literature has explored the need to reform local government, proposing new revenue sources and new legislative and constitutional recognition of responsibilities, though less research has focused on
how local governments endeavour to meet the urgent needs of underserved and underrepresented people that cannot wait for structural change.

The overarching objective of this dissertation was to empirically examine how local governments in diverse geographic and socio-political contexts around the world engage with local actors to identify and address complex social challenges. Specifically, this dissertation aimed to develop a deep understanding of how local governments work within their current constraints to meet the needs of their most vulnerable and underrepresented residents. This research contributes to understanding the factors that affect the ability of local government to engage with local institutional actors to leverage their unique proximity and resources in addressing the local manifestations of global challenges.

1.1.2 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides a broad introduction to the research presented throughout this integrated manuscript dissertation. It is divided into four parts. The first part presents an overview of the constraints local governments operate within across the globe and the conceptualization of complex social challenges in this dissertation. The second part presents urban governance theory (UGT) as the theoretical framework applied to address the overarching research question. The open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability and the problem driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) approach are introduced as the structured analytical lenses employed in the empirical application of UGT (Andrews, et al., 2012). The third part of the chapter provides an overview of the research, which is divided into three studies across three manuscripts that are the centerpiece of this dissertation. The chapter concludes with a description of the organization of this dissertation.
1.2 Background

1.2.1 Local Government Constraints

Local governments and the systemic limitations they face must be viewed within the social, economic, historical, and political environment that they operate within (Knox & McCarthy, 2012). Depending on the context, local governments face limited fiscal resources, low levels of institutional capacity, and a lack of multi-level government cooperation and integration (Kanuri et al., 2016; Westman, et al., 2019). Modern governance relies on local governments, despite their capacity constraints, as they have a proximal advantage and are the best positioned level of government to develop place-based policy to address inequity and offer inclusive, participatory, and responsive governance (Fessha & Kirkby, 2015; Dam, & Wayland, 2019).

Supranational institutions, multilateral collectives, and global agendas continue to rely on local governments to address pervasive complex social challenges (Thompson, 2021). For example, the New Urban Agenda (NUA), a global agreement on urban development, housing and sustainability adopted by 167 countries, refers to “local government” 31 times and acknowledges that the success of the agenda’s commitments depend on effective implementation at the local level (UN Habitat, 2016). One of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (goal #11) is, “making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,” and the local implications of many of the other 16 goals place local governments at the forefront of achieving them (UNHCR, 2017).

Similarly, a multilateral collective called the Open Government Partnership (OGP) launched a local-government-focused technical support and collaboration program called the OGP Local (Robinson, & Heller, 2015), in recognition that vital political, economic, and social change happens in local space and place (Dam, & Wayland, 2019). The OGP positions itself as a
convenor of national and local governments, in collaboration with local civil society organizations, to secure commitments to action toward more transparent, accountable, and participatory governance. Policy documents from the OGP Local program were used as the foundation for the first research manuscript in this dissertation.

While local governments as institutions are central to the delivery of global social and environmental agendas, and there is broad agreement on their importance, the practice of supporting their ability to perform this role is mired in divergent epistemologies (Andrews, et al., 2015; Barnett, & Parnell, 2016). How local governments should be provided with the resources and autonomy they require to meet the increasing complexity and pervasiveness of social challenges remains contentious. When the focus shifts from establishing the importance of cities to the implementation and evaluation of local governance, the complex, multi-scalar, and multi-sectoral composition of cities uncovers differing levels of commitment to equipping local governments for success (Barnett, & Parnell, 2016).

Driven by supranational forces of neoliberalism and austerity, local governments are entrenched in ineffective rational-technical approaches to decision-making and service provision (Head, & Alford, 2015; Bauwens, & Onzia, 2017). The space of local government jurisdiction is often developed in equal-sized geographic areas within which the needs of residents are identified, defined, and institutionalized in a standardized way (Raco, & Flint, 2001). The experimentation and iteration needed to develop successful interventions are fundamentally at odds with the structure of local government, which emphasizes predictability, routinization, and bureaucracy (Lodge, & Wegrich, 2015). Though the promoted benefits of the decentralization of authority and decision-making are spread through a wide range of global actors, networks, and supranational polities; they are based on normative arguments and a nuanced discussion about
the contextual limitations is absent (Plehwe et al., 2006; Westman, et al., 2019). Primarily, a focus on spatial functionality ignores the importance of local circumstances that form a sense of place (Raco, & Flint, 2001). From a human geography perspective, the concepts of place and sense of place are used to explain connections and perceptions that residents have about the norms and defining features of a geographic area (Gregory et al., 2009). Thus, an understanding of the tensions between place as experienced by residents and space as created by local government jurisdiction is critical to research on local government.

Prescriptions for reforms from the West are prone to failure when transplanted in different contexts without significant adaptation because the operating environment in these contexts is influenced by a complex interplay of factors that are fundamentally different from the environment in which the policy script originated. Further, there is no one ‘right’ local government structure (Raco, & Flint, 2001). Instead, this dissertation focuses on investigating an approach for local governments to collaborate with local governance actors to develop place-based solutions to locally relevant challenges. This collaboration requires an understanding of the contexts and the historically grounded local socio-political relations (Imrie, & Raco, 1999; Raco, & Flint, 2001).

Despite the recognition of the centrality of their role, local governments worldwide continue to operate with limited autonomy, capacity, and resources while facing increasingly complex responsibilities that often fall outside of their legislated responsibilities. This research considers these constraints as contributing factors in the inability of local governments to identify and address the local manifestations of complex social challenges.
1.2.2 Complex Social Challenges

Complex social challenges are defined as multilayered issues, with multiple actors, that are resistant to traditional interventions and require systemic and collaborative approaches to their solution (Rittel, & Webber, 1973; Zimmerman, et al., 1998; Head & Alford, 2015). The New Urban Agenda identifies the following global complex social challenges: poverty and hunger, social inequalities, gender inequality and lack of power, homelessness, living conditions in slums, and unsafe and insufficient water and sanitation (UN Habitat, 2016). While these challenges are global, their local manifestations are unique and are influenced by a range of complexities, including political tensions, power-sharing, administrative capacity constraints, and financial limitations that require an intimate understanding of the local context. Existing studies suggest that even when locally relevant problems are identified, a catalyzing event or destabilization of the status quo are often required before addressing the problem becomes a priority (Lee, 2013; Andrews, 2018).

Complex problems have three common features: They do not have an obvious answer; they contain embedded assumptions about a situation; and they comprise a challenge that demands an innovative response (Zimmerman et al., 1998). Complex social challenges are not linear in nature; they contain multiple and diverse consequences and are entrenched in social and cultural norms. Identifying these challenges as complex allows governments to acknowledge that they cannot be solved with technical solutions, brings assumptions held about the problem to the surface, and increases the space for innovative and collaborative approaches. Literature on social justice and inclusive governance maintains that identifying and addressing complex social challenges requires meaningful public participation from a network of local actors, with an
emphasis on the participation of individuals or groups most impacted by these challenges (Dahl, 2006; Lee, 2013; Van Hemelrijck, 2013).

Due to rapid urbanization and the identification of cities as “engines of growth” for countries’ gross domestic product, cities are pushed to supply increasingly sophisticated infrastructure to compete in the global market; while, at the same time, mitigate the consequences and the inevitable marginalization of large numbers of the urban poor (Hennigan, 2017). This dissertation embraces the complex and dynamic nature of cities and proposes that urban governance theory (UGT), when infused with additional conceptual lenses, is sufficiently adaptable to guide empirical research on the way local governments address resource and capacity constraints through collaboration with local institutions.

1.3 Theoretical Framework for the Study of Local Governance Networks

This research is based on the belief that regardless of the maturity of a democracy, identifying and addressing complex social challenges requires the participation of a broad network of actors, including local government, with a privileged position for traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations who live with the negative effects of the challenge. As Davis (2016, p. 26) states, “Whenever you conceptualize social justice struggles, you will always defeat your own purposes if you cannot imagine the people around whom you are struggling for as equal partners.” As the complexity of the challenge increases, so does the need for a meaningful participatory role for those most impacted by it and the institutions that serve them. Despite global commitments to participatory governance for all, (e.g., Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 21), research indicates that residents who participate in local government processes rarely reflect the diversity of the community. As a result, the unique
challenges of vulnerable populations are often not recognized (United Nations, 1948; Lee, 2013; Awal, & Paller, 2016)

The concept of “governance” has been coopted by global institutions and considered a normative ideal to be toiled for in pursuit of “good governance.” This research reclaims the term as part of a localized approach to addressing intractable challenges in cities. Urban governance is broadly concerned with why cities are the way they are and how the actions and interactions of local government and other institutions involved in civic matters influence decision-making. Situating the notion of governance within the realm of global - and local-government discourse, governance is no longer a tool of neoliberalism; it becomes a part of a theoretical framework for empirical research on localized government reform and progress. This hyper-localization of governance discourse can serve to counter the broad prescriptions of the good governance narrative that is globally and uncritically championed. This research does not aim to contribute to an idealized or normative vision of good governance, rather it aims to identify complex social challenges and the underlying local government capacity and resource deficits that contribute to their pervasiveness. Shami (2003, p. 80) captures the underlying ethos of this research:

This research should not aim at providing ready-made models of urban governance that can be “replicated,” but rather provide a model of how to work on “local” issues in “local” ways. What can be replicated is the approach and the philosophy behind it but not the procedures and activities.

UGT posits that in response to the constraints of local government there is need for policy-implementing networks and networked forms of governance. Sorensen and Torfing (2009, p. 236) define governance networks as “mutually dependent, but operationally autonomous actors from state, market, and civil society, who interact through conflict-ridden negotiations that
take place within an institutionalized framework of rules, norms, shared knowledge…and contribute to the production of public value”. To succeed, governance networks must address ambiguity around authority and harness tensions between disparate perspectives and objectives (Christensen, & Lægreid, 2007; Ingrams et al., 2020). While this level of collaboration is limited within traditional governance structures, it is a vital component of network governance and is critical for ensuring equitable and sustainable societies (Glover et al., 2016).

As a research perspective, UGT is adaptable to a range of network approaches, from primarily government-led networks to collective action networks in service of unmet needs. UGT offers guidance in understanding the institutional underpinnings that facilitate or limit urban governance; yet, it requires support from more structured analytical lenses for comparative research. To address this gap, this dissertation integrates the open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability in its analysis of governance networks.

While democratic governance is a contested concept that is debated by scholars, “these dissenting views about democratization converge at the essential ingredients of dialoguing, participation, transparency, accountability and legitimacy” (Fuseini, 2016, p.29). The tenet of transparency is comprised of two parts: access to government information and access to government processes and decision-making. Transparency is necessary for meaningful civic participation to occur as residents need to have the necessary information and know when and how to participate. When residents are involved in government process, it leads to an increase in accountability for public services and expenditures. Further, the problem driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) approach is used to assess how local governments identify locally relevant complex social challenges and engage a network to develop and iterate upon potential solutions (Andrews et al., 2012). PDIA suggests that locally relevant problems require contextually
appropriate solutions that are best developed by local governance actors that understand the socio-political context and can experiment and iterate on interventions. This dissertation uniquely integrates open government and PDIA lenses with a UGT framework in comparative research.

While a significant amount of urban governance literature has been developed in and is biased toward the West, open government principles have demonstrated their adaptability to diverse local government contexts, and PDIA was developed for and is primarily used in international development government reform (Andrews et al., 2012, 2015, 2016; Ingrams et al., 2020). The integration of non-Western perspectives in the theoretical framework that guided this research was imperative, with its focus on a global perspective; local governments in Ghana; and a Western context, local governments in Canada.

This integrated-article dissertation comprises three manuscripts that correspond with each of these foci. The first manuscript uses data from 15 participating jurisdictions in the OGP Local program and demonstrates the utility of the theoretical framework in examining the local expressions of global complex social challenges in distinct geographical and socio-political environments. While the first manuscript provides a breadth of empirical data, the second and third manuscripts provide in-depth empirical data from comparative case studies in Ghana and Canada.

1.4 The Integrated Articles

As noted in the introduction, the objective for this dissertation is to understand how local governments can work within their current constraints to leverage local governance actors to identify and address urgent complex social challenges. This dissertation focuses on the role of local government as an institution in distinct geographical and socio-political contexts. It begins
with a global perspective on the features of local government strategies and action plans engaging local governance actors and then narrows the focus to in-depth case studies in two distinct democratic environments, Ghana, and Canada. The selection of these contexts and the methodology and study parameters are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. As an integrated-article dissertation, each study is presented in one of the three manuscripts in Chapters, 4, 5, and 6. The following is an outline of the three manuscripts.

1.4.1 Research Objective One:

The aim of the first study, which is presented in the first manuscript (Chapter 4), was to understand how OGP Local program participants leverage local governance actors to collaboratively develop strategies to address complex social challenges. The first study employed document analysis to critically examine the action plans of 15 OGP Local participants, to assess the predominant themes that guide the collaboration between local governments and governance actors in their efforts to identify and address complex social challenges. OGP Local program participants represent democratic governments in diverse socio-political environments that are geographically dispersed across five continents. The critical examination of these policy documents was a rare opportunity to analyze coordinated and guided efforts to use local governance networks to address local challenges collaboratively.

The OGP launched its local program to support participating governments in collaborating with local governance actors, with the guidance of open government tenets, to address the most pressing concerns of their residents. In this study, the theoretical framework was used to achieve the research aim; in particular, the PDIA approach, was used to assess how effectively local governments leverage the unique resources of local actors when assuming leadership through a metagovernance approach to the collaborative process (Doberstein, 2013).
1.4.2 Research Objective Two:

The aim of the second study, which is presented in the Manuscript Two (Chapter 5), was to examine how local governments in Ghana leverage local governance actors to overcome resource and capacity constraints in identifying and addressing complex social challenges. This second study focused on two local governments in Ghana: The Tamale Metropolitan Assembly (TaMA) in the Northern Region and the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA) in the Western Region. These local governments were chosen as the cities they serve are similar in size yet distinct in their socio-cultural identity. Further, the cities are both the capitals of their respective political administrative regions but have not been as extensively researched as Accra, the national capital and seat of the Ghana Government. As a maturing democracy, Ghanaian governance is subject to a significant number of external experts touting global solutions to local challenges. Using empirical data from the two local governments this paper sought to answer the following research questions,

1) How do local governments in Ghana engage with local governance actors to identify complex social challenges within their jurisdictions?

2) How effectively do they leverage the unique resources of local governance actors to overcome their resource and capacity constraints to address these challenges?

During the preliminary desktop review and initial interviews, the questions were revised to narrow the focus from complex social challenges in general to challenges identified as specifically relevant to each of the jurisdictions. In Tamale, the research focused specifically on alleged witches as the complex social problem and in Sekondi-Takoradi the research focused on slum communities. The research confirmed the impediments associated with identifying and addressing complex social challenges, specifically the reluctance of the local government to
meaningfully engage with local institutional actors. Further, it highlighted the potential benefits of a broad network of local actors to devise local solutions to the identified challenges. However, the findings highlight that while local expertise exists in Ghana, the local governments in Sekondi-Takoradi and Tamale did not engage in the role of metagovernors nor did they leverage local governance actors to address challenges.

1.4.3 Research Objective Three:

The third study, which is presented in Manuscript Three (Chapter 6), aimed to examine the approach Canadian local governments take in leveraging the resources of local governance actors to identify and address complex social challenges related to homelessness. This study incorporated the perspectives of Canadian experts from local governments and the homelessness sector in a case study of two municipalities in Canada: Surrey, British Columbia, and Hamilton, Ontario. These municipalities were chosen due to their comparable population size and their status as steadily growing mid-sized cities in the shadow of global cities (i.e., Vancouver, British Columbia and Toronto, Ontario respectively). While global cities are well-researched and their approaches to complex social challenges are well-funded; mid-sized cities, such as Surrey and Hamilton, experience more constraints in their capacity and resources. Both cities operate within provincial-wide municipal charters, and they must abide by the same legislation as other cities of different sizes within the same province.

This manuscript focused on the approach that the two local governments took to address homelessness in their jurisdictions. Homelessness is used as a proxy for broader complex social challenges, as it is multidimensional and fundamental to the well-being of residents. Using empirical data from the two jurisdictions, the paper addressed two research questions:
1) How are Canadian cities leveraging local governance actors to identify and address local complex social challenges?

2) How effective are local governments as metagovernors within the Canadian context?

This research confirmed that the dynamics at higher levels of government have an impact on the ability of local governments to identify and address complex social challenges. The mandates handed down by provincial governments significantly influence the ability of the local governments to engage with local institutional actors in developing innovative solutions. However, the desired solution to the challenges of multi-level government was not less involvement from higher levels of government but more focus on clarity of roles and stability in the government-to-government relationships to foster more meaningful collaboration at the local level.

1.5 Overarching Themes in the Dissertation

The empirical research in this dissertation begins with an in-depth analysis of policy documents from 15 geographically distinct local government participants in the OGP Local program. It then presents four in-depth comparative case studies of two distinct environments: two in local governments in Ghana and two in local governments in Canada. As discussed in Section 1.1, the motivation for this research was to examine how local governments can better serve their vulnerable residents by identifying and addressing local complex social challenges. The literature reviewed for this research, aligned with UGT, indicate that local governments operate with insufficient resources and capacity. These resource gaps are global, but their manifestations are unique to the socio-political environment within which local governments operate, much like the local manifestations of complex social challenges. This research evaluated how local governments in distinct environments overcome these constraints. Previous studies
suggest that local governments commonly attempt to overcome their institutional deficits by engaging with local institutions that have a mandate to address the issues in question. This dissertation evaluates the catalyst(s), management, and foci of such local governance networks through OGP Local program participants and local governance actors in Ghana and Canada.

This research demonstrates the adaptability of the theoretical framework employed to the distinct socio-political environments in this study. One of the key findings in this research is that mandated network governance does not necessarily lead to effective collaboration between local governance actors. There are numerous preconditions that need to be met including a sufficient level of transparency on behalf of the local government and a re-thinking of how accountability is managed between local actors. Civil society organizations must be autonomous and not rely on government funding for their operations. The most effective examples of network governance emerged from non-standard collaborations where local government was forced to give-up some measure of control of the decisions and outcomes.

1.6 Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of seven interrelated chapters, including the present chapter. Chapter 2 presents the literature review and the theoretical framework that guided this research on the ways that local governments identify and address complex social challenges. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology employed in this dissertation, including an introduction to the OGP Local program and its participants, an overview of the case study areas (in Canada and Ghana) and a discussion of the legislative environments within which the local governments operate, as well as a summary of the key analytical approaches employed in this dissertation. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the three integrated research articles that address the key research
aims of the dissertation. Finally, a discussion of the overarching themes in the research findings and the conclusion of the dissertation are presented in Chapter 7.
References


CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to outline the broad theoretical perspectives within which the research is situated. As stated in Chapter 1, the centrality of local government in identifying and addressing complex social challenges is at the forefront of global agendas, such as the New Urban Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Open Government Partnership (UN Habitat, 2016). The normative benefits of the proximity of local governments to residents are touted as crucial in addressing the most pervasive challenges around the world. However, once we move past the broad agreement about the importance of local governments, disagreement quickly appears regarding how best to equip these institutions to meet the emerging needs of their residents.

While the word governance has been appropriated by international institutions and has been attached to the norms of ‘good governance’, urban governance theories are more interested in the shift from hierarchy and clearly demarcated boundaries between government and external institutions to a blurring of public–private boundaries (Peters, 2000; Kjaer, 2008). Urban governance theorists focus on the processes that networks and coalitions of community-based actors undertake to organize themselves and to make collective strategic choices about local economic and social processes in the macro-economic and macro-institutional contexts within which they operate (Kantor, & Savitch, 1993; Pierre 1999, 2005; John & Cole, 2000; Kearns & Paddison, 2000; Kjaer, 2008). Critics highlight that most urban governance theories have a Western bias and originate in neoliberal austerity; for example, the regime theory focuses on
private sector involvement and emerges from the unique context of American cities (Stone, 1993, 2008). However, urban governance theories are evolving and are being infused with scholarship from developing and emerging countries as well (e.g., Lindell, 2008). There is a resurgence of interest in networked forms of governance that, due to their heterogeneity, are often loosely categorized as post-new public management (Ingrams et al., 2020).

The theoretical framework for this research is based on urban governance theory, with a globally infused view of network governance (See Figure 2.1). The open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability are used as guideposts to ensure the practical applicability of this comparative research; to connect urban governance theory with the problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) view of local governments, as metagovernors engaging a broad network around locally relevant problems (Doberstein, 2013; Andrews et al., 2015). Local government endeavours to expand their authorizing environment through the facilitation of a broad network, to collaborate on experimental approaches with local governance actors, and to elicit rapid feedback for ongoing evaluation. From the high-level perspective of urban governance theory to the practical application of PDIA, this chapter presents the theoretical foundation for this empirical research on understanding how effectively local governments leverage local governance networks to identify and address complex social challenges.
The chapter begins with a detailed exploration of the concept of complex social challenges. Complex social challenges are pervasive and resistant to technical solutions. Common features include lack of an obvious answer to a challenge, embedded assumptions about a situation, and/or a challenge that demands an adaptive response (Zimmerman et al., 1998). While climate change, peak oil, global pandemics, and land use are complex challenges, this research primarily focused on social manifestations of complex challenges, such as poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, and inequality.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Complex Social Challenges

The most pervasive challenges in the public sector are logistically complex, politically contentious, and resistant to solutions; therefore, with sufficient resources and autonomy, these challenges contain opportunities for local governments to experiment with innovative approaches (Churchman, 1967; Rittel & Webber, 1973; Andrews et al., 2015). Complex social challenges, often referred to as “wicked problems,” are never permanently solved and require an ongoing
balancing of the multiple interests and values of actors, incomplete knowledge or construction of the problem, and inter-organizational and multi-level governance cooperation (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Head & Alford, 2015). Conklin (2006) suggests that wicked problems are not fully understood until after an intervention has been implemented and learnings have been gathered. Furthermore, each problem is unique, and there are neither right nor wrong answers. Traditional approaches are often reductionist in nature and only treat the symptoms, without acknowledging the damage that simplistic interventions can cause.

Globally, the frequency and intensity of complex social challenges, such as poverty, housing insecurity, social inequalities, gender inequity, health and livelihood disparities, and environmental decline, continue to confound governments at all levels. According to global agendas, such as the New Urban Agenda, these issues have eluded resolution despite the sustained efforts of international, national, subnational, and local governments around the world (UN Habitat, 2016). Identifying global challenges as wicked problems allows governments to acknowledge their complexity, to reveal assumptions about the problems, and to increase the space for innovative and collaborative approaches to their solution. This research acknowledges that the unique socio-political and geographic contexts of cities cause distinct manifestations of complex challenges; it concurrently suggests that the pervasive nature of these challenges and their resistance to change are a global issue. Regardless of geographic location, these challenges require new approaches that move away from linear and segmented interventions and recognize the complex interplay of contextual factors, their place and space, and the actors that perpetuate them.

Local governments around the world must be better equipped to respond to complex challenges, optimizing network resources and harnessing innovation to ensure the needs of
vulnerable residents are addressed. While this dissertation adopts a position that substituting
government leadership with other actors to address issues of inclusion and equity is detrimental,
it believes that active participation of civil society is necessary to identifying and addressing
complex social challenges. Early research on complex social challenges in social planning,
policy and geography suggest the need for a collaborative approach to addressing these
problems, but scholars highlight the inherent difficulties of collaboration (Rittel, 1972; Roberts,
2000; Mercer, 2003). Ferlie and colleagues (2013), whose views align with the focus of this
dissertation on metagovernance (See sub-section 2.2.2), contend that “managed” networks may
be the “least bad” approach to addressing complex social problems within a bureaucratic
framework.

The focus of this dissertation encompasses many distinct local governments that operate
within unique contextual environments, and the distinct forms that metagovernance takes in each
context are an integral component of this empirical research. An active and autonomous civil
society has the potential to equip and empower communities to participate in the development of
their city, to build social capital, and to influence urban design. Likewise, business, academia,
trade unions, and professional associations all have a role to play in the design and
implementation of policy and regulations to improve the living conditions and address the needs
of traditionally underserved populations. With this understanding of complex social challenges, I
now turn to the theoretical framework of this research on how to catalyze the necessary
cooperation of local governance institutions in addressing these challenges.

2.2.2 Urban Governance

One of the central requirements for effective comparative analysis is to develop
frameworks that are applicable to diverse settings and have substantial meaning and validity
(Peters, 2000; Kjaer, 2004; Kjaer, 2008). This requirement is especially pertinent to this research as it took place in distinct geographical environments. A frequent challenge of institutional research that includes governments at different stages of political and economic development is that frameworks from longer-established regions are imposed on different environments without proper acknowledgement of, or adaptation to, their contextual uniqueness. This not only occurs in the imposition of Western-developed frameworks on countries throughout Africa, South America, and Asia; it also occurs in the imposition of “best practices” for the implementation of government reforms. While this dissertation employs a single framework for research on globally dispersed Open Government Partnership Local program participants, and the Canadian and Ghanaian case studies, the framework is constructed through geographically diverse perspectives on urban governance. Each of the distinct components of the framework—urban governance theory, open government tenets, and PDIA—embodies a rejection of homogenized best practices that are developed in one context and imposed on another. Further, the empirical research presented in this dissertation demonstrates a responsive application of its framework to the distinct natures of the local government environments.

From an institutionalist perspective, this research locates the role of local government in urban governance. Broadly, urban governance focuses on why cities are the way they are at a particular moment in time, and how they are made to be the way they are through the actions of government and other institutions involved in civic matters (McCann, 2017). Institutions are often understood as formal organizations governed by documented rules. However, given the nature of the governance environments in this research, the concept of an institution is stretched to include informal organizations that are governed more by patterns of behaviours rather than formal rules (see Bevir, 2009). This is an intentional rejection of the often repressive and
dismissive attitude of local governments towards informal actors (Asante, & Helbrecht, 2019). Lindell (2008, p. 1880) proposes that urban governance encompasses “multiple sites where practices of governance are exercised and contested, a variety of actors, various layers of relations, and a broad range of practices of governance that may involve various modes of power, as well as different scales”. Lindell’s statement follows the lead of theorists (e.g., Rhodes, 1997) who define governance as inter-organizational networks convened around urban civics. At its root, this definition refers to the way in which power and authority are exercised “to manage the collective affairs of a community (or a country, society, or nation)” (Gisselquist, 2012, p. 4). Networked forms of governance have emerged from a critique of the new public management’s preoccupation with hierarchy and efficiency and the resultant inability to address pervasive social challenges that are emerging globally (McCarney, 2003; Head & Alford, 2014).

Seminal theory and scholarship in urban politics are derived from the political, economic, and social aspects of the American city and are primarily concerned with the synergy between political and corporate resources (Pierre, 2005, 2014). For example, Stone’s concept of urban regimes (i.e., the informal arrangements that allow government organizations and private interests to function together in carrying out local governance) has been a dominant theory in the study of urban politics and represents this bias toward American contexts (Stone, 2008; Pierre, 2014). Davies (2003) suggests that urban regimes are unlikely to emerge in political, economic, and institutional contexts that differ from the local government autonomy of the American city. This gap leads to a need for an urban theory, specifically for this research, that is broad enough to apply to the place and space tensions within diverse socio-political and geographic settings (Raco, & Flint, 2001).
Urban governance theory (UGT) is reflected in the global trend toward a renewed focus on the role of civil society in the pursuit of public goals, especially in addressing complex social challenges (Swyngedouw, 2005; Kjaer, 2008). Indeed, scholars suggest that the inclusion of the relationship between the government and the governed, and interactions between civil society (formal and informal) and government, distinguishes the study of governance from other studies of government (McCarney et al., 1995; McCann, 2017). As an approach, UGT can be adapted to a range of network approaches: from government-centric, where the state plays the role of metagovernor, to more distributed network governance with horizontal and inclusive decision-making (Torfing et al., 2012; Doberstein, 2013). This research focuses on governance networks, led by local government, that include civil society organizations in meaningful roles for problem identification, ideation, and decision-making. UGT is suited to the practical nature of this research because of its primary focus on implementing networks or networked forms of governance. In contrast to urban regimes, which are typically established by private and corporate actors, governance networks within UGT are catalyzed through local government actions (Kjaer, 2004). UGT is largely grounded in institutionalism; but it directs the researcher to look beyond the role of local government to examine the impact of the coordinated actions and resources of diverse institutional actors on formal and informal rules, norms, and patterns of behaviour (Kjaer, 2004; Pierre, 2005). This aligns with an urban geographic focus on addressing place-space tensions where places are constructed by and mediate the ways residents interact over different spatial scales and how they align with imposed spatial organization of government (Taylor, 1999; Raco, & Flint, 2001).

Scholars are increasingly aligned in the belief that exclusive focus on the workings of formal institutions is insufficient for understanding the complex web of power in governance
Allen (2004; Lindell, 2008). Allen (2004) suggests that research focused on a binary of centred and diffused governance is unproductive. It is more productive, as Lindell (2008) asserts, to interrogate how power is exercised, how networks are mediated, what role the local government plays, and how adaptable and responsive the institutional actors are to competing interests. The question is not between hierarchical versus horizontal, but as Davies (2010, p. 17) suggests, “which terms of the relationship is the most prominent in any spatio-temporal and scalar conjuncture”. This approach moves beyond the Western notion that collaboration, trust, and mutual recognition between government and other institutions are essential components of urban networks. While these components have a role to play, many dispersed governance rules have been developed outside the permission or control of government (Lindell, 2008). Despite these nuances, influential work from the global south defines urban governance by the relations between government and civil society and the extent to which formal and informal civil groups can influence decision-making (McCarney, 1996, 2003; Devas et al., 2001; Devas et al., 2004).

Assessing how power is exercised in distinct socio-political environments requires a nuanced application of governance and an openness to multiple potential outcomes that are not intrinsically right or wrong (Veronis, 2019).

The premise of predominant UGTs is that institutional capacity and resource deficits within local governments render them incapable of addressing the most salient and urgent challenges cities face alone. Stoker (2000, p. 93) defines urban governance as “a concern with governing, achieving collective action in the realm of public affairs, in conditions where it is not possible to rest on recourse to the authority of the state”. Governance theorists and, more specifically, urban governance scholars continue to ruminate and debate how to perceive the centrality of the state or the significance and make-up of networks and collaborative forms of
governance (Bevir, 2010; Pierre, 2011, 2014). Though they agree that many governance practices occur beyond government actors and involve a range of non-state actors from private, civil society; community organizations; and academia. While capacity and resource deficits no doubt exist, local governments worldwide continue to exercise considerable influence in perceivable ways (Allen, 2004; Lindell, 2008). Local governments depend on civil society and other institutional actors to address some of the capacity, representation, and resource deficits; yet they are the best positioned institution to catalyze, facilitate, and sustain network structures and to be accountable for their successes and failures (Jessop, 1997; Doberstein, 2013). This dispersed yet centred approach to urban governance is often referred to as metagovernance, where the local government remains the principal authority at the table (Lindell, 2008; Doberstein, 2013). Key dimensions of metagovernance are network formation and mandate, investments and resource provision, policy development, and accountability (Doberstein, 2013). While these concepts are universal, their application differed in the distinct geographic contexts within this dissertation.

The movement toward metagovernance of networks cannot assume that local governments are rational, with homogenous perspectives, and uniformly capable of securing compliance from local stakeholders (Davies, 2005). Local governments are not a neutral arbitrator of competing interests; rather, they can choose policy directions, collaboration partners, and who to exclude from influence (Rao, 2014). Likewise, geographic scholars have pointed out that civil society has no predetermined goodness and are just as subject to potential corruption and undemocratic practices as government (Gibbon, & Bangura, 1992; Mercer, 2003). An identified weakness of UGT is that it does not inherently focus on these issues of power, conflict, and accountability. This critique is especially salient in non-Western local government
contexts, where practices of governance are frequently exercised and informally contested and contained in multiple sites, within multiple institutions (Allen, 2004; Lindell, 2008). An additional critique suggests that governance networks can be captured by unelected members of civil society and thus threaten representative governance. There are concerns about the equity, accountability, and the democratic legitimacy of networks (Penny, 2017). However, the literature suggests that this critique applies to all liberal democratic institutions, and that representative democracy is already failing underrepresented and underserved populations who deal with complex social challenges (Doberstein, 2013).

The risk of an unelected civil society group dominating civic processes is dependent on the situation, the capacity of government, the involvement of higher levels of government, and the particular focus of the network. Nefarious civil society capture is less likely when the network agenda is to identify and address complex social issues, especially in a multi-level government environment. However, these risks highlight the need to better understand the conditions under which local governance networks are effective, and how to catalyze the necessary transparency and accountability required to maintain trust and legitimacy with residents (Sorensen, 2002). This is the focus of the empirical research within this dissertation.

Theorists suggest that simply applying UGT to empirical research is insufficient. Additional tools are needed to identify the norms that are assumed necessary to create and sustain the legitimacy of inter-organizational governance networks (Kjaer, 2008). In this light, this research applied the open government principles of transparency, civic participation, and accountability to examine how governance networks make and justify decisions. Additionally, the research used PDIA to examine how local governments work within their current capacity,
authorization, and resource deficits and leverage local governance actors to identify and address complex social challenges.

The remainder of this chapter introduces the open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability; this is followed by a discussion of the intersection of these tenets with the four components of PDIA: identify locally relevant challenges, create an authorizing environment conducive to experimental solutions, integrate active and ongoing learning and feedback, and engage a broad network of stakeholders for collaboration (Andrews et al., 2012). While the tenets of open government and the components of PDIA are distinct, they intersect at the nexus of network governance.

2.2.3 Deconstructing Open Government: Transparency, Civic Participation, and Accountability

The concept of “open government” as a package of reforms has grown popular over the past decade; yet its salience in this research manifests in deconstructing the package and applying its elements to governance that involves collaboration between local governments and local institutions. Governance theorists suggest that applying these elements at the local level leads to greater public sector cooperation and effectiveness (Ingrams et al., 2020). The connection between open government and governance has been proposed as “governance relationships and processes…which allow the perspectives, needs, and rights of all citizens to be addressed, including those most marginalized” (McGee & Edwards, 2016, p. 16). Ultimately, if meaningfully implemented, the principles of transparency, civic participation, and accountability facilitate a networked approach to UGT and fundamentally change the relationship between government and residents (Clarke, 2019).
2.2.3.1 Transparency: Access to Information and Process

Governments are information collectors, producers, and users; and they must institute policy and practice regarding how this information is used, what data is released in terms of quality and quantity, and how this information benefits the public (Florini, 2007; Dawes & Helbig, 2010). Transparency is defined as access to government data and information, data collection techniques, documents, and proceedings. Through managerial mechanisms (e.g., budgeting and public financial management), transparency enables the public to understand the workings of their government (Andrews et al., 2015). Transparency in government processes provides opportunity for institutions and residents to engage in civic processes, influence decisions, and pursue accountability. A culture of openness and engagement, beyond making politically neutral data available to the public, must be institutionalized for local governments to engage in networked forms of governance that address complex social challenges. Transparency requires intentional actions on behalf of the local government to ensure that the public is made aware, has the capacity to understand, and can see the relevance of government information and processes.

Transparency is one of the central pillars of effective regulation; it supports accountability and sustains confidence in the legal environment by ensuring that special interests have less influence (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010). A culture of transparency at the local government level facilitates the dissemination of information and empowers the public with greater knowledge, creating the potential for clearer problem construction and opportunities for previously excluded groups to exert influence on government decision making (Schauer, 2011). Residents have varied levels of capacity to understand government processes and often require different information, data, or participatory mechanisms.
Designing open government for the “general user” runs the risk of compromising participation processes and further marginalizing underrepresented groups (Meijer et al., 2012).

Democratic scholars argue that transparency measures are a precursor to equitable civic representation; they ensure that all members of the population have access to the information and government processes necessary for effective civic participation (Phillips, 1995; Dahl, 2006; Meijer et al., 2012). Well-functioning democratic systems involve multiple avenues for people to receive necessary information, express their interests and preferences, influence policy, and scrutinize the exercise of government power during and in between elections (Diamond, 1999).

2.2.3.2 Civic Participation

Research suggests that with appropriate socio-political and administrative structures, institutions informed by broad civic participation are more representative, efficient with resources, and sustainable in their development (Osmani, 2008; European Commission, 2014; Kassen, 2013; Glover et al., 2016). While the upfront investment required is often substantial, the legitimacy of decisions made through civic engagement contributes to increased acceptance of the resultant policy and programs and less need for redesign (Ross, 2018). An analysis of the trade-off between upfront investment and long-term returns in identifying and addressing complex social challenges permeates this research.

Unlike many previous reform movements, civic participation (from an open government perspective) is explicitly designed to include influence from a broad array of actors who have traditionally been marginalized (Berliner et al., 2018; Ingrams et al., 2020). While global agendas uncritically promote voice and accountability initiatives as essential to democratic growth, these initiatives are an oversimplified response to governance exclusion of marginalized populations from meaningful participation (Andrews et al., 2015). Contemporary approaches to
public participation often encourage extensive consultation but do not necessarily address issues of power redistribution, trust, and resources (Lee, 2013). Previous studies refer to these processes as “cosmetic” or tokenistic participation (Arnstein, 1969; Lee, 2013). The success of initiatives designed to provide access to information in building participation and influence has been mixed (Andrews et al., 2015). More promising results have emerged from strategies aimed at empowering coalitions from both government and society to address civic challenges (Fox, 2014).

In this research, civic participation refers to the individual and collective involvement of actors within the local governance system, with a privileged role for the populations most impacted by local manifestations of complex social challenges. There is extensive literature about what civic participation should look like, but there is limited discourse on how to empower the collective agency of multi-barriered individuals and the conditions necessary to create participation opportunities that influence decision-making. Facilitating equal and inclusive representation requires a shift in the value governments assign to public participation. Governments must recognize the value that people, and their lived experiences bring for collaboration to be successful (Lee, 2013). Limited access to and influence on local government lead to ongoing exclusion; but equally concerning are partial and problematic participation opportunities that do not provide residents with a meaningful and sustained role (McCann, 2017).

Socio-spatial considerations are important to understanding how residents are interacting with vulnerable populations and developing shared interests and values (Kearns, 1995). The literature suggests that when formal mechanisms are not accessible to the poorest residents, they often find ways to be heard through informal organizing (Lindell, 2008; Awal & Paller, 2016).
When large numbers of urban residents lack access to employment or basic services, they organize and advocate for their needs through collective efforts (Lindell, 2008). Van Hemelrijck (2013, p. 10) suggests that empowering participation is a combined process of expanding the individual and collective agency of marginalized people, changing their social institutions, and reconfiguring broader societal relationships. Engagement built on these inclusive practices creates a political framework in which the public has an increased ability to influence the workings of their government throughout the policy and service design processes (Creighton, 2005). Meaningful participation at key decision-making times requires the equipping of residents with an adequate understanding of government processes and information which leads to better accountability (Kearns, 1995).

Civic participation through a networked approach with governance actors has spurred concerns about a “democratic deficit” in government decision-making (Swyngedouw, 2005). Transparency within networked approaches to government is limited by who is allowed and enabled to participate and who is excluded; ill-defined systems of representation, accountability, and legitimacy; as well as the continued and increasingly “pivotal and often autocratic” role of local government in organizing and legitimating new governance networks (Swyngedouw, 2005; McCann, 2017). Further, pure network governance arrangements can be inefficient and unstable and can reinforce inequitable power hierarchies (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009; Doberstein, 2013). These issues are critical to this dissertation, as this research perceives local government as an institution responsible to identify and address complex social challenges, which often involve underrepresented and underserved (excluded) populations.

This research explored multiple sites of power within formal and informal institutions in governance networks; though, it largely applied a metagovernance lens, which in theory reduces
the risk of reinforcing hierarchies and the inefficiency associated with leaderless decision-making (Doberstein, 2013). Pertinent to this dissertation are existing power hierarchies within local government that result in marginalized populations being underrepresented and underserved by the status quo (Fung, 2008).

2.2.3.3 Accountability

While an agreed upon definition of accountability has proven elusive to scholars and practitioners, the term generally refers to an obligation to “present an account of and answer for the execution of responsibilities to those who entrusted those responsibilities” (Gray & Jenkins, 1993, p. 55). Accountability is most often perceived as demonstrating efficiency and effectiveness with resources. While historically rooted in hierarchical power structures, accountability is multi-directional: upward to higher levels of government and/or external funders, downward to the public, and horizontal in and among governance actors. Local governments are often most accountable to the higher levels of government who provide conditional transfers to them. While all governments are accountable to their residents through the electoral process, downward or social accountability is an inadequate system. Without a system of accountability for decisions about resources and services, local governments have no incentive to ensure their effective use across broad social programs. Local governments are not inherently virtuous and engaging in more horizontal network governance can provide a level of accountability that the public cannot manage as a collective.

The increasing popularity of horizontal forms of network governance and expanding the boundaries of accountability to civil society can exacerbate transparency challenges and trust issues between local government and residents (Conteh, 2016). This trend represents a threat to our traditional understanding of accountability in the public sector (Doberstein, 2013). If local
governments rely on local institutions to fill gaps in service, accountability measures require transparency and reciprocity. Collaboratively dealing with complex social challenges through a network governance approach requires mutual understanding of and commitment to address the deficits that perpetuate the lived experiences of the problems (Baradach, 1998).

Horizontal accountability between local government and governance actors is not viable for monitoring outputs and expenditures, but it is crucial for learning and reflection on how decisions are made and the strength of relationships within the network (Schillemans, 2008). The proximity of local governments to the public and local governance actors must be balanced with their accountability to multiple levels of government. The challenge is to manage the accountability tensions between these directions and levels. Conteh (2016) suggests that the most important indicator of accountability in network governance structures is the legitimacy of institutions in the eyes of other institutions and their influence within a policy domain. This perspective shifts accountability from a static approach of resource allocation and annual reporting structures to a dynamic approach that incorporates continuous feedback, reflection, dialogue, and responsive learning (Aucoin & Heintzman, 2000; Perrin et al., 2007; Schillemans, 2008).

Conteh’s (2016) suggests that the legitimacy of an institution is a critical factor in horizontal accountability, as are legitimacy and trust within a hierarchical (e.g., multi-level governance) relationship; and they can expand the authorizing environment to facilitate a shift from static to dynamic methods of accountability. The distinct accountability processes are shaped by their context, designed for a range of relationships, and contingent upon the purpose of the network (Conteh, 2016). Perrin et al. (2007) suggest that accountability should be oriented toward results rather than process and less focused on accountability for assets and more focused
on accountability for outcomes. Perrin’s conceptualization of accountability is designed to be complementary to the necessarily hierarchical orientation of governance and to be more responsive to the fluid nature of horizontal collaboration, specifically in the context of complex social challenges.

Consistent with this dissertation’s affinity to a metagovernance approach, relational and dynamic accountability within networks should exist within established hierarchical structures of accountability. Government is ultimately held accountable for public policy, and this translates into motivation to hold network actors to account (Doberstein, 2013). The legitimacy of network governance with local actors requires a blend of vertical, horizontal, and social accountability mechanisms (Doberstein, 2013). Embedding a social accountability approach can facilitate and/or be facilitated by collective problem identification and collaborative solutions that involve transparency regarding the resource, capacity, and authorization deficits of local institutions. This leads us into a detailed discussion of problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) in the next section.

2.2.4 Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)

The theoretical framework that guides this dissertation provides a practical lens for assessing how local governments in distinct geographic environments catalyze and leverage governance networks to identify and address complex social challenges. Urban governance theory (UGT) indicates that a guideline or process is required to apply its components to comparative research. Mossberger (2009) suggests that comparative urban research should consider the high-level purpose for local governments, situational incentives that facilitate change, and small windows of opportunity that foster cooperation and capacity. A critical component of developing a clear purpose is the construction of problems in a way that reflects
the needs of people and is informed by the perspectives of those working in direct contact with them.

The PDIA approach was conceptualized and refined within international development government reform in the global south (Andrews et al., 2012). Despite its origins in development, PDIA is an appropriate framework for research on identifying and addressing complex social challenges by local governments in the OGP Local Program and through case studies in Ghana and Canada. It reflects ongoing shifts from solution to problem-solving oriented modes of governance (Grove, et al., 2019). At its core, PDIA is designed to empower governments, who struggle with capacity and resource deficits, to resist externally imposed best practices. PDIA suggests that local governance networks, not external actors, should inform policy development and service delivery with local knowledge. Urban governance theory provides the structure for the research framework, and its focus on network governance is legitimized through the principles of transparency, civic participation, and accountability (as previously discussed in Section 2.2.3). PDIA is a complementary lens for assessing how local governance networks identify and address complex social challenges. The PDIA approach, first outlined by Andrews et al. (2012), proposes four core principles:

1) Aim to solve particular problems in local contexts.

2) Create an authorizing environment for decision-making that allows “positive deviation” and experimentation to solve these problems.

3) Integrate active, ongoing, and experiential learning and iterative feedback into new solutions.

4) Engage broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate, and relevant.
PDIA suggests that complex social challenges are twofold: the negative lived experience and the capacity or resource deficits that perpetuate it. The inclusion of capacity and resource deficits in the definition of a problem aligns with the literature on urban governance. In response to the inability of local governments to identify and address complex social challenges, local governance actors have been organizing, both with and without formal government involvement, to fill unmet needs (McCarney, 2003). Local governance networks must be viewed as part of the larger economies and societies that maintain them, and any attempts at governance reform (e.g., participatory approaches to addressing complex social challenges) will occur within the existing institutional environment (Knox & McCarthy, 2012). In this research, PDIA provides a complementary focus on engaging a broad set of actors to ensure that problems are clearly understood, and solutions are viable and locally relevant.

2.2.4.1 Engaging a Broad Network

Local governments across the globe face local manifestations of common constraints, including increasingly complex issues, resource and capacity deficits, and challenges with multi-level government cooperation and integration (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2013; Kanuri et al., 2016). While the issues are global, specific constraints are contextually unique and should be viewed within their specific socio-political environments. Recognizing these constraints, urban scholars focus on the broad governance networks of local actors that blur the boundaries between public, private, and civil society sectors (Bradford, 2016). Agranoff (2007) suggests that it is rare that a single government, agency, or actor has a monopoly on identifying potential solutions, making the difficult work of network governance necessary.

PDIA literature suggests that successfully addressing complex social challenges is possible when a broad network of actors contribute their unique perspectives to the design and
implementation of locally relevant solutions for locally identified and prioritized problems (Andrews et al., 2015). At the local government level, different urban systems, patterns of local politics (formal and informal), configurations of governance actors, and socioeconomic structures shape the capacity for collaborative interactions between government and civil society actors (Bramwell, 2012). Actors within local governance institutions outside of local government have actual or inferred administrative mandates to address specific sectoral issues, often with limited resources and in difficult and uncertain environments (Pritchett et al., 2010). The need for a diverse set of actors in governance has led to a resurgence of interest in networked forms of governance, within which the state does not necessarily hold a sovereign position but maintains varying levels of influence (Rhodes, 1997; Elander, 2002; Lindell, 2008).

Actors outside of the local government provide distinct types of resources, including authority, financial resources, networks and relationships, and proximity to residents, which can be harnessed when appropriately leveraged in the pursuit of collective goals (Pierre, 2014). In the context of network governance, resources are not exclusively financial; they may also include administrative support, social license, and resource reallocation. However, local governments control legal authority, due process, and political support from higher levels of government; and very few projects of significance can be implemented without these resources (Pierre, 2014). This represents a limitation in the autonomy of civil society and their ability to advocate for the needs of underserved populations (Mercer, 2003).

With a variety of actors working on the same issue, there are major challenges in ensuring sufficient coordination and collaboration. Addressing these challenges may involve facilitating relationships between key actors or networks, improving channels for sharing information and negotiating action, or building common products or spaces for interaction.
Change efforts require buy-in from a broad number of individuals and organizations (Root et al., 2015). Rao (2014) outlines multiple potential iterations of network governance arrangements with civil society, including reform coalitions, policy networks, and the convening and brokering of influence.

This research concentrates on two primary roles for civil society, which have been identified in the literature. First, civil society may champion the interests of underrepresented groups and engage with local governments to defend these interests (Vaughan & Hillier, 2019). Second, civil society frequently performs gap-filling functions by delivering basic services and addressing the material needs of underserved populations (Vaughan & Hillier, 2019; Veronis, 2019). In performing these roles, civil society groups regulate access to resources, establish rules of conduct, monitor the effective use of resources, and become sites of governance in their own right (Lindell, 2008). While the increasing involvement of civil society in governance functions can be beneficial, it can also introduce tensions between the competing interests of different groups vying for the same limited resources (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007; Ingrams et al., 2020). Theorists suggest that the legitimacy of governance networks can be analyzed through the characteristics of the system, comprising autonomous and independent heterogeneous actors who operate within understood structures but without dominant, centralized control, while still exhibiting strong interdependence and interaction (Root et al., 2015). Local government, when operating within a decentralized system, plays a significant role in facilitating participation and deciding who is at the table to influence decisions.

As this research adopted an institutional perspective, its examination of governance networks and engaging a broad network of actors heavily relied on the concept of metagovernance (Doberstein, 2013; Dam, & Wayland, 2019). The term metagovernance
encapsulates an acknowledgement that local government requires support from local actors in meeting complex social challenges; though it must maintain a degree of control over resources and decisions while operating within the traditional notions of democratic accountability (Doberstein, 2013). Despite its hierarchical nature, for network actors to meaningfully collaborate with local government, government must commit to transparency and providing access to relevant information, to forums where network actors can apply their knowledge and perspectives, and to mutual respect for each other’s ability to contribute (Lathrop & Ruma, 2010; Lee, 2013). Governments often develop advisory committees in response to public pressure to appear to be taking action, but they avoid using the advice provided (Doberstein, 2013).

From a PDIA perspective, engaging a broad network of governance actors, with a foundation of accountability and transparency, leads to a more accurate construction of complex social challenges and their systemic nature, to a broad range of options for addressing the problems, to a more accurate view of the challenges of addressing the problems; and to an expanded authorization space for experimentation (Andrews et al., 2015). Pooling diverse perspectives, missions, and experiences makes decision-making more effective and sustainable (Ingrams et al., 2020).

2.2.4.2 Problem Identification

Complex social challenges often attract the attention of local government and motivate those in decision-making positions to question their approach, only when the negative effects disrupt the status quo (Andrews et al., 2017). However, the visual manifestation of the problem rarely portrays the entire scope of the challenge. Accurately diagnosing a complex social challenge is a continuous process that requires the participation of local network actors and, perhaps more importantly, the residents directly impacted (Muamar, 2016).
PDIA research emphasizes that globally, institutions have done well in identifying and addressing technical problems, where the answer has been to expand a known technology or process (Andrews et al., 2015). However, the same institutions have struggled to identify and address non-technical, adaptive, or complex social challenges because they often deploy linear solutions that are not responsive or adapted to the context. Despite the unique manifestations of challenges in diverse socio-political environments, there is a global disposition toward technical solutions and a deficit in adaptive solutions.

PDIA focuses on the process of identifying and solving problems, not the solutions themselves. PDIA scholars suggest that a clear and locally relevant problem can be the foundation for an honest and directed search for contextually relevant solutions that address how governance deficits may perpetuate negative lived experiences (Andrews et al., 2015). A central focus of the problem identification stage is assessment of both institutional capacity (a feature of the local government) and the governing capacity (the patterns of interaction between local government and key societal actors (Pierre, 2014). Prado and Trebilcock (2009) suggest that identifying how to address capacity deficits in just one institution is insufficient and often counter-productive. In PDIA, the goal of problem identification is capacity change within the entire governance network (Andrews et al., 2012).

While PDIA focuses on hyper-local identification and interpretation of problems, the complexity of social challenges compels governance actors to construct an understanding of the problem from a systemic perspective (Bosch et al., 2013; Nguyen & Bosch, 2013). According to Nguyen and Bosch (2013), systems thinking is a way for professionals to conceptualize and pursue the integration of social, environmental, and economic dimensions of sustainability. This approach helps communities address the challenges of improving the well-being of both humans
and the ecosystem. The complex social challenges that local governments face do not consist of simple linear relationships between static elements; rather, they are interconnected, messy, uncertain, dynamic, and intimately connected to their context and environment (Boulton, 2010). Further, many of the most complex challenges are underscored by deep-rooted disagreements on both the nature and significance of the problem and the potential solutions (Head & Alford, 2015).

Governance theorists argue that the social, economic, or environmental problems that local governments face in their communities cannot be left to the economic and market forces (Kjaer, 2008). The most complex global challenges (e.g., environmental protection, poverty, immigration, and homelessness) all contain inherent tensions between market and social forces. Local governments must mobilize residents and civil society actors with intimate local knowledge about the local manifestations of these challenges. However, even within socially focused civil society organizations, actors may have divergent interests and values that cause conflict in problem construction and solution (Head & Alford, 2014). Some scholars suggest that a political economy approach to the needs of the jurisdiction would enable mutual understanding of embedded class and power conflicts and the resultant inequity (McCarney, 2003). According to Andrews et al. (2017), starting with a well-researched, mutual understanding of existing practice, power, and limitations would ensure that actors develop a properly constructed view of the social challenge.

UGT literature suggests incorporating “interest-mapping” exercises in the problem identification stage to assist local governments in their meta-governance and equip actors to choose between various implementation strategies (Jessop, 2002). Mapping allows for realistic consideration of the kind of partnerships that are feasible and the kind of consensus that can be
reached either through network governance or compensation measures, depending on the problems identified (Haggard & Kaufman, 1992; Kickert et al., 1999). A careful analysis of the formal and informal institutions in a local environment would contribute to the discussion of the feasibility of a strategy based on collaborative arrangements between network partners.

2.2.4.3 Creating an Authorizing Environment

PDIA literature suggests that when addressing complex social challenges with capacity and resource deficits, the process of designing an appropriate solution requires experimentation because the answers are not known nor static (Ostrom, 2008). To put PDIA into practice requires actors to go beyond the restrictions of their current capacity, resources, or enabling environment (Andrews et al., 2015). At times, global neoliberal ideals and multi-level government oversight appear to have closed the space for experimentation and innovation in the urban environment (Andrews, 2017). Indeed, the origin of network governance emerges from neoliberal austerity driving local governments towards imposed partnerships (Veronis, 2019). Specifically, attempts to address capacity or resource deficits that perpetuate a problem are often met with resistance from both the political and administrative sides of government, which are often path-dependent and committed to reinforcing silos, hierarchies, and closed models of service and policy development (Lowndes, 2005; Kjaer, 2008; Clarke, 2019). Neo-institutionalist theorists argue that the dynamics of higher-level government shape the opportunities and constraints that local governments operate within, and that a supportive macro-institutional framework is necessary for local governance networks to succeed (Bramwell, 2012).

Assessing the dynamics of enacting a particular policy or addressing a specific complex challenge must be understood as occurring within a governance space that consists of numerous actors within dynamic relationships. Governance is described as a living or evolving system. The
space is not static; rather, it consists of multiple, ongoing, and competing tensions. UGT emphasizes the systemic constraints of local government and the importance of local network actors to expand authorizations and create space for innovation (Pierre, 2014). Thus, within the PDIA framework, the authorizing space of local governance networks is two-fold; the authorizing space that the local government operates within, in relation to higher-levels of government; and the authorizing space that the local governance actors operate within in relation to the local government.

Local government-initiated governance networks operate in the “shadow of hierarchy,” under higher levels of government that have varying degrees of authority over their operations (Fredrickson, 2007; Aucoin, 2012; Conteh, 2016). Building institutional capacity at the local government level is an idiosyncratic process that must reflect the unique geopolitical environment and gain legitimacy through effectiveness (Andrews et al., 2017). Without control over financial resources to support locally driven initiatives, network governance experimentations to address locally identified complex social challenges are inherently constrained (Bramwell, 2012). Innovative approaches to reform government in a way that is conducive to identifying and addressing complex challenges often falter; because they are politically infeasible, create winners and losers, and have not been through the necessary bargaining process between levels of government (Nunberg et al., 2010).

The effects of the hierarchical relationship of multi-level governance can be ameliorated, to a certain degree, by developing staff capacity (e.g., network facilitation skills), designing flexible organizational structures (including budgeting and financing), anticipating and mitigating risks (especially in relation to higher levels of government), ensuring joint accountability, and ensuring effective communication among leaders (Moore, 1995; Baradach,
1998). As the influence of higher levels of government is difficult to circumvent, literature proposes that local governments utilize them as resources for identifying pathways to change (Spencer, 2018). The sources and exercises of power will vary from process to process, often depending on the scope of change required (Pierre, 2014). Though maintaining a proximal advantage to higher levels of government, local-government-dominated governance models are likely to demonstrate a poor understanding of complex problems and to provide biased feedback due to distorted information flows and institutional structures (Duit & Galaz, 2008). The lack of local government understanding can in part be understood through the multitude of places and residents’ sense of place encapsulated by an administrative space (Raco, & Flint, 2001).

Obtaining authorization across multiple domains requires that implicated actors and institutions from different sectors mobilize to address a commonly identified challenge (Andrews et al., 2015). However, leaders within these institutions often find themselves at immense risk when supporting innovative approaches (Heifetz et al., 2009). This is especially true of local government leaders who cede authority to non-governmental actors. For local governments to facilitate an authorizing environment amenable to experimentation, a transparent admission that a solution is beyond the grasp of any one institution is required (Rao, 2014). Pierre (2014) suggests that urban governance research has yet to present a compelling rationale, beyond directly funding, to civil society actors for their involvement in collective projects and the pursuit of collective action despite the inherent risks. Broad engagement helps to overcome the constraints of embedded agency so that authorizers can support reforms—even if they do not know what the core problems or solutions are—with less risk than when they act alone. Broad engagement and support help establish the legitimacy of the reform or policy intervention.
Scholars have repeatedly found that deep and broad change is more commonly associated with work by groups of authorizers (Krueger, 2002; Leftwich, 2010).

A focus on achieving practical and politically feasible results in the short-term can expand the authorizing space for desired longer-term reforms. A focus on emergent change has the advantage of being sensitive to local contingencies and suitable to real-time experimentation; it facilitates learning, allows for varying levels of autonomy, uses existing context to gain specific knowledge, and can be rapidly implemented with shorter feedback loops reducing the risk of failure (Weick, 2000, p. 227). The most successful reforms often begin obliquely, starting as an initiative that is not designed to tackle the core problems and is, for precisely that reason, more feasible. PDIA theorists refer to this process as “purposive muddling”: the development institutional solutions through a series of small actions, where each step leads to learning about what works and what does not (Andrews, 2017; Andrews et al., 2016).

Identifying solutions that address complex social challenges requires first identifying multiple ideas and experimenting with them to allow for the emergence of tangible solutions, which often appear as a hybrid of the original solutions (Andrews et al., 2016). Occasionally, small “pockets of effectiveness” or positive deviance can be created, leading to wider reform initiatives (Andrews, 2018). Thus, the role of governance is to identify the “adaptive challenge, keeping distress within a productive range, directing attention to ripening issues and not diversions, giving the work back to the people, and protecting voices of leadership” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 207). Reform trajectories are rarely linear, and problems may become worse before they get better, making early judgements about which interventions should be sustained despite negative feedback a critical juncture in the process (Woolcock, 2009; McCulluch & Piron, 2019). Demonstrable results from pilot projects may subsequently persuade skeptics on either the
demand or the supply side of the institutional reform equation that costs are not as high as previously assumed or that the benefits of incurring these costs are larger than expected. Experiment-based pilot projects also have the virtue of reversibility, in the event that they generate unintended consequences, and thus entail lower risk of expensive capacity building failure (Prado & Trebilcock, 2009; Andrews et al., 2016).

2.4.4.4 Evaluation and Iterative Feedback

An authorizing environment conducive to experimentation can be the result of well-connected governance actors, mediated risk, and a locally relevant problem that reflects poorly on those in power. However, building on initial solution ideation and sustaining the authorizing environment requires quick feedback and ongoing evaluation. Contextually appropriate solutions, which are practically and politically acceptable, emerge through an incremental experimentation process embedded within tight feedback loops that facilitate learning (Muamar, 2016). The ongoing ability to give and receive feedback offers invaluable perspectives on reforms and allows network actors to maintain ownership of the process.

People who have historically been marginalized and are being recognized and included for the first time will likely have different perspectives than people in institutional roles. However, collecting feedback data is only valuable to the extent that it is analyzed and reflected upon by local governance networks. In fact, gathering feedback and not acting on it can have significant negative consequences and damage the trust between local government and residents and network actors. When local governments are open to feedback, course corrections can be made before challenges become deeply entrenched. This research investigates how effective local governments, in their role as metagovernors, ensure that feedback is collected and considered in decision making and is reflected on by actors. Documenting the decisions, actions,
and outcomes of network actors addressing a particular challenge is key to identifying necessary adaptations. The PDIA approach suggests that small and experimental steps help to clarify contextual barriers and resistance to the process of building capacity and autonomy (Andrews et al., 2016).

The theoretical framework presented throughout this chapter is designed to address complex social challenges with competing and interdependent variables that generate learning through non-linear consequences (Senge, 1990; Stacey, 2001; Garud et al., 2010; Andrews et al., 2017). PDIA theorists suggest considering two questions early on in the lifecycle of a particular approach to a complex challenge and revisiting them throughout the process:

1) Did the PDIA approach reveal contextual factors that limited past reform success?

2) Did the PDIA reforms foster adaptive progress around these factors, helping reformers move progressively toward finding and fitting a functional solution? (Andrews, 2015).

Answering these questions in a governance network requires a steadfast commitment to transparency and accountability, as in many situations existing networks and their formal and informal ways of working may contribute to the status quo that perpetuates the challenge. Developing and iterating upon solutions in a particular governance context require an intimate understanding of the systems within which the problem and potential solutions operate. Powerful external institutions often push for rigour based on global best practices that are not adapted to the local context (Andrews et al., 2012).

There is extensive social science literature on behavioural change theories and models to guide ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning (Darnton, 2008). Andrews et al. (2016) caution that the PDIA approach is not conducive to a randomized control trial; rather, feedback loops and evaluation must be based on plausible and explicit theories of change. Further,
traditional impact evaluations are not appropriate because they assume that outputs are a given and focus on desired outcomes. In a PDIA approach, key outputs often do not occur or may be different from how they were originally conceptualized; evaluation must focus on where, how, and why failure occurred in the process of going from inputs to outputs to outcomes (Andrews et al., 2015). In contrast to hierarchical systems of accountability-driven desires for isolated attribution, collective impact initiatives through governance networks require shared processes, measurements, and learning systems to generate and demonstrate the collective contributions to outcomes and impact (Van Hemelrijck, 2013).

Action research is the predominant methodology for constructing a process of learning and feedback in the PDIA approach, applying the scientific method of fact finding and experimentation to locally identified problems and involving the collaboration of a local network for actions (Kondalkar, 2009; Muamar, 2016). Based in a qualitative paradigm, action research uses a structured approach to collecting and assessing information from three main sources: interviews and/or focus groups, observations, and artifacts (e.g., documents, reports, and meeting minutes). To maximize the validity of the findings, theories of change must be plausible, and attention must be paid to the methods of collecting and assessing information and lessons associated with the initiative’s desired outcomes (Andrews, 2015; Chatwin & Mayne, 2020).

Local government, as the metagovernor of the network process, can identify appropriate data to collect, initiate feedback loops, and guide how progress is tracked and communicated (Du Plooy, 2017). Global institutions have found that local governments have a significant role in leading the co-development of mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on progress and outcomes; and local networks would benefit from investment in building the research capacity of its stakeholders (UN Habitat, 2016). Boundary setting and decisions about what data to collect
are deeply subjective and often done with an eye toward maintaining the status quo and power structures (Van Hemelrijck, 2013). In the interest of transparency and accountability, boundary setting, and data decisions should be collaborative and conducted in a way that prevents undue influence of more powerful institutions.

To facilitate the necessary conversations and expand the authorization environment for local governance actors, evaluation data must be meaningful, useful, and responsive to the information and learning desires of decision-makers (Van Hemelrijck, 2013). If this quick iteration, feedback, and learning approach to evaluation succeeds in shaping and scaling public debate about the power of networks in addressing complex social challenges, it will presumably prepare the ground for sustainable systemic change; this, in turn, will result in greater capacity for the local government and improve the lives of residents. Sustainability is furthered by evidence-based social, societal, and institutional learning in a collaborative setting (Chambers, 2008; Wadsworth & Patton, 2011).

The rapid feedback and learning style of evaluation proposed for the PDIA approach does not attempt to prove that an intervention is solely responsible for the achievement of an outcome, nor does it try to demonstrate that an idea or process will work in any given context (Andrews et al., 2012). Rather, it attempts to document learning and iterations based on learning in real time, in a real intervention, in a particular context. This necessitates that reflection and feedback be embedded in the design of practical projects to allow for fast and systematic learning.

### 2.5 Pulling it All Together

This research aims to examine how local governments that operate in distinct geographical and socio-political environments, with diverse levels of capacity, resources, and governance maturity, identify and address complex social challenges. While it is inherently risky
to apply a theoretical framework developed in a Western context to research that includes the global south, theorists have proposed that UGT is sufficiently agile and adaptable to be applied across distinct contexts (Pierre, 2014). But critics of UGT highlight that when applied to any geographic context, its focus on network governance reduces transparency and makes accountability for decision-making more difficult. To supplement UGT, this research applies the principles of open governance to assess the transparency, civic participation, and accountability of network governance. Open government has been implemented across diverse geographic contexts; thus, it is also sufficiently adaptable for this research.

A second critique of UGT is that while it recognizes that conflict can occur and undermine governance networks, it does not explain how such conflict should be managed (Davies, 2005). To address this concern, this research applies a PDIA approach to develop an understanding of how a problem is constructed, who makes decisions on potential solutions and how, who provides authorizations, and how the outcomes are monitored. While PDIA was developed within an international development context, its principles are transferable to local governments worldwide. It examines problems from the perspective of negative lived experiences and the capacity and resource deficits of local governments that perpetuate it. This research adheres to Shami’s (2003, p. 80) belief that,

research should not aim at providing ready-made models of urban governance that can be “replicated,” but rather provide a model of how to work on “local” issues in “local” ways. What can be replicated is the approach and the philosophy behind it, but not the procedures and activities.
The infusion of UGT with the open government tenets of accountability, civic participation, and accountability and the PDIA framework provides a complex lens to interrogate local attempts at identifying and addressing complex social challenges as discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.
References


CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Urban governance theorists call for an increase in comparative research that investigates the extent to which different social, political, and economic forces produce different models of urban governance (Pierre, 2005). This dissertation responded to this call and sought to understand how local governments in distinct geographical environments leverage local institutional actors to identify and address complex social challenges. The research comprised three studies, beginning with a broad focus on local government participants in the global Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local program, then narrowing the focus to two distinct socio-political and geographical environments, Ghana, and Canada. Each study addressed one of the following three research aims:

1. To gain an understanding of how OGP Local participants leverage local governance actors to develop strategies to address complex social challenges collaboratively (Study I, Manuscript One, Chapter 4)

2. To examine how local governments in Ghana leverage local governance actors to overcome resource and capacity constraints in order to identify and address complex social challenges (Study II, Manuscript Two, Chapter 5)

3. To examine the approach of Canadian local governments in leveraging the resources of local governance actors to identify and address complex social challenges related to homelessness (Study III, Manuscript Three, Chapter 6)
One of the central requirements of effective comparative analysis is the development of concepts that are applicable to diverse settings and while maintaining substantial meaning and validity (Peters, 2000; Kjaer, 2004; Pierre, 2014). This research was guided by a theoretical framework that infused urban governance theory (UGT) with the open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability to assess the efficacy of governance networks and the problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) approach to assess how local problems are identified and addressed. The theoretical framework was applied to the in-depth document analysis of 15 local government participants in OGP Local and the case studies of local governments in Ghana and Canada.

3.1.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter provides an overview of the research design for the studies in this dissertation. It provides the methodological foundation for the three studies presented in the integrated manuscripts that appear in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, as well as the research discussion and conclusions that appear in the final chapter (Chapter 7). The research design outlined in this chapter is supplemented by specific detail in each individual manuscript.

The next section (Section 3.2) describes the distinct study areas that each study focused on and the rationale for choosing them: 1) OGP Local participants from 15 jurisdictions around the world (Manuscript One, Chapter 4); 2) Two local governments in Ghana (Manuscript Two, Chapter 5); and 3) Two local governments in Canada (Manuscript Three, Chapter 6). The socio-political contexts of the local governments in Ghana and Canada are described as well. Section 3.3 outlines the research design for each of the studies, including the methods used to analyze policy documents of the OGP Local participants, which were commissioned by the multilateral governance initiative; and the methods used to conduct case studies of local governments in
Ghana and Canada, which involved key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group sessions.

### 3.2 Study Areas

Manuscript One focuses on participants from diverse socio-political and geographical contexts in the OGP Local program to develop a broad understanding of how local governments leverage local institutional actors in order to identify and address complex social challenges. The localized comparative research in Manuscripts Two and Three, which is situated in two distinct locations (Ghana and Canada), complements the breadth of understanding developed in Manuscript One with in-depth understanding.

The resource gap that cities across the world face is widely recognized in research and practice, and there is a ubiquitous need to find innovative ways to support local governments in identifying and addressing their complex social challenges (Andrews, et al., 2015; UN-Habitat, 2016). Additionally, the potential benefits of local government-led governance networks are, with adaptations to local contexts, universally recognized. Results of the study of 15 local government participants distributed around the globe and the four comparative case studies of local governments in two distinctly different countries will inform both theory and practice on local governance networks. The focus on distinct governance contexts allowed for empirically based intra-country comparisons and generalizable theorizing for inter-country learning and best practices.

#### 3.2.1 OGP Local Program Participants

Launched in 2011, the OGP is a multilateral collective with 75 member nations committed to “opening” their governments through transparency, civic participation, and accountability initiatives. In 2015, the OGP launched the Local program (originally called the
Subnational Pioneer’s pilot project; Robinson, & Heller, 2015). The OGP Local program currently has 20 local government participants, including three inactive jurisdictions. As Figure 3.1 displays, the participants represent a broad range of socio-political contexts from diverse geographical regions. The OGP requires participants to submit bi-annual action plans for open government initiatives, which are published in both the official language of the government and in English. These action plans provide a unique opportunity for systematic analysis of policy documents from distinct socio-political environments. Due to the diversity of the participating governments, the trends and patterns that emerged from the document analysis can be viewed as a reflection of broader government actions to leverage local governance partners in order to identify and address complex social challenges (Stemler, 2001; Cleave et al., 2017; Chatwin et al., 2019).

**Figure 3.1 OGP Local Participants**
3.2.2 Ghana: A Maturing Democracy at all Levels of Government

Ghana is a unitary republic with an executive presidency and a multiparty election system. The structure of government is documented in the 1992 Constitution and separates the state into three branches: executive, legislature, and judiciary and two spheres of government: national and local. The regional authorities in Ghana are an extension of the state (without distinct legislated authority), local governments act as the second tier, and sub-district structures and traditional authorities are the lowest tiers. Ghana’s history of decentralization can be traced back as far as 1878, during the protracted colonial era when the country was labelled “The Gold Coast” (Ahwoi, 2010). Local chiefs were handpicked to represent their people in government as a tool to extend the colonizer’s rule beyond the limited geographical areas within which they lived (Kyei, 2008).

The current local government structure was established in 1988, with the initiation of a nationwide decentralization program under the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law 207 (Ahwoi, 2010). Ghana’s history of colonized decision-making is explicitly referenced in the PNDC guidelines (1981): “The urgent need for participatory democracy to ensure that the bane of remote government that had afflicted Ghanaians since independence is done away with effectively, to render governments truly responsive and accountable to the governed.”

Concurrent to PNDC Law 207, Ghana increased its local government units from 65 to 110 (Songsore, 2011). In 2003, 28 more local governments were added, followed by 32 in 2007, and 46 in 2015, bringing the total to 216 (Farkour & Adjei, 2016). Recently, Local Government Act 462 of 1993 was replaced with Local Government Act 936 of 2016, and the number of local governments increased to 260 (Government of Ghana, 2016). Ghana’s local governments are divided into Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) based on population.
The emphasis of the relevant legislation, since decentralization was initiated, has been on the central role of local governments in development planning through grassroots participation. MMDAs are legislatively empowered to lead political, administrative, deliberative, legislative, and planning functions; and they are responsible for the effective mobilization of resources to fund overall development. Local governments are responsible for identifying and addressing complex social challenges through the improvement of human settlements; the development of basic infrastructure in education, health, and water; and the provision of basic services (Adamtey, et al., 2020).

While there have been great strides in bringing Ghana’s decision-making to the people, significant structural challenges remain and constrain MMDA leaders. Deconcentrated public services are under the authority of the MMDAs; however, they continue to rely on their parent ministry for budgeting and planning (United Cities and Local Governments [UCLG], 2015). Further, District Chief Executives (who are an approximate equivalent to mayors in Canada) and 30% of the local assembly members (who are an approximate equivalent to city council members in Canada) are appointed by the president (Anaafo, 2018). The Local Government Act 936 of 2016 provides MMDAs with the authority to raise revenue through property rates, business operating permits, investment incomes, and other rates and fees (Government Ghana, 2016). However, the mobilization and management of local revenues continue to be a significant challenge to decentralization in Ghana (World Bank, 2015; Adamtey, et al., 2020). In addition, the decentralization program includes five financial transfer system: The District Assemblies Common Fund, District Development Fund, civil servant salaries, Grants in Aid, and Ceded Revenue (Ahwoi, 2010). These transfer systems are unpredictable in the timing and amount of
their budgetary releases, thus constraining the ability of MMDAs to be responsive to their residents (Anaafo, 2018; Adamtey, et al., 2020).

Compared to other countries across Africa, Ghana has developed a relatively stable and favourable operating environment for local governments (UCLG, 2015). Ghana is widely regarded as a successful example of multi-party democracy in Africa, with multiple peaceful transfers of power. From a research perspective, it is an appropriate choice for case studies, as its local governments have clear constitutional and legislated responsibilities. These responsibilities include identifying and addressing complex social challenges and meeting the needs of all residents. Further, Ghana’s legislation throughout decentralization, including the current Local Government Act 936 of 2016, has mandated public participation in decision-making (Government of Ghana, 2016; Chatwin, & Arku, 2017). Finally, in alignment with the focus of this dissertation, local governments’ lack of resources and capacity to meet their day-to-day responsibilities is well-documented, indicating a significant need for support from local governance actors to identify and address complex social challenges.

3.2.2.1. Local Government Case Studies in Ghana

The case studies of Ghanaian local governments were conducted in Sekondi-Takoradi, the capital of the Western Region, in the jurisdiction of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly; and in Tamale, the capital of the Northern Region, in the jurisdiction of the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly. These cities were chosen for their commonalities: Both are regional capitals and have the largest population size in their respective regions, with similar growth rates. Sekondi-Takoradi’s estimated population is 946,000, and Tamale’s estimated population is 640,000. Further, public records show that the local governments in both cities have made attempts to engage in network governance with local actors. The comparison of the two cities is
also interesting because of their differences: Sekondi-Takoradi in the south is a hub for oil and related exploration, and Tamale in the north is a hub for ground transportation, with routes to multiple countries to the north and east of Ghana (See Figure 3.2). More information on the sites of the case studies in Ghana is provided in Manuscript Two (Chapter 5).

**Figure 3.2 Map of Ghana**

In contrast to the Canadian multi-governance structure, the regional authorities in Ghana do not have constitutional authority or the ability to enact legislation over local governments.

### 3.2.3 Canada: An Outdated Institutional Framework

Canada has approximately 3,700 municipal governments across 10 provinces and three territories. In contrast to the unitary system of Ghana, Canada operates under a federal system, and many powers are devolved to the provinces and territories. The Canadian municipalities operate within an institutional framework that emerged from old British Commonwealth and was designed for the realities of the 19th century rather than the complexity of today (Sancton, 2011;
Federation of Canadian Municipalities [FCM], 2013). The constitutional and jurisdictional powers of municipalities in Canada are limited, especially in comparison to the United States and other advanced countries (Young, 2009); and local government is not recognized or legal defined in Canadian constitutional law (Sancton, 2011; FCM, 2013). By virtue of constitutional jurisdiction, the existence of local governments in Canada is based on provincial law and recognition, and they are thus subject to provincial intervention (Young, 2013; Taylor, 2019).

Local governments were established in provincial laws after 1867 as the basic unit of rural municipal government. Urban settlements applied to become incorporated as villages, towns, or cities based on population size (Sancton, 2011). Local governments operate as municipal corporations, acting on behalf of themselves and their residents, and are legally entitled to act only in accordance with their charter or statute (Sancton, 2011). The organization, authority, and capacities of local governments are predominantly determined by higher levels of government: Provinces establish laws, regulations, policies, and fiscal arrangements that determine their autonomy (Taylor, 2019). Young (2013) notes that many functions carried out at the local level in other countries are administered at the provincial level in Canada. All Canadian provinces and territories have cabinet-level departments of municipal affairs (the names of which vary across the country), to regulate and oversee local government finances and land-use planning (Taylor, 2019).

However, despite the unrestricted authority of the provinces, almost all provincial governments have increased the autonomy of local governments by legislating broad spheres of jurisdiction (Garcea & LeSage, 2005). Provincial reforms in the late 1990s increased the cities’ responsibilities for funding (from its property tax base) public transit, social housing, and other social assistance programs. These policies were often dictated by the provinces, rather than
negotiated with the local governments, and caused financial stress in municipalities, especially in those with high levels of social needs (Young, 2013; Horak & Dantico, 2014). The financial position of municipalities in Canada is highly dependent on their provincial bodies, as they lack access to revenue from sales and income taxes (Young, 2013).

Research demonstrates that incidences of multi-level governance are rare; and when they do occur, they are hampered by competing agendas and a lack of resources (Horak, 2012; Young, 2013). Local officials are highly dependent on property-related taxes, resulting in pressure to focus on the interests of property owners and developers to ensure high revenues from property and sales tax. Research on urban policymaking in Canada and the United States suggests that local governments are structured to privilege the development and servicing of property, often to the exclusion of other concerns (Horak & Dantico, 2014). Residents without property, though often economically stable renters, have difficulty placing their interests on the municipal policy agenda. These challenges are exacerbated when individuals or communities are poor, racialized populations who also face cultural barriers and systemic discrimination (Horak & Dantico, 2014).

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, Canadian cities have undergone a growing polarization, with an increase in the number of families who live in poverty and related challenges, such as unemployment, welfare dependency, family instability, and crime (Ley & Smith, 2000). Concurrently, Canadian cities continue to see a large influx of immigrants and government-assisted refugees. The confluence of immigration and multiple deprivations originally predominated in large metropolitan areas; however, since the early 1990s, it has drifted into the suburbs and surrounding cities (Murdie, 1994).
3.2.3.1. Local Government Case Studies in Canada

The case studies of Canadian local governments were conducted in Hamilton, Ontario, and Surrey, British Columbia. These locations were chosen due to their comparable population size and status as mid-sized cities with proximity to global cities. Both case study locations have struggled with ongoing issues of homelessness and addiction and insufficient resources to identify and address complex social challenges comprehensively within their jurisdictions. Further information on these case study sites is provided in Manuscript Three (Chapter 6).

3.3 Research Design

The studies in this dissertation employed an intensive qualitative research approach (Miles et al., 2014). Qualitative research is a robust scientific process of gathering the perceptions of study participants and analyzing how contextual and macro-factors influence these perceptions. Further, this approach can help make connections between the participants’ perceptions and resultant actions and shed light on socio-political processes in a meaningful way (Quisumbing et al., 2014). Qualitative research also has the potential to provide detailed explanations of social phenomena that are not possible through quantitative research (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative approaches uncover insights into dynamics of power, social change, and exploitation, as well as people’s motivations as they confront social inequalities (Simpson, 2007; Quisumbing et al., 2014). However, qualitative research cannot represent an entire range of issues and circumstances nor provide generalizable findings. Rather, it illuminates possibilities and depth in ways that are inaccessible in quantitative methods. This is consistent with the goals of this research to provide a model and philosophy of how to identify and address complex social challenges, rather than a model of governance or results that can be replicated.
3.3.1 Study I (Manuscript One)

The first study, which is presented in Manuscript One (Chapter 4), used a structured document analysis approach to explore policy documents prepared by OGP local program participants in accordance with the program’s prescribed format for bi-annual action plans. The comprehensive content analysis of the action plans allowed for the exploration of urban governance across a diverse range of local governments worldwide, validating the theoretical framework in distinct socio-political environments and broadening the generalizability of the research. Each of the participating jurisdictions developed their action plans in conjunction with local governance actors. Civil society played a significant role in outlining commitments and
plans to accomplish the necessary milestones for governance reform. The open government
tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability were applied to locally relevant
challenges. Where the intensive case study approach of the subsequent manuscripts provided
depth, the research for this manuscript allowed for the exploration of urban governance across a
diverse range of local governments worldwide.

The methodology for the first study builds on Chatwin et al.’s (2019) studies on
subnational governments, De Blasio and Selva’s (2016) work on European governments, and
Clarke and Francoli’s (2014) study of national governments. The analysis of the action plans
aligns with these studies in its focus on the “salience” of governance ideas, with a specific
interest in the varying degrees of emphasis placed on ideas in comparison to one another and the
entire plan. This research diverges from previous studies in its use of the open government tenets
of transparency, civic participation, and accountability and the PDIA approach within a UGT
framework.

In addition to evaluating the salience of relevant themes in the action plans, this study
analyzed the content of the policy documents to identify evidence of the collaboration of active
governance networks to identify and address complex social problems. The OGP Local program
action plan template encouraged participants to outline their commitment and approach to the
tenets of open governance; this study focused on how these themes interact with each
jurisdiction’s approach to governance actors and their commitment to local solutions rather than
importing external good governance solutions. This manuscript assessed the content of the policy
documents to understand the active engagement of local governments in Ghana with local actors
to better understand local problems and find potential solutions.
3.3.1.1 Content Analysis

A comprehensive content analysis was conducted on the action plans of 15 of the 20 OGP Local program participants in the 2018–2020 program cycle. These action plans are publicly available and were accessed via the OGP website (OGP, 2020). Of the five participating jurisdictions not included in the study, three had failed to submit an action plan for the 2018–2020 cycle (Note: Though they are inactive, they have not been removed from the website); and the action plans of two jurisdictions were not publicly available in English.

Content analysis allows for broad learnings and patterns to be drawn from a limited but representative number of sources (Moynihan, 2006; Cleave et al., 2017). The diversity of the participating governments that authored the analyzed documents allows for the trends and patterns that emerged to reflect broader government actions within the context of emerging government processes to engage local actors in governance (Stemler, 2001; Cleave et al., 2017; Chatwin et al., 2019). Collaboration, or co-creation within the OGP, among the participating local government, civil society, and the public is mandated by the OGP Local program; this mandate helps researchers understand the process that governments use to identify the status quo or the challenge that they are trying to address (OGP, 2017).

The content analysis for Manuscript One was conducted using a codebook adapted from Chatwin et al. (2019) and included 22 codes (See Table 3.1 for codes). Each action plan was analyzed using NVivo software to calculate the occurrences of the distinct codes. The information was then systematically recorded for a quantitative analysis of the documents. A measure of subjectivity is inherent in the coding process, but through an iterative process with two reviewers, coding decisions were standardized for each action plan (Cleave et al., 2017). Coded themes that met a threshold of 3% or greater in an action plan were included in the
analysis to address the research question. Themes that did not meet the 3% threshold were assessed for alignment with existing themes or removed from analysis. If a code did not meet the threshold in one or more jurisdictions, it was removed from the final codebook. This process aimed to enhance the ability to identify and compare the most salient themes in each action plan.

**Table 3.1 Codebook**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Codebook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>General references to public sector transparency, without discussing specific measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Information</td>
<td>Measures that ensure governments make high quality and relevant information accessible and understandable to the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Data</td>
<td>Specific references to the publication of government data for use, reuse and collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress Updates</td>
<td>Test in the document that references previous open government work, as a part of the subnational pilot or previous actions outside of OGP membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuse of government information</td>
<td>Mechanisms to encourage non-governmental actors and other governments to reuse government information and data (Ex. Open Government Licenses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Participation</td>
<td>Enabling the public (individuals, civil society and private organizations) to contribute to the work of government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Service Delivery</td>
<td>Enabling non-government actors to deliver goods and services (co-production, crowdsourcing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Creation</td>
<td>Specific references to civic participation processes to build the commitments of the OGP action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Creating opportunities for public, civil society or internal oversight (ex. Whistleblower protections) of government activities and expenditures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
<td>Processess to gather data on the implementation and outcomes of the action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Information Management</td>
<td>Measures to improve processes and policy for effective information management (ex. Recordkeeping procedures, digital information repositories)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Public Service</td>
<td>Raising the quality of public services, making services more accessible, user-friendly and responsive to the needs of the target community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Government More Efficient and Effective</td>
<td>Raising the productivity of government, streamlining internal work processes and services, directly addressing clearly identified needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevent Corruption</td>
<td>Measures to prevent corrupt behaviour and perceptions of corruption within the public service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Corporate Accountability</td>
<td>Measures that encourage transparency and ethical conduct, while tackling corruption, in private industry (especially the financial/banking sector)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen Governance</td>
<td>Building the relationships between the public and government, increasing legitimacy and trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
<td>Embedding open government principles in efforts to support economic growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Outcomes</td>
<td>Measures to use open government principles to address environmental concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Implementing new approaches to designing and delivering government services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergovernmental cooperation</td>
<td>Open government work occurring between levels of government within a specific country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livelihood Improvement</td>
<td>Programs and services to directly impact the livelihood of the public using open government principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Technologies</td>
<td>Implementing new digital approaches to meeting the needs of the public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the coding, an in-depth review of each plan was conducted to gain a better understanding of the context around each commitment, the structure of the plans, and the co-creation process undertaken with local governance actors in each jurisdiction. This in-depth
analysis also allowed the researcher to assess the intent of each commitment through the lens of a PDIA-infused approach to urban governance.

3.3.2 Study II (Manuscript Two)

The empirical research for Manuscript Two (Chapter 5) was conducted in two distinct local government jurisdictions in Ghana: Sekondi-Takoradi and Tamale. The case studies employed ethnographically-based methods to reveal the particular local problems in each unique context as expressed by institutional actors. Case study research is common in geography and is one of the most widely used qualitative method in the social sciences (Baskarada, 2014; Rashid, et al., 2019). The purpose of case study research is analytical, not statistical, generation; and it provides greater scope for theory (Yin, 2009). Case study research tends to be “exploratory in nature” (Gerring, 2009). Since there is limited literature using a UGT framework to explore complex social challenges, this study endeavoured to understand the practical experiences of governance actors. Further, given the unique complexity of the challenges, the study intended to balance local factors with a recognition of larger structural factors in understanding the phenomena.

This study used a triangulated qualitative research design: Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group sessions, and a review of relevant policy documents. The semi-structured interviews included key informant interviews and in-depth interviews with additional participants. Multiple actor groups within the local governance networks were included to achieve confirmation and completeness of the study data and to allow for comparison between groups (Morgan, 1997; Arksey & Knight, 1999). Methodological and data triangulation helps increase the validity of the study and decrease bias (Singleton & Straits, 2009). Data collection was conducted in 2018 and 2019 with two visits to each jurisdiction and subsequent
interviews conducted by research assistants to fill in gaps in the data. Six key informant interviews, eight in-depth interviews, and two focus group sessions (n = 7, n = 4) were conducted in Tamale; seven key informant interviews, 11 in-depth interviews, and two focus group sessions (n = 5, n = 6) were conducted in Sekondi-Takoradi; and two key informant interviews were conducted with national level experts.

Document review aided in understanding the institutional environment of each local government and to examine the policies that impact governance actors. The document review was conducted in two phases: An initial review of relevant documents identified during preliminary research, and a review of additional documents identified through the interviews and focus groups during and after the data collection. The documents reviewed comprised official publications prepared by the national and local government, non-governmental organizations, and Civil Society Organizations, with a focus on meeting minutes from cross-sectoral meetings.

3.3.2.1 Key Informant Interviews

Key leaders in the governance networks of each jurisdiction were purposively sampled for their experience in and perspectives on collaborating to identify and address complex social challenges. Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research when the researcher wants to gain detailed knowledge about a specific phenomenon. An effective purposive sample must have clear criteria and rationale for inclusion. The criteria for selecting key informants in this study included an active role in institutions involved in local governance, decision-making ability, active engagement with complex social challenges, and involvement in collaborative work with more than one institutional partner. Individuals who did not interact with local government in their work were excluded.
A total of 15 key informant interviews were conducted in Ghana (Sekondi-Takoradi, n = 7; Tamale, n = 6; National, n = 2). All key informants were experts in their field, in adherence to the expert sampling approach (Etikan et al., 2016). Each of the case studies included interviews with an administrative officer at the deputy level or above, a local politician, a civil society leader working within the identified challenge area, a traditional authority, and a regional government senior officer. The goal was not to achieve data saturation but to gain insights from actors within key urban governance institutions.

The interviews were conducted in person, in a semi-formal manner, and lasted between 35 and 75 minutes each. All interviews took place in the participants’ offices, except for one interview in Sekondi-Takoradi, where the participant met with me outside a local business within her community. The participants responded to a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions from an interview guide (see Appendix C1); this format ensured that the interviews did not stray from the intended focus but allowed for new information to emerge in line with the interpretive paradigm approach of this research (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991; Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

3.3.2.2 In-depth Interviews

As an outsider in Ghana, my ability to engage with participants was limited; as such, snowball sampling was used to supplement the participants I had recruited with purposive sampling. There are limitations to snowball sampling, as it does not necessarily yield a representative sample; but it is the most useful approach in a context where access to research participants is challenging (see van Meter, 1990; Miller & Brewer, 2003). The in-depth interview participants were identified during key informant interviews and included participants from local government administration, civil society, and local associations. Key informants were asked to
share names of potential interviewees in governance institutions, including, but not limited to, local government staff with whom they regularly worked. The participants were all actors in the governance networks with an interest in identifying and addressing complex social challenges. Unlike the key informants, they often worked more directly with the public and with people who had lived experience of complex social challenges. More information on participant selection and demographics is provided in Manuscript Two (Chapter 5).

A total of 19 key in-depth interviews were conducted in Ghana (Sekondi-Takoradi, n = 11; Tamale, n = 8). The interviews were conducted in a semiformal manner and lasted between 35 and 75 minutes. They took place in the community and in the participants’ offices. Participants were asked questions about their experiences of working with partners to identify and address complex social challenges. In contrast to the key informant interviews, where participants were asked about decisions that they had made or had been a part of; in the in-depth interviews, participants were asked about the impact of such decisions on the work that they do. All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

3.3.2.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with community members in informal associations who had been hesitant to engage directly with the researcher due to cultural and/or language barriers. Two focus group sessions were conducted in Tamale and two in Sekondi-Takoradi. Focus group participants were identified and recruited by key leaders within their community and/or local association. Some of the interview participants agreed that focus groups would be a viable method to gather information from vulnerable residents. For example, in Sekondi-Takoradi, a leader in a women’s fish-monger association was identified as a potential research participant; however, she expressed discomfort when asked to represent her association in an English
language interview. We proposed, instead, a focus group session in the local dialect, and it was considered an acceptable solution. One focus group session in Tamale and the session in Sekondi-Takoradi were composed entirely of female participants. The second focus group in Tamale was mixed gendered, with more female than male participants. More detail on the selection and demographics of the focus group participants is provided in Manuscript Two.

Each focus group was led by a local research assistant in the local language. The sessions lasted between 25 and 50 minutes and were audio recorded and later transcribed by the research assistant, who also added commentary from notes taken during the focus group session. Once I reviewed the transcripts, I worked with the research assistant to clarify any comments or themes that were unclear.

3.3.2.4 Data Analysis

Literature on case study methods suggests that data collection and analysis often occur simultaneously: “analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (Stake, 1995:71). In addition to audio recording the key-informant and semi-structured interviews, I took detailed field notes about the participants’ non-verbal expressions and communication during the interviews, as well as additional questions that I asked and wanted to include in subsequent interviews and comments that would later provide context to the transcripts.

After thoroughly reviewing my notes and the interview and focus group transcripts, I coded the data based on the key themes that were developed throughout the iterative process, using NVivo software. Adhering to the interpretivist tradition of qualitative research, the analysis first considered what the data were “saying” and then organized them into themes, allowing for
meaning to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once the data was organized into themes, the themes were assessed for relevance to the research question.

### 3.3.3 Study III (Manuscript Three)

The study presented in Manuscript Three followed a similar research approach to that employed in Study II for Manuscript Two and included case studies of the local governments in two locations in Canada: Hamilton, Ontario and Surrey, British Columbia. The main difference between the studies is that Study III did not include focus groups, as participants in Canada were more comfortable with English language interviews than some of the participants in Ghana. Unless otherwise stated, the research approach and methods discussed in Section 3.3.2 were employed in both studies.

As in Study II, this study used a qualitative case study methodology to explore the phenomenon of network governance within two local governments in Canada, through various data sources and a variety of lenses, in order to understand the complexity of a metagovernance approach to network governance (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It followed an interpretive paradigm, with a focus on the socio-political context and human complexity that influence how actors understand network governance (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991; Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). Two case studies were conducted to balance the depth and generalizability of the findings.

A case study provides deep insight into a single unit, while comparative or cross-case studies provide broader insight across two or more units and can provide more externally-valid and generalizable findings (Gerring, 2009). For the purposes of Manuscript Three, the case studies explored local governments as they navigated network governance within two specific Canadian cities. Although only two local governments were studied, the study was comparative because it investigated the unique expression of network governance as a response to a unique,
Locally identified complex social challenge: homelessness. While allowing for more depth, the two case studies limited the breadth of comparison possible and the generalizability of the findings.

Data was collected through key informant and in-depth interviews (See Appendix C2) and a review of relevant policy documents. The data collection for the Canadian case studies took place in 2019 and 2020 with two visits to each jurisdiction (Hamilton and Surrey). Additional interviews were conducted via telephone. The study included 10 key informant interviews (Hamilton, n = 6; Surrey, n = 4) and four in-depth interviews (Hamilton, n = 1; Surrey, n = 3). Additionally, seven key informant interviews were conducted with external experts. These experts included provincial representatives, inter-governmental relations experts, housing and homelessness advocates, academics, and a consultant based in a university. The expert participants provided a broader perspective to the research and allowed for more comparisons among diverse Canadian contexts.

Document review comprised official publications prepared by national and local government, NGOs, and CSOs, with a focus on meeting minutes from cross-sectoral meetings. The document analysis for this study was more in-depth than in Study II because the network governance process used to identify and address complex social challenges in Canada is more formalized than in Ghana. This study significantly benefited from analyzing the meeting minutes of formal tables for the collaboration of network governance actors on specific complex social challenges.

3.3.3.1 Key Informant Interviews

Key informants were selected for interviews in both locations using purposive sampling. Also called judgment sampling, purposive sampling is a non-random technique, where the
researcher decides what information is required and engages participants who will provide that information (Bernard, 2002; Etikan et al., 2016). The participant sample in the case studies included local government managers working on the identified problem (i.e., homelessness), local government politicians, and leaders in non-governmental or civil society organizations. All participants in the case studies were targeted based on their engagement within local governance networks working to address and identify the complex social challenge. External experts in local government and the complex social challenge were selected based on their online profile, documented interaction with multiple local governments, or documented interactions addressing homelessness at the local government level. The study focused on the respondents’ subjective experiences and perspectives and did not intend for the sample to be statistically representative.

Interviews were conducted in person and via telephone or an online platform and lasted 35–65 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Participant recruitment ended when I was confident that data saturation had been achieved, as certain themes and responses were repeated, and conversations became redundant. More information on the key informant interviews is provided in Manuscript Three (Chapter 6).

3.3.3.2 In-depth Interviews

Participants in the in-depth interviews were identified by the key informants. When a key informant suggested that a certain individual had a valuable perspective on the complex social challenge or the functioning of the local governance network, the individual was contacted and invited to participate in the study. Although I am Canadian and operate within the local government space, I do not reside within either of the case study jurisdictions; and so, participant recruitment was limited to personal introductions or was based on an individual’s online presence. While the key informant interviews provided the necessary themes for analysis, the in-
depth interviews produced specific data to support the triangulation of the findings. Each interview was conducted in a semiformal manner and lasted between 35 and 75 minutes. In-person interviews were conducted in the participants’ office space and remote interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams or telephone.

3.3.3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the same processes as Study II (Section 3.3.2.4). In addition, data collected in the interviews were cross-referenced with local governance meeting minutes when decisions were referenced during an interview. This was made possible by the online availability of meeting minutes and other artifacts. Participants’ perspectives were thus validated with publicly available documents, allowing for an ongoing triangulation of the data while adhering to an interpretivist tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.4 Expert Validation

To reduce the degree of bias in my research—and to ensure the practical usefulness of this dissertation outside academia—I engaged two local government experts in Ghana and one in Canada, as well as three globally-dispersed experts, to provide feedback at multiple points during the research. These experts were not participants in the research but were briefed on the intent and format. First, when I was close to completing the data coding and developing the themes for each study, I reviewed my preliminary themes and discussed them with experts to determine which themes were most novel and important. Second, the first draft of each manuscript was sent to two non-academic experts to assess their relevance to real-world practitioners. Finally, the final draft was sent to the same experts for final review prior to submission for publication. This process enhanced the quality of the manuscripts and significantly contributed to my understanding of the environment within which the experts are immersed daily. One of the
experts included in Manuscript One became co-author on a submitted version of the paper in recognition of the individual’s contributions to this research.

3.5 Practical Considerations

One of the first steps in preparing for fieldwork, and productive research interviews and conversations, is to understand the local context (Michaud, 2010). My understanding of the local context in Ghana was informed by the 4 years I had spent living and working there, supporting local government; and my understanding of the local context in Canada was informed by close to 10 years of working within or adjacent to local governments in Canada.

Despite having lived and worked in Ghana, I am still an outsider there; and some of the interview participants in Study II expressed a desire to benefit from their participation in the research in some practical way, thinking that I represented an international non-governmental organization or foreign aid. I attempted to mitigate this by asking key informants to make the initial contact with potential participants on my behalf. From a research ethics perspective, this created the potential for coercion, but all respondents were actively involved in governance processes and had no direct influence over one another. Further, although I was an outsider, I benefited from some of the advantages of an insider conducting this research. I had already been immersed in the culture and, therefore, had a basic understanding of the local dialect and greetings, norms, and social cues as well as the ability to locate and connect more easily with key informants and gatekeepers.

During the interviews in Ghana, I was able to demonstrate an awareness of the governance system, and this allowed for more productive conversations. For example, when government officials cited legislated civic participation processes, I could respond with an understanding that these processes do not occur in reality. In Ghana, I was also assisted by a
local graduate student who explained cultural nuances that I was unaware of as an outsider. One prominent example occurred during research on alleged witches in Tamale and the network that identified and addressed this phenomenon. After a productive interview with a knowledgeable and prominent figure in local governance, I commented on his apparent compassion and commitment to address the human rights’ violations perpetrated against the alleged witches. The research assistant pointed out that the participant was wearing jewelry with inscriptions from the Quran for protection against the power of witchcraft. While this did not have any apparent practical implications for the study, it was an informative incident that I would have otherwise missed as an outsider.

While in Ghana, I took the opportunity to take research trips: I visited a camp for alleged witches and spent some time interacting with the priest responsible for the camp and spoke with the women leaders; and I visited the fields where the women farmed and observed the conditions within which they lived. I also spent an afternoon with the leader of the landlord/tenant union in one of the informal communities in the jurisdiction of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly. This was not a formal part of the study but added helpful context to understanding the lived experiences of the complex challenges rather than considering them from an academic perspective alone.

The study in Canada was very different, especially as I completed data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic. All civic meetings had been either cancelled or moved online to digital platforms. Further, complex social challenges in Canada are more contained than in Ghana: Tent cities and squatters, the closest equivalent to informal settlements in Ghana, are rapidly dismantled and individuals ejected with haste. There is also a stronger commitment to ensuring the comfort of residents in Canada, or the functioning of local economies; however, this not
interrupted by vulnerable underserved individuals who face intersecting challenges. A positive step in Canadian discourse is the attempt to include representation from people with lived experience of social challenges in decision-making on policy and services. While the inclusion of vulnerable individuals is associated with the risks and pitfalls of exploitation by government for political theatre, all decisions that impact the lives of multi-barri ered individuals should reflect their input in some way.

3.6 Summary

This chapter began with an outline of the research context and provided an overview of the socio-political environments presented in each of the integrated articles in this dissertation. This overview was followed by a description of the document analysis and qualitative case study approach employed in this research and an outline of the specific methods used in the individual studies. Additional information on the methods employed in the studies is provided in the manuscripts (Chapters 4, 5, and 6).
References


CHAPTER 4

MANDATING LOCAL NETWORK GOVERNANCE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF OGP LOCAL ACTION PLANS

4.1 Introduction

Around the world, governments at all levels continue to be confounded by the pervasiveness of complex social challenges. Complex social challenges are challenges that require the balancing of multiple interests within inter-organizational and multi-level governance; and while global in nature, they have contextually-unique local manifestations. Global agendas and programs developed through supranational institutions and multilateral collectives highlight the critical role that local governments play in identifying and addressing these challenges. This paper focuses on a multilateral collective, the Open Government Partnership (OGP), and its participating local government jurisdictions in 2019. The OGP positions itself as a convenor of national and subnational governments to support the development of commitments toward realizing the tenets of open government—transparency, participation, and accountability—in collaboration with civil society organizations. Recognizing the centrality of local governments in global efforts to address the most pervasive challenges, the OGP launched the local program to support participating governments in engaging with local governance actors (Robinson & Heller 2015). OGP Local program participants represent democratic governments in diverse socio-political environments across five continents. Document analysis is used to critically examine the OGP Local bi-annual action plans of program participants to assess the extent to which they leverage local governance actors, including civil society, academia, the private sector, and residents to identify and address complex social challenges.
From its inception, the OGP Local program has encouraged participants to focus on complex social challenges, such as homelessness, inadequate service delivery to marginalized communities, unsafe and insufficient water and sanitation, gender inequality, and unbalanced representation in decision-making (SNAP, 2017). OGP Local participants are encouraged to involve civil society in the planning process for their action plans, in identifying local problems that negatively impact the lives of residents, and in collaboratively addressing these problems using the tenets of open government as guideposts. In contrast to other predominant approaches to governance reform, the OGP prioritizes local knowledge and leveraging effective and trusting relationships with a network of local actors to design and implement immediate change (OGP Local, 2019). This research is based on an understanding that local governments operate with resource and capacity constraints and benefit from engaging with local institutional actors in networked forms of governance (Kjaer, 2008).

The objective of this research was to understand how local governments identify and address complex social challenges and whether they involve local institutional actors in this process. This paper addresses two research questions: 1) How do OGP Local program participants apply the open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability to identify and address the complex needs of residents? 2) How do OGP Local program participants engaging in network governance and leveraging the unique assets of local governance actors to overcome resource and capacity constraints in identifying and addressing complex social challenges?

This research employed an urban governance theory (UGT) perspective, infused with the analytical lenses of open government principles and the network governance approach of problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) (Andrews, et al., 2012). PDIA is designed to
empower governments to resist externally-imposed best practices through active engagement with local governance actors (Andrews et al., 2015); as such, it is an appropriate lens for research on a multilateral collective, such as the OGP. The research draws on the actions plans of 15 of the 20 OGP Local program participants in the 2018–2020 program cycle (see Table 4.1 for participating jurisdictions included). Of the 15 participants, 10 were in their second round of action plans and five had submitted their first action plan. Of the five participating jurisdictions not included in the study, three had failed to submit an action plan for the 2018–2020 cycle, and the action plans of two jurisdictions were not available in English.

The action plans represent a diverse range of geographical and political-economic contexts and provided a rare opportunity to analyze the coordinated efforts of local governments to address governance deficits through collaboration with local institutional actors. This analysis allowed for the identification of reform prioritization through an open government lens and provided a window into local government engagement with local networks to identify and address complex social challenges.

4.2 Complex Social Challenges

Often referred to in the literature as “wicked problems,” complex social challenges are resistant to technical solutions and are beyond the capacity of individual institutions (Head, & Alford, 2015). The New Urban Agenda (NUA) identifies poverty and hunger; inequality, including gender inequality; homelessness and lack of safe housing; and insufficient water and sanitation as global complex social challenges (UN Habitat, 2016). While often outside the constitutional and/or legislative responsibility of local governments, local manifestations of these challenges require their attention. Unique local tensions, including politics, power-sharing, administrative resource and capacity deficits, and financial limitations add complexity to
addressing these challenges. The status quo is often maintained until a catalyzing or destabilizing event occurs that makes it less tenable for those in power (Brady & Spence, 2010; Lee, 2013; Andrews, 2018).

4.3 Urban Governance Theory (UGT), Open Government, and Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)

Urban governance theory (UGT) is based on a recognition that regardless of the socio-political environment or maturity of a democracy, local governments have constraints, and the unique assets of local institutional actors are required to overcome them (Stoker, 2000). UGT primarily focuses on policy-implementing local governance networks and considers a spectrum of networked forms of governance, including governing coalitions, policy communities, and governance actors (Elander, 2002; Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; Lindell, 2008). This perspective aligns with the OGP conceptualization of a “multistakeholder forum” (a formalized group of government and civil society partners) and the cocreation and implementation processes of government commitments (OGP Handbook, 2020).

Wholesale attempts to “open” government are plagued by the same superficial changes to policy and organizational structure that hinder broader “good” governance reforms and lead to mixed results (Williamson, & Eisen, 2016). However, the central tenets of open government (i.e., transparency, civic participation, and accountability) create a pathway for implementing the PDIA approach (discussed in the following section), including problem identification, an authorizing environment, feedback and iteration processes, and stakeholder engagement (Ingrams, et al., 2020; Andrews, et al., 2012). An emerging consensus among academia and practitioners demands that transparency and accountability be facilitated by a fundamental transformation in the relationship
between governments and residents (Yu & Robinson, 2012; Clarke & Francoli 2014; Clarke, 2019).

The transparency required for contemporary open government has multiple forms. It relates to the quantity and quality of government information and data that are available to the public (Florini, 2007). Information and data help residents to better understand government decision making and to determine their own preferences among government decisions, programs, or policies (Bimber 2003). Additionally, the transparency of government processes equips residents with the knowledge necessary to engage with governments and hold them accountable. In this sense, transparency is essential to the values of civic participation and collaboration with local governance actors, which are at the heart of the OGP Open Government Declaration. As Harrison and Sayogo (2014, p.1) observe, “Public participation supplements these processes [transparency and accountability] in that the public is viewed as the ultimate audience for and consumer of information provided through transparency processes.”

Information and data are needed to inform residents, but residents also require access to mechanisms, both informal and formal, to participate in matters of governance. It should be noted that not all residents require the same information, data, or participatory mechanisms. In essence, designing open government for the general user runs the risk of compromising transparency and civic participation (Meijer et al., 2012). As the complexity of the social challenge increases, so does the need for a meaningful participatory role for the people most impacted by them and the governance institutions that serve these residents.

OGP Local participants are encouraged to build systemic capacity for transparency, civic participation, and accountability to address locally relevant problems. The OGP mandates a timeline for each commitment within the action plans, thus establishing action-oriented
expectations. While not explicitly stated, the OGP guidelines reflect a path-dependent belief in the need for iterative change. They promote government commitments that align with PDIA, a non-traditional approach to governance reform.

4.4 Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)

Originally introduced by Pritchett et al. (2010), PDIA challenges dominant prescriptions of externally-developed best practices and proposes that they be replaced with local solutions for local problems. This does not imply that global initiatives, such as the OGP, are not relevant to addressing local problems; but that the tenets of open government must be applied in a way that builds the capacity of local governments to solve local problems. Each country, and their respective local governments, has a unique balance of politics, administration, civil society, and residents that creates politicization (Moon, & Ingraham, 1998). Identifying and addressing local challenges in ways that are adapted to the local context builds the capacity of governance stakeholders (Andrews et al., 2015). PDIA is based on four core principles or steps (Andrews, et al., 2012):

- Aim to solve particular problems in local contexts.
- Create an authorizing environment for decision-making that allows “positive deviation” and experimentation.
- Integrate active, ongoing, and experiential learning and iterative feedback into new solutions.
- Engage broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate, and relevant.

To align PDIA with UGT, this research re-orders the PDIA components and begins with the fourth step: engaging a broad set of local agents or governance actors to co-create an
understanding of the problem and collaborate to address it in a sustainable way within the local context (Andrews, et al, 2015). The fourth step is then followed by problem identification; creating an authorizing environment; and, finally, gathering feedback through monitoring and evaluation.

4.4.1 Engaging a Broad Network

Local governance networks include people with lived experience of the challenges, institutional actors acting directly to address the identified challenge and those acting as support and accountability partners. The process of engaging a broad network does not necessarily exclude external actors; rather, it centers on the contextual knowledge of local actors. External best-practices need to be adjudicated by local actors who understand the problem, context, and feasibility of new solutions (Andrews, 2012; Andrews, et al., 2013). Focusing the energy of a network on a particular problem assists in highlighting the weaknesses of existing structures in addressing it (Seo, & Creed, 2002; Vis & van Kersbergen, 2007). Groups on the periphery, often underrepresented voices, can provide new perspectives. A central role needs to be created for people who have lived experience in dealing with the effects of the problem (OGP Participation, 2020).

Local actors begin with existing practices and collaboratively define why they are not working and consider new solutions to address barriers. Pritchett et al. (2010) discuss the paradox of embeddedness: stakeholders who are in proximity to identify challenges and the barriers to addressing them, frequently do not have the authority to address the challenges; and stakeholders with the authority do not have the proximity to identify the problems or the willingness to acknowledge them. The collaboration of an engaged network of institutional actors facilitates the co-creation of a change-strategy that identifies the necessary conditions for an enabling
environment, entry points from within existing practices and permissions, and strategies for creating an environment conducive to realizing the desired change.

One of the few mandatory conditions of membership in the OGP is co-creation. OGP Local program participants document their engagement and co-creation efforts, in the development of their commitments, in the action plans that they submit to the OGP. Co-creation varies widely across participants, and some are more successful in engaging the broad range of stakeholders outlined in the literature on PDIA. Fundamental to the development of a local governance network are the core tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability. Identifying and addressing complex social challenges requires a measure of vulnerability; local governments must acknowledge their internal constraints and leverage the unique assets of local governance actors (Pierre, 2014).

4.4.2 Problem Identification

According to literature on systems or complexity thinking, problems must be perceived as a part of an overall system so that solutions are designed in anticipation that they may merely shift the problem rather than solve it (Root, & Wild, 2015). PDIA requires a shift from asking, “What solution should be adopted?” to “What problem do local stakeholders want to address?” (Andrews et al. 2015). A well-defined problem is one that has been constructed, deconstructed, and defined through the shared consensus of local actors. Too often, problems are constructed by forces outside the local network with a vested interest in the implementation of a particular solution. In the context of complex social challenges, the problem is two-fold: the lived experiences of the problem in the community, or its felt consequences, and the capacity or resource gaps that limit the government’s ability to address it sufficiently.
The PDIA approach emphasizes capacity building through the process of identifying and solving problems rather than relying on readymade solutions. Government reforms are more successful when they are motivated by, or directed toward, problems that local actors care about. This approach involves an active search for solutions that can be implemented within the context and with an understanding of the existing socio-political environment. The more complex the challenge, the more modest the scale and scope of the solution’s first iterations (Andrews, 2015). An intentional approach to these preliminary actions must consider past practice, existing stakeholder engagement, the potential for rapid results, and existing capacities and strengths.

A properly framed problem with a compelling narrative is required to communicate its importance and build the engagement and motivation of local actors. The OGP recognizes this and encourages participating governments to consider carefully the rationale guiding the commitments outlined in their action plans. The template for the action plans prompts governments to clearly outline the problem or the status quo their commitment attempts to address, their commitment to change, and the potential of their commitment to contribute to a solution to their given problem (OGP Handbook, 2020).

4.4.3 Enabling Environment

The PDIA approach relates to the type of environment needed to foster reform. Complex social challenges are rarely solved; rather, the goal is for the local government to develop the capacity to manage and minimize their negative effects. As Muamar (2016, p.707) states, “Poor progress comes from the fact that you do not learn from your wrong decision, but it also comes from the fact that you do not learn from your good decision”. The ability to make decisions confidently requires an environment that is conducive to active iteration, experimentation, and learning from ongoing monitoring and evaluation (Andrews, 2018). Three conditions are necessary
for an enabling environment: political support of change, acceptance of the need to change by those with authority, and the ability to present new and compelling ideas for implementation (Andrews, 2008; 2012; 2017). Resistance must be anticipated; and reformers, inside and outside the government, must prepare for windows of opportunity to engage the political economy of those positively or negatively impacted by changes to the status quo (Grindle, 2017).

For an enabling environment to exist, disruption in the context is often necessary, an event or series of events that make the status quo untenable (Brady & Spence, 2010; Andrews, 2013). This is consistent with the literature on meaningful public participation (Lee, 2013). Those in power need an incentive to question the status quo and how challenges are addressed. However, disrupting events can only catalyze change when an engaged network has already prepared the environment and can capitalize on a challenge to the status quo. Gradual improvement, quick wins, and problem clarity serve to solidify the enabling environment. Further, a focus on active iteration and learning mitigates the risks involved in long-term governance reform that is based on untested assumptions (Pritchett, et al., 2010). Local actors, working to address a capacity deficit that hinders their ability to solve a problem, must allow for flexible processes, structured adaptation, and opportunities for consistent feedback and monitoring (Andrews, 2018). An enabling environment that supports this experimentation is sustained by feedback loops that facilitate learning (Muamar, 2016).

While their efforts are not well documented, the OGP Local program has attempted to provide an enabling environment. It has allowed its participants to change their action plans after they are published as it recognizes that problems, and the way they are approached, can change as learning occurs. The action plans are assessed by OGP’s Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM). These narrative-based assessments allow researchers flexibility to comment on the local
context and the extent to which it helps or hinders change. PDIA suggests that all commitments within the action plans should be ambitious but viable within the current political, administrative, and financial environment of the participating jurisdictions.

### 4.4.4 Feedback Through Monitoring and Evaluation

The final principle of the PDIA approach reflects the necessity of a specific stage for reflecting on progress and lessons learned in the process of identifying and addressing a problem (Andrews, 2012). There is an important distinction between learning from ongoing monitoring and learning from pre-identified stages of formative evaluation. Evaluation literature argues that monitoring and evaluation strategies should be developed and implemented at program ideation and embedded in each stage of action (Kane et al., 2017; Chatwin, & Mayne, 2020). Ongoing monitoring and learning are designed to facilitate real-time iteration and refinement of strategy. Monitoring allows for new learning and ideas to be combined into hybrid approaches that are best suited to the context (Andrews, 2013). It minimizes the risk of long lag times inherent in periodic or end of program evaluation. For the stage-based evaluation, it is valuable to include actors external to the immediate working group to provide new perspectives and allow those actively involved to process their collective experience (Kane et al., 2017). This evaluation can include a review of progress made, lessons learned, and strategy iterations.

The rapid feedback component of PDIA aligns with literature on civic inclusion, which emphasizes the need to report back to participants, both institutions and residents, on the impact of their input (SFU, 2018). Transparency regarding why decisions were made and how input from participants influenced them is essential to ensure those in positions of power are responsive to the needs of residents. An analysis of individual and collective contributions can highlight changes in behaviour, trust, and relationships through shared impact measurement and learning (Mayne,
Further benefits of feedback include contributing to the sustainability of the enabling environment and to necessary authorizations for continued progress. It also helps government actors to build legitimacy within their institutions and the broader community (Andrews, 2017).

In the context of the OGP, as participants develop successive action plans, iterations presumably occur. As such, problems should, theoretically, be re-examined, approaches evaluated, stakeholders regularly consulted, and evidence of early results presented. However, the OGP is limited in its capacity to comment on results. The IRM has clearly maintained that it is not an impact assessment mechanism. It is the responsibility of the participating jurisdictions to establish an ongoing monitoring and evaluation strategy. The focus of the IRM assessments is suitable for mid-point corrections within the participants’ commitments.

4.5 Methodology

A comprehensive content analysis of the action plans of 15 OGP Local participants for the 2018–2020 cycle was undertaken (Table 4.1). The OGP Local participants’ action plans are publicly available and were accessed via the OGP website (OGP Local Members, 2020). The current OGP process of bi-annual action plans provided a unique opportunity for the systematic analysis of documents from distinct socio-political environments, because all participants follow the same template for their action plans and the plans are published both in each jurisdiction’s official language and in English. As Table 4.1 demonstrates, the OGP Local participants represent a broad range of socio-political contexts and geographical regions.
Table 4.1: OGP Local Participants Included in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OGP Local participant</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Austin</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basque County</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Buenos Aires</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elgeyo Marakwet County Government</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Iasi</td>
<td>Romania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaduna State</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Madrid</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Paris</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Narino</td>
<td>Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality of Sao Paulo</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Government</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seoul Metropolitan Government</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province of South Cotabato</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Document analysis allows for broad learnings and patterns to be drawn from a limited but representative number of sources (Moynihan, 2006; Cleave et al., 2017). Due to the diversity of the participating governments, the trends and patterns that emerged from the document analysis reflect broader government actions within the context of emerging processes to open government both within and beyond the OGP movement (Stemler, 2001; Cleave et al., 2017; Chatwin et al., 2019).
The methodology for the research builds on Chatwin et al.’s (2019) study of subnational governments, De Blasio and Selva’s (2016) work on European governments, and Clarke and Francoli’s (2014) research on national governments. The analysis of the action plans aligns with these studies in its focus on the salience of open government ideas, with a specific interest in the varying degrees of emphasis placed on ideas in comparison to one another and to the entire action plan. This research diverges from previous studies in its use of the open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability and the PDIA approach within a UGT framework.

The document analysis in this study was conducted using a codebook of 22 codes, adapted from Chatwin et al. (2019; See Table 4.2). The concepts of co-creation and progress updates were added as new codes for this analysis. As previously noted, co-creation among the participating jurisdictions, civil society, and the public is mandated by the OGP (OGP Participation, 2017). This is reflected in the action plans and contributed to understanding the leveraging of local governance actors to identify the status quo or complex social challenge that they are trying to address. Further, the unique codes were organized according to their alignment with the core tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability. Codes that refer to local solutions to local problems were categorized accordingly.

The action plans were analyzed using qualitative computer-assisted manual coding with NVivo software to calculate the occurrences of distinct codes. The data was then systematically recorded for a quantitative analysis of the documents. To address the subjectivity inherent in the coding process, two coders engaged in an iterative process to standardize the subjective decisions for each action plan (Cleave, et al., 2017). For example, when a commitment in an action plan reflected numerous codes, but they were all in service of a particular goal, the entire commitment
was coded according to that goal. In the commitment implementation breakdown, the distinct steps were coded according to the theme that they reflected. Additionally, decisions made between text that closely reflected multiple codes are another area vulnerable to subjectivity. For example, steps taken to improve access to information are often made with the intent of facilitating civic participation. Similarly, opening data is often a step toward more access to information, which is ultimately a sign of transparency. The text was coded to reflect the first point of reference, rather than the ultimate desired outcome.

Coded themes that met a threshold of 3% or greater in an action plan were analyzed to address the research questions. Themes that did not meet the 3% threshold in each action plan were assessed for their alignment with existing themes or removed from analysis. If a code did not meet the threshold in one or more jurisdictions, it was removed from the final codebook. This process aimed to enhance the ability to identify and compare the most salient themes in each action plan (See Table 4.3).

**Table 4.2: Codebook**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transparency</th>
<th>Transparency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transparency</strong></td>
<td>General references to public sector transparency, without discussing specific measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to Information</strong></td>
<td>Measures that ensure governments make high quality and relevant information accessible and understandable to the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Data</strong></td>
<td>Specific references to the publication of government data for use, reuse and collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Progress Updates</strong></td>
<td>Text in the document that references previous open government work, as a part of the subnational pilot or previous actions outside of OGP membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reuse of government information</strong></td>
<td>Mechanisms to encourage non-governmental actors and other governments to reuse government information and data (Ex. Open Government Licenses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Participation</td>
<td>Civic Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Service Delivery</td>
<td>Alternative Service Delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Creation</td>
<td>Co-Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Information Management</td>
<td>Improve Information Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Public Service</td>
<td>Improve Public Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Government More Efficient and Effective</td>
<td>Making Government More Efficient and Effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevent Corruption</td>
<td>Prevent Corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Corporate Accountability</td>
<td>Promote Corporate Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen Governance</td>
<td>Strengthen Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Outcomes</td>
<td>Environmental Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergovernmental cooperation</td>
<td>Intergovernmental cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livelihood Improvement</td>
<td>Programs and services to directly impact the livelihood of the public using open government principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Technologies</td>
<td>Implementing new digital approaches to meeting the needs of the public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the coding, each plan was reviewed in-depth to gain a better understanding of the context of each commitment, the structure of the plans, and the leveraging of local governance actors in identifying and addressing the complex social challenges identified in the commitments.

### 4.6 Results and Discussion

The results of the document analysis show how unique contextual characteristics influence the application of the open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability in individual commitments. Table 4.3 provides a summary of the results, with the percentage of text dedicated to each theme in the participating jurisdictions. Only 16 of the original 22 codes represented 3% or more of the text in one or more of the 15 action plans reviewed. Consistent with prior research on the 2016 actions plans (Chatwin et al., 2019), civic participation was the most prevalent theme overall; it accounted for 26.6% of all text and was present in all 15 action plans reviewed. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the action plan template prompts participants to outline the co-creation process undertaken in the development of their plan.

In contrast to the 2016 action plans (Chatwin et al., 2019), beyond civic participation, the broad themes of transparency and accountability were not as salient. For example, in the first-cycle action plans, transparency represented 6% of the text and was above the 3% threshold in 14 of the 15 plans reviewed. In this study, only two action plans had more than 3% of text dedicated to transparency, and it represented 2.3% of the overall text. Similarly, while accountability was present in all 15 of the first-cycle action plans, it only met the 3% threshold in five of the current action plans and accounted for 3.5% of all text as opposed to 7% in 2016 (Chatwin et al, 2019).
At first glance, these differences could imply a deprioritization of transparency and accountability; however, a deeper look shows a maturation in the commitments and a movement toward more specific incarnations of the core tenets of open government. For example, access to information, which is essential to transparency, was the second most prevalent theme in this study: it was present in 14 action plans and represented 14.7% of all coded text. Further, the “strengthen governance” code, which is aligned with accountability, was present in eight of the 15 action plans and represented 4.4% of all coded text. A new code, co-creation, which is an example of civic participation and specifically focused on the development of the action plan, represented 22.4% of all coded text across the 15 action plans. There was substantial variability in the amount of text dedicated to co-creation in the individual action plans. For example, the Municipality of Sao Paulo dedicated close to 80% of their action plan to discuss its co-creation process and how they arrived at their commitments. In contrast, the City of Paris dedicated only 4.5% of their action plan and focused more on updates from their previous action plan.

Table 4.3: Action Plan Summary of Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>City of Austin</th>
<th>Denver County</th>
<th>City of Boston</th>
<th>Maricopa County Government</th>
<th>City of Paris</th>
<th>City of Madrid</th>
<th>City of Sao Paulo</th>
<th>City of Porto Alegre</th>
<th>Municipality of Sao Paulo</th>
<th>Scottish Government</th>
<th>Senado, Taiti Metropolitan Assembly</th>
<th>Seoul Metropolitan Government</th>
<th>Provence of South Dakota</th>
<th>Tel Aviv Municipal Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to Information</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Participation</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Creation</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving Economic Growth</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Outcomes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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These findings show a homogenization of the salient codes, which are related to the open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability; but there was variability in their application across levels of government and geographical locations. This is consistent with previous research findings (Clarke & Francoli, 2014; Chatwin, et. al, 2019). Some of the differences are discussed below in relation to the three core tenets of open government.

### 4.6.1 Open Government Tenets

#### 4.6.1.1 Transparency

A consistent pattern in the action plans was a passing reference to transparency as a principle that is achieved through activities to improve access to information and open data to the public. As previously noted, transparency involves providing the public with access to government information and data and ensuring that the public understands government decision-making processes (Dawes, & Helbig, 2010; Shauer, 2011). Within the action plans, there was significant focus on making information available in ways that facilitate engagement between governments and residents to solve locally relevant problems collectively. For example, Tbilisi’s action plan states, “it is important to have mechanisms for processing and simplified usage of published information, which can be an important prerequisite for the increase of the citizen engagement” (Tbilisi, 2018, p. 6). Indeed, Tbilisi’s action plan applied this understanding of residents’ need for information to solve a local problem related to construction and tree cutting issues. The first commitment in Tbilisi’s plan addressed the locally relevant need for residents to have updated information on government-funded construction projects in order to equip them to monitor their progress and to obtain permission to remove green cover (Tbilisi, 2018, p. 6). Similarly, Sekondi-Takoradi aimed to provide user-friendly information on public infrastructure to the public, so that they can monitor the implementation of public investments (Sekondi-Takoradi, 2018).
In Elgeyo-Marakwet’s action plan (2018, p. 22), access to information was a critical means to the declared goal of enhancing government actions aimed at capacity development and job creation for youth and other special interest groups. Additionally, access to information serves to equip residents and Civil Society Organizations to hold the government accountable and to improve the acquisition and distribution of medicines in government-operated facilities (Elgeyo-Marakwet, 2018). The City of Iasi demonstrated an in-depth understanding of successfully applying access to information to a local challenge. In their second commitment, aimed at reducing waste and increasing recycling, the action plan states, “The highest information retention rate is registered when the information has practical, contextual value. Those people who remember the information the best are those who need it the most in a specific context” (Iasi, 2019, p. 22).

In contrast to the salience of the informational aspects of transparency, there is a noticeable absence in the action plans of attention to making government processes and decision-making more accessible. The limited focus on opening existing government processes to the public may be addressed by the significant focus on new avenues for civic participation, but only if these avenues become embedded in sustained government practice. Residents who are traditionally underserved require intentional government actions to equip them with the information they need to participate.

4.6.1.2 Civic Participation

The results indicate a significant emphasis in the action plans on the importance of fostering civic participation and expanding stakeholder engagement. The City of Buenos Aires, for example, noted the need to build resident capacity for effective public participation to make meaningful engagement possible. Similarly, the City of Iasi identified civil society as part of public participation, demonstrating an understanding that non-governmental organizations can actively
advocate on behalf of underserved communities. Further, the City of Iasi’s plan specifically commented on the OGP Multi-Stakeholder Forum, indicating that there should be transparency in the selection of its members. Other plans explicitly focused on capacity and engagement within specific sectors or in relation to defined themes. For example, the City of Narino focused on engagement around the defence of water.

Overall, references to civic participation were in service of a tangible goal, such as addressing environmental concerns or collectively addressing economic development. Narino demonstrated a unique approach by using civic participation to build knowledge about local coffee production (Narino, 2019). In some cases, the action plans fell into the trap of designing solutions for a general user instead of local residents. The Tblisi Government plan, for example, discussed access to public services, but it did not refer to particular underserved communities. However, other governments detailed consultations with specific populations or noted the populations they hoped their commitments would impact. The Municipality of Sao Paulo’s action plan, for example, referenced the involvement of Periferia Invisivel, an arts and culture organization that works to democratize art in the outskirts of the city. One of the commitments outlined in Seoul’s action plan was to develop a subway transfer map to help vulnerable residents, such as handicapped people, elderly people, and pregnant women. The map was made by Muui, a civil society organization. However, it is unclear whether local institutional actors were included in its development and whether the vulnerable populations were impacted. A noteworthy absence throughout the documents analyzed was a substantial commitment to gender equality.

4.6.1.3 Accountability

In some cases, civic participation and accountability were intimately intertwined. Elgeyo-Marakwet’s action plan, for example, points to the need to understand who participates in
governance engagement and how their actions may impact vulnerable persons. However, as noted above, the broad theme of accountability did not feature significantly in the action plans examined. The action plan of Secondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly incorporated the value of accountability most explicitly. It included references to a civil society report, the Citizen Report Card (CRC), which captures residents’ views on government activity. It also discussed the need to protect against perceptions of corruption and for improved access to information on public infrastructure. Such opportunities for residents to provide feedback on government action and progress are essential to accountability, particularly as they are identified and measured within OGP, where a redress mechanism is considered fundamental. However, these opportunities must be institutionalized to be effective. Once the civil society organization stopped funding the CRC in Sekondi-Takoradi, the opportunity for resident input ended.

4.6.2 Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)

Applying a PDIA lens to the results was useful to better understand whether the OGP Local participants engaged with local institutional actors and the public to define the complex social problems they face, develop locally-relevant solutions, and iterate them through continuous feedback. This perspective revealed examples of global policy migration that are not adapted to local context, as well as examples of participating jurisdictions committed to addressing locally relevant problems. One of the risks associated with the global centering of local governments is the transfer of homogenized policies prescribed by external entities without adaptation to local influence (Chatwin et al., 2019). From a PDIA perspective, local governments that aim to make meaningful change through governance commitments must avoid superficial changes to organizational structure and surface-level policy change that is either not implementable in the current context or does not address the systemic nature of a problem (Andrews et al., 2013.
Andrews, 2013; Muamar, 2016). In following discussion, the four steps of the PDIA approach (i.e., engaging a broad network, problem identification, authorizing environment, and feedback through monitoring and evaluation) are considered in relation to the document analysis findings.

4.6.2.1 Engaging a Broad Network

Action plans tend to provide little detail on the extent of engagement that occurred in the development of their commitments. As noted in the discussion of civic participation above, many action plans failed to specify whether they included vulnerable populations in their co-creation processes. When this information was included, the description was general. Sao Paulo’s action plan mentioned the engagement of “different people” and “vast territory.” In many cases, however, network actors, including civil society actors, residents, or even involved government actors, are not clearly identified in the plans.

Austin’s action plan is somewhat more comprehensive than the action plans of the other jurisdictions. In response to suggestions made by the OGP’s IRM, Austin assigned a specific department and manager to each of their commitments, improving overall accountability. In Paris’s action plan, engaging a broad network went beyond institutional engagement alone. The plan specifies training volunteers to participate in gathering input from residents (The Solidarity Factory) and discusses a conference for residents to outline opinions and to look toward future reform. In some cases, it is difficult to ascertain the breadth of the network engaged and whether those engaged are truly local governance institutions. For example, Elgeyo-Marakwet’s action plan mentions World Vision Kenya and the Centre for Innovation in Open Governance as their civil society partners. While external international non-governmental organizations can be beneficial, the focus of the plans should be on local civil society partners with intimate understanding of the context.
4.6.2.2 Problem Identification

The OGP Local template requires participating jurisdictions to articulate the local context and challenges that demonstrate the need for each commitment. Many complex social challenges were identified in the action plans, from youth unemployment and healthcare provision in Elgeyo-Marakwet, to homelessness in Austin and Paris, and insufficient water and sanitation infrastructure in Sekondi-Takoradi. Many of these challenges were present in the first cycle of action plans (SNAP, 2017), but they are more prevalent in the documents analyzed for this research. However, the degree to which residents, particularly underrepresented and vulnerable groups, were involved in articulating the problems and devising the solutions varied. PDIA, in alignment with literature on liberal democracy, suggests that meaningful engagement occurs when initial decisions or definitions are made through a process of constructing and deconstructing people’s experiences of the challenge (Dahl, 1989; 2006; Andrews, et al., 2015). Overall, the action plans suggest that resident engagement was more geared toward the prioritization of issues rather than their identification and definition.

There is little evidence of the consideration or incorporation of the lived experiences of the people impacted by the plans in the participating jurisdictions’ commitments. Diverse groups, such as children, youth, women, and people with disabilities, are often treated like a monolith. This is certainly the case in Secondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly’s plan and in Elgeyo-Marakwet County Government’s plan. The lack of nuanced understanding, demonstrated by combining diverse demographics in this manner, leads to weak problem identification. In other cases, there are clearer though limited attempts to understand and include the diverse experiences of residents. Madrid’s action plan, for example, included an opportunity for participation in an observatory, but recruitment was done via a lottery. While this approach perhaps guaranteed equal opportunity to
participate, it ran the risk of alienating the voices of those who may be most impacted by a decision. Further, one of Madrid’s five commitments was left open to be identified and co-created by residents of Madrid. The other four were decided on by city council with limited consultation. In Paris, residents were engaged in surveys and interviews to identify the reason for homelessness and develop a nuanced understanding of why people are homeless on their streets.

This analysis demonstrates a weakness in the problem identification stage of the PDIA approach and in the co-creation process of the OGP. OGP Local participants have room for improvement when it comes to identifying the complex social challenge and internal deficits that they wish to address in their action plans. As the OGP Participation and Co-Creation standards state, those most intimately impacted by the commitments need to be better identified and engaged in thinking through the articulation of problems and their corresponding solutions (OGP Participation, 2017, p. 2).

4.6.2.3 Enabling Environment

The diversity of geographical and socio-political contexts that the OGP Local participants represent highlights the complex nature of developing and maintaining an enabling environment for positive change and learning. The City of Seoul’s action plan acknowledged the role its institutions play in creating disincentives to participation, and that as a government they are responsible for creating an enabling environment for residents to actively participate in governance (Seoul, 2018). Despite the awareness of Seoul’s administration, there are limited activities in their action plan specifically directed at improving the enabling environment.

The Municipality of Sao Paulo’s action plan offers an interesting example of the tension between avoiding the potential for isomorphic mimicry and maintaining an enabling environment. To improve their co-creation, Sao Paulo conducted several interdepartmental meetings to ensure
the action plan had more sectoral, interdisciplinary, and relevant commitments. The co-creation process was extensive and led to a set of preliminary commitments that were submitted for technical and legal review. Their commitments included equipping local municipal counsellors with tools and information to fulfill their duties, to strengthen transparency, and to increase public integrity. However, each commitment was significantly altered following review to fit within the current authorizing environment of the municipality. When the revised commitments were voted on by the multi-stakeholder forum, the votes split upon the lines of government and civil society. Though, the government has one more vote than civil society, and the revised commitments were accepted without any civil society votes in favour (Sao Paulo, 2018). Perhaps even more troubling, this disagreement was not substantially addressed, and no actions were proposed to mitigate its reoccurrence.

The document analysis broadly indicates that the participating jurisdictions work within their current authorizing environments, but there is no discussion about actions that can further establish an enabling environment for ambitious commitments. The action plans demonstrate an awareness of the need for an enabling environment, but there was a noticeable absence of forward planning to cultivate the necessary conditions for it in future plans. In fact, none of the plans clearly highlight the necessary conditions for change that are vital to PDIA (Chatwin, & Mayne, 2020). Part of the problem is a lack of specificity in the wording of commitments and a failure to elaborate on key indicators for success or failure. It is important to note that this study was limited to the texts of the action plans, and it is possible that government efforts to improve their enabling environments and expand authorizations are occurring beyond their plans.
4.6.2.4 Ongoing Feedback Through Monitoring and Evaluation

Rapid feedback through ongoing monitoring and evaluation promotes agility and allows jurisdictions to capitalize on quick wins and move away from obvious failures. Some participants, such as the City of Buenos-Aires, attached detailed evaluation plans to their commitments; but there is a consistent and discernable absence of gathering feedback and/or monitoring for rapid iteration opportunities. Most references to evaluation are to outcome indicators that serve to demonstrate that an activity has been completed, rather than to qualitative assessments of changes to the status quo or the lived experiences of residents. For example, within the limited milestones documented in the City of Madrid’s action plan, the deliverable of the first commitment was the creation of a digital mailbox and the deliverable of the second commitment was “development of the project” (City of Madrid, 2018, pp. 3–4). The City of Buenos-Aires, recognizing the value of monitoring and “collaborative assessment,” built a milestone into their commitment on comprehensive sexual education that outlines the use of evaluation to strengthen the implementation of the commitment (City of Buenos-Aires, 2018, p. 67). The overall lack of focus in the action plans on both early iteration and outcomes is potentially influenced by the OGP strategy to focus assessment primarily on task completion.

4.7 Conclusion

It is impossible to capture all the nuances of the findings in a short paper, but the participating jurisdictions created more focused commitments using the open government tenets as a means to achieve governance outcomes. For example, the deprioritizing of transparency in the second action plan cycle, compared to Chatwin et al.’s (2019) study, indicates a maturing application of open government principles to local problems, rather than aspiring to a vague notion of openness. This indicates an important shift. In the past decade, as open government has gained
prominence, the tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability have been presented as an end in themselves (Heald, 2006; Chatwin, & Arku, 2017). Through an increase in practical applications of service delivery codes, such as improved public service, driving economic growth and pursuing environmental outcomes, the current action plans demonstrate an emergent view of open government tenets in service of achieving outcomes, rather than the outcomes themselves. This could be translated into using open government tenets to support the identification and solution of complex social challenges. However, there is a noticeable absence of clear language in in the action plans that identify the local government deficits that contribute to the perpetuation of the challenges. Without transparency regarding deficits, the network governance approach is limited, and the capacity development that can be achieved through collaboration is stifled.

In closing, it is useful to return to the research questions: 1) How do OGP Local program participants apply the open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability to identify and address the complex needs of residents? 2) How do OGP Local program participants engaging in network governance and leveraging the unique assets of local governance actors to overcome resource and capacity constraints in identifying and addressing complex social challenges? In response to the first question, the research findings demonstrate that participating jurisdictions are beginning to understand the core tenets of open government as guideposts for network governance that can help them identify and address complex social challenges. Ultimately, however, the limitations of the document analysis precluded a conclusive answer to the second question.

The OGP Local participants did not comprehensively articulate how they leverage their local governance actors to identify and address complex social challenges. The absence of discussion on network governance and the unique assets of local institutional actors is noticeable
in the action plans. This highlights a need for further research, using a case study approach, to investigate how local governments engage in network governance arrangements in distinct geographical areas. Despite the limitations, this research indicates that there is an opportunity for participating jurisdictions to improve their co-creation processes and how they engage with a broad network of local institutional actors. When identifying institutional actors, it is important to identify their areas of expertise, explain how they are best positioned to contribute to the success of a commitment, and how they played a role in the problem definition. This sort of attention to detail helps ensure that residents and civil society are not treated as a monolithic entity of general users and will improve problem definition and the identification of, potentially, more successful reforms that are generated through a clear understanding of lived experience. In essence, co-creation will help to ensure that local plans do in fact reflect the local populations they impact. Further, it allows for the unique assets of local governance actors to be leveraged to meet the needs of residents.

The document analysis approach used in this research was only able to scratch the surface of these questions. More nuanced answers to the questions would necessitate a broader review of documents and in-depth stakeholder interviews to obtain a richer understanding of the environment in which OGP Local participants operate. Further, the documents analyzed here were themselves limited. As noted throughout, OGP Local participants follow a broad template in creating their action plans. This influences the content and potentially the space dedicated to co-creation, commitment design, implementation, and evaluation. Stakeholder interviews would reveal any restrictions felt as a result of the template or other guidance from the OGP.

Despite these limitations, infusing UGT with the lenses of open government tenets and PDIA in this document analysis revealed that OGP Local participants have room for improvement
when it comes to thinking through the design, implementation, and evaluation of their action plans. Two areas for improvement stand-out:

1) Problems could be better articulated so that they clearly relate to a specific need that has been identified through consultation or collaboration with those most directly impacted by the challenge and the local institutional actors that provide service to these people;

2) Commitments should be designed with more flexibility, so activities can be adapted in response to ongoing feedback through monitoring and evaluation.

Open government literature agrees that transparency, civic participation, and accountability measures must be facilitated by a fundamental transformation in the relationship between government and residents (Yu & Robinson, 2012; Clarke & Francoli 2014; Clarke, 2019). This paper shows that despite increasing knowledge on how to apply open government tenets in service of governance reform, they are still not used effectively to leverage the unique assets of local governance actors. Further research is needed in distinct geographical locations to develop an understanding of how local governments collaborate with local governance actors to overcome resource and capacity constraints in identifying and addressing complex social challenges.
References


CHAPTER 5

BEST PRACTICE FOR WHO? ADDRESSING LOCAL PROBLEMS WITH LOCALLY DEvised SOLUTIONS

5.1 Introduction

Despite sustained global efforts, complex social challenges like poverty, housing insecurity, violence, and growing inequality continue to manifest in unique ways in communities around the world. In countries throughout Africa, this has resulted in extensive research on the capacity deficits and resource constraints of local government. The normative ideals of decentralization and good governance propose a plethora of technical fixes, best practices, and imported solutions (Garriga-Portolà & López-Ventura, 2014; Grindle, 2017). These best-practice prescriptions are frequently based on an overly simplistic narrative about local governments in Africa being weak and requiring external intervention (Lindell, 2007). While there is little argument that local governments throughout African countries have room for improvement,
abstract notions of “achieving” good governance overshadow necessary discussions about how local government can identify and address immediate needs.

Like countries of similar trajectories, Ghana’s local governments face common constraints, including an “unfunded mandate” due to insufficient resources to carry out legislated functions, provide basic services, and engage residents (Dafflon, 2013; Crook, 2017; Anaafo, 2018). Grindle (2017) suggests that understanding these constraints and how political economies shape options for capacity building should be prioritized over nebulous governance ideals.

Using empirical data from two local governments, Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA) and Tamale Metropolitan Assembly (TaMA), this paper seeks to answer the questions: How do local governments in Ghana engage with local governance actors to identify complex social challenges within their jurisdictions? How effectively do local governments leverage the unique attributes of local institutional actors to overcome the resource and capacity constraints to address these challenges? To answer these questions, this research investigated how identified jurisdictions identified and addressed complex social problems broadly and then narrowed its focus on one specific complex challenge in each jurisdiction.

Acknowledging the capacity and resource deficits that have been identified within Ghana’s local government, this paper adopts an urban governance theory as a lens to understand the characteristics of governance networks. Urban governance has been defined as “a concern with governing, achieving collective action in the realm of public affairs, in conditions where it is not possible to rest on recourse to the authority of the state” (Stoker, 2000, p. 93). Given the importance of nongovernmental organizations and development partners in Ghana, this research focuses specifically on governance networks that include civil society actors in a meaningful role in identifying and addressing complex social challenges (Sorensen & Torfing, 2007).
To supplement urban governance as an analytical lens, this research applies open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability as a pathway to a networked governance approach as outlined within literature on Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA). PDIA suggests that governance interventions should aim to solve locally relevant problems through the creation of an authorizing environment that is conducive to experimentation and involves iterative feedback and learning with a broad set of stakeholders (Pritchett et al., 2010). Given Ghana’s over-saturation with international organizations, PDIA’s focus on empowering local governments to resist externally imposed “best practices” through an active process of local network development is salient (Andrews et al., 2012).

This paper proceeds as follows: The first section briefly reviews the literature on the characteristics of complex social challenges. It continues with a brief introduction of urban governance theory with an analytical lens that is infused with open government and the tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability as a pathway to PDIA literature and its relevance to complex social challenges. The next section provides contextual information on STMA and TaMA and briefly reviews the methodology for the research. The paper then moves into results of the two case studies, followed by a discussion. Finally, the paper presents concluding thoughts.

5.2 Complex Social Challenges – an enduring global problem

Globally, despite sustained effort, resolutions on pervasive social challenges have eluded global institutions, multilateral collectives, development organizations and governments at all levels. Some of these critical issues include social inclusion, ending poverty and unemployment, improving housing and slum conditions, ensuring urban prosperity for all, and environmentally sustainable development (UN-Habitat, 2016). While local manifestations of complex challenges
may vary based on context, they have identifiable features. Borrowing from literature on complexity thinking (Ostroff, 2006; Root et al., 2015) and adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 1994), complex social challenges are described as multilayered issues, with multiple actors, resistant to technical responses, and only addressed by systemic and collaborative approaches. Solutions must therefore shift away from linear and segmented interventions and recognize the complex interplay of factors and actors that perpetuate the challenges (Head & Alford, 2015).

5.2.1 Urban Governance Theory, Open Government, and Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation

Each of the distinct components of the theoretical framework—urban governance theory (UGT), open government tenets, and PDIA—embrace a resistance to externally derived solutions, or “best practices” that are developed in a particular context (frequently the West) and uncritically imposed on another context. UGT is appropriate for this research as it focuses on the practical application of network governance for policy-implementation (Kjaer, 2004). Further, UGT begins from a place of recognizing that institutional capacity and resource deficits within local governments render them incapable of singularly addressing the most salient and urgent social challenges facing cities. As an analytical lens, UGT is insufficient for interrogating issues of power, conflict, and accountability (Kjaer, 2008). Power relationships between civil society partners, residents, and the local government are of particular importance to this research. To mitigate for the inherent shortcomings of UGT, this research uniquely applies open government tenets as guideposts for connecting UGT to the PDIA component of engaging a broad network to solve locally relevant problems (Andrews et al., 2012).
Open government is broadly defined through the core tenets of transparency of information and process (Dawes & Helbig, 2010; McGee & Edwards, 2016), which facilitates civic participation (Evans & Campos, 2013; Wirtz & Birkmeyer, 2015), and leads to government accountability to its residents (Ramirez-Alujas, 2012; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil, 2016). The open government lens is relevant to identifying and addressing complex social problems because its principles coalesce around the importance of equipping and engaging the public to contribute to democratic governance (Ribot et al., 2008). This lens also allows us to investigate how limitations within one principle, for example, transparency, impact the ability of individuals or groups to meaningfully participate in civic issues. There is wide acceptance in literature that establishing a culture of transparency, civic participation, and accountability is a necessary component of addressing complex social challenges (Head & Alford, 2015; Muamar, 2016; Andrews, 2018).

Literature suggests that civic participation is positively related to the quality of democracy and improves the legitimacy of government decisions (Porumbescu, 2015). Open government reforms are most impactful and transformational when governments actively equip vulnerable and underrepresented residents with the information and processes that they need to participate in decisions and hold government accountable (OGP Participation, 2017; Chatwin et al., 2019).

One framework that responds to the call for innovation in public policy and practice is the PDIA approach (Pritchett et al., 2010; Andrews et al., 2013). PDIA is an approach based on four core principles:

- aim to solve particular problems in local contexts;
- through the creation of an authorizing environment for decision-making that allows “positive deviation” and experimentation;
- involving active, ongoing and experiential learning and the iterative feedback of lessons into new solutions, doing so by;
- engaging broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate, and relevant (Andrews et al., 2012).
PDIA acknowledges that well-understood resource and capacity constraints make it impractical to expect local governments to implement systems and processes that will immediately solve all their complex challenges. Additionally, external solutions cannot be imposed through policy, superficial redesign of existing institutions, or a wholesale push for “good governance” (Andrews, 2012; Grindle, 2017). Central to the premise of PDIA is protecting local governance from a concept called “isomorphic mimicry,” defined as: institutions pretending to reform by changing organizational structure, or adopting broad nonactionable policy, rather than enduring the pain of real change and capacity building (Andrews et al., 2013; Andrews, 2013; Muamar, 2016). PDIA literature suggests that complex social challenges, labeled locally relevant problems within PDIA, are comprised of two components: 1) the negative lived experience, and 2) the capacity and/or resource deficit that perpetuates it. The acknowledgement of capacity and resource deficits being a fundamental concern aligns with the literature on urban governance theory. For this research, the point of entry from urban governance theory into PDIA is in their alignment on the need to engage a broad set of actors to ensure that complex social challenges are clearly identified, understood, and addressed through locally relevant and sustainable solutions. The real-world application of our open government–infused PDIA lens occurred within two local governments in Ghana.

5.3 Research Context

STMA and TaMA are two of the 260 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) in Ghana. Under the Local Government Act 2016 (Act 936), MMDAs are the highest political and administrative authority in each jurisdiction with a primary function of promoting local economic development.
Located in the Western Region of Ghana, STMA has an estimated population of 946,000 and is the third largest MMDA in both geographical coverage and population. TaMA, located in Ghana’s Northern Region, has an estimated population of 640,000 and is the fourth largest MMDA in the country. Both jurisdictions are the administrative capitals of their respective regions and are rapidly growing, although for very different reasons. STMA is a coastal jurisdiction, the hub for an emerging oil and gas sector, with rapid growth in oil service companies. In contrast, TaMA is a landlocked city surrounded by agriculture and well-positioned as a trade route to neighbouring countries of Burkina Faso, Togo, and Benin.

During the preliminary desktop review and early interviews, a complex social challenge that was locally relevant was identified for each jurisdiction. For STMA, the issue that permeated the conversations was the prevalence of slum communities. While there are other pressing issues, the participants seemed to acknowledge that providing residents with safe housing was central to addressing other complex social challenges. Slums have developed in STMA due to rapid population growth associated with the oil and gas sector, poor spatial planning and land use enforcement and a lack of availability of affordable and safe housing (STMA, 2014). While almost one-third of all residents in STMA live in slum communities, there has been a bias toward formal communities for projects implemented by the MMDA (CHF, 2011). Slum communities represent a complex social challenge because there are both formal and informal loci of power, people benefiting from the status quo, and capacity deficits within the local government that perpetuate the problem. Within slum communities exist poor housing conditions, a lack of basic amenities, poor water and sanitation, and insufficient services provided by the local government.

In TaMA, there are extensive issues of poverty, rapid urbanization that is overtaking farmland, growing inequality, and a lack of basic services from the local government. For this
research, the issue identified that was unique to the sociopolitical context was the violence and banishment of alleged witches to one of numerous camps in surrounding jurisdictions. Witchcraft and the issue of alleged witches being banished represents a complex social challenge because the beliefs are an integral component of social reality in Ghana and represent a conflict between the “modern” beliefs of international NGOs and traditional beliefs of residents. Witchcraft allegations are connected to climate change, diseases, crop failures, and misfortunes at the individual and community scale. It is an issue prevalent in the northern regions of Ghana that continues to result in injuries, ostracizing, and death for those accused. While there are no longer any witch camps in the TaMA jurisdiction, local estimates suggest that one-third of all camp residents are from TaMA.

5.4 Methodology

The qualitative analysis is based on empirical data from case study research in STMA and TaMA. The two locations were selected based on being of comparable size, regional capitals, and having geographic, economic, and cultural variability that creates interesting comparisons within Ghana. Further, public information indicates that the local governance actors have attempted to create meaningful initiatives that address specific challenges. The study used data from six key informant interviews, eight in-depth interviews and two focus groups (TaMA-LA1-FG N=7; TaMA-LA2-FG N=4) in TaMA; seven key informant interviews, 11 in-depth interviews, and two focus groups (STMA-LA1-FG N=5; STMA-LA2-FG N=6) in STMA; and two key informant interviews with independent consultants at the national level (see Table 5.1). The research purposively sampled key informants from local government administration, local government politicians, regional government, civil society, and local associations. These institutional actors were chosen because they are all active in governance networks with an interest in identifying and addressing complex social challenges. Consistent with an expert sampling approach, the research
began with key informant interviews that purposively targeted broad representation within decision-makers from each governance institutional actor (Etikan et al., 2016). Snowball sampling was used to supplement my key informant interviews with semi-structured interviews with participants within governance actors who actively engaged with residents. Each interview was conducted in a semiformal manner, lasted between 35 and 75 minutes, and were audio recorded. An open-ended semi-structured interview guide was developed on topics including general local government structure, civic participation, vulnerable residents, and complex social challenges. There are limitations to purposive snowball sampling as it does not necessarily yield a representative sample, but the method has proved to be the most useful sampling approach in a context where access to research participants is challenging (see van Meter, 1990).

The research used focus groups for community members in informal associations who were hesitant to engage directly due to cultural and/or language issues. The focus groups occurred after the interviews and were initiated by one or more interview participants as a viable approach to gathering more empirical data from vulnerable residents. Each focus group lasted between 25 and 50 minutes, and were audio recorded. While there is an inherent selection bias in this method of focus group creation, the intent was to validate the perspective of government and civil society participants rather than to get a comprehensive understanding of the perspective of residents.

Consistent with previous literature on case study research, the purpose was to understand the unique experience of participants (Gerrig, 2009). Each interviewee and the focus groups were given an anonymizing code for inclusion in the results and discussion (see Table 5.1). The research also used available government reports and publications online and obtained hard copies during field work to validate the perspective and details provided within the interviews. All data was manually coded using Nvivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software and adhered to an interpretivist
tradition by first analyzing what the data are saying and then organizing it into themes related to identifying and addressing complex challenges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Table 5.1: Interview and Focus Group Participants and Codes

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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
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The interviews, focus groups, and document review began with a general inquiry into complex social challenges and the local governments’ attempts to identify and address them within both TaMA and STMA. As the unique complex challenges emerged—for example, slum dwellers from STMA and alleged witches from TaMA—subsequent interviews began with general questions on identifying and addressing complex social challenges and then narrowed into questions related to the identified challenge. The following results section follows the same pattern of beginning with general findings and then narrowing into the findings related to the specific complex challenge.

5.5 Results

5.5.1 TaMA: The importance of understanding local context

Government officials acknowledge that civil society actors are crucial to TaMA engaging with communities to identify and address the challenges of its vulnerable residents (TaMa-LGA1). Often, TaMA directs civil society organizations to specific communities that have issues unaddressed by government services. The organizations then conduct a needs assessment, develop an action plan, and present it to the local Assembly. This process provides access to in-depth information and helps develop TaMA’s ability to direct internal and nongovernmental support to their residents’ complex social challenges (TaMA-CSO1). This relationship, although valuable, is dependent on civil society actors proactively engaging with the MMDA and being transparent about the information they collect and their activities. If TaMA does not reciprocate this transparency and provide the necessary access to information, the relationship can break down. As stated, “We find it difficult to advocate because they [MMDA] are not as open as possible, but they still need to be informed on our end so that there is no duplication” (TaMA-CSO5). Although
civil society leaders have cultivated a small but committed network, the leadership of the TaMA local government in identifying and addressing complex social challenges is noticeably lacking. As one interviewee stated, “It is their [MMDA] responsibility to provide the basic needs for the people, but if the NGOs were not here, the local authority would not take care of them” (TaMA-RG1).

Empirical data from TaMA provides a poignant example of the importance of understanding local context when engaging with the public. In much of TaMA, it is against cultural and social norms for women to speak about their concerns in meetings when men are present (TaMA-LA1-FG). A civil society organization representative stated, “When you call for a meeting, they [women] would come, but sit separately and when there are issues to discuss, they won’t even talk” (TaMA-CSO5). Even if men are open to their wives participating, “The people around them would not allow it. They would say that their wife is fooling you or has juju [spiritual power] over you” (TaMA-LGA2). Thus, attempts to identify and address complex social issues must adapt by designing unique opportunities to give space for women to present their perspective. In response, CSOs and local government hold separate meetings for women and find that women are more willing to discuss their challenges, which helps facilitators to develop a more comprehensive perspective. To illustrate, an interviewee noted, “If we meet them [women] alone, we can understand their needs and what is affecting them. Once we know their needs, we advocate such that the men can also understand the needs of their women” (TaMA-LGA2). The importance of the perspective of women was emphasized, “When men make the decisions, it is about the men, but when women make the decisions, it is about the children in their care, the community and their personal issues” (TaMA-LGP1).
A known cultural feature of Ghana’s Northern Region is that alleged witches are chased out of communities and into rural camps with inadequate living conditions. It has devastating impacts on the accused and their families and can result in physical injuries and fatalities. Demographics most at risk of being accused are widows who lack a support system and may represent a financial burden for their extended family, and women above 60 years old without children or with children who have moved away. This is especially true of women in polygamous homes where an older wife is accused. While many accusations are nefariously motivated, these communities have strong beliefs in witchcraft, and some of the women in camps even confirm that they are a witch saying, “It is a spirit that is in me” (TaMA-LA1-FG).

Witchcraft allegations are a challenge that has received attention and periodic interventions from the national government and international partners, and there are multiple organizations working to address the issue (see Roxburgh, 2016). For example, one interviewee recounted the national government’s involvement, stating, “The national ministry in charge of social protection launched an initiative promising to close all the witch camps, though thus far, only one has been successfully disbanded” (TaMA-CSO3). Further, the national government extended a bimonthly cash-transfer and health insurance program to all residents of the witch camps (TaMA-CSO4). While meeting immediate needs is important, local CSOs have shown the most substantial commitment to understanding the complexity of issues around alleged witches and the camps. CSOs assume various roles, with some focused on protecting human rights and others investigating the cause of the allegations and working to negotiate with the community to prevent more forced camp entries. A CSO representative stated,
It’s a very deeply rooted belief system that cannot be ended now. We thought it was proper to start from the human rights perspective, where people are entitled to their beliefs, but their beliefs should not be a hindrance to other people’s rights. (TaMA-CSO3)

A number of organizations that collaborate to identify and address the complex challenges associated with alleged witches were identified, including the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (TaMA-RG1); regional offices of the national Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection; police domestic violence and victim support units; traditional authorities; individual scholars from the University of Development Studies; the Regional House of Chiefs and other traditional authorities; religious organizations; and CSOs. While the issues around witchcraft and accusations are predominantly in the Northern Region, it is a unique issue for TaMA to deal with because there are no longer any camps located within their jurisdiction. However, estimates from multiple interviewees suggest that at least 30% of all witch camp residents are from Tamale (TaMA-CSO3; TaMA-CSO4).

Currently, local actors advocate that the MMDAs discourage allegations through local bylaws, education, and appeals to human rights. One CSO suggested it is a sequencing of priorities, stating, “In the event that we are able to stop these practices [witchcraft allegations] within the districts, I think we will save ourselves resources to do other things” (TaMA-CSO3). Despite most of the work being focused on preventing allegations with bylaws and education, CSO respondents demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the multiple root causes of the allegations. For example, one respondent highlighted a linkage between allegations and seasonal outbreaks, stating, “When there’s a breakout of disease, for example, cholera or cerebrospinal meningitis, and a lot of people all of a sudden suffer. It can be attributed to witchcraft” (TaMA-CSO4).
Interviewees acknowledged that it was a challenge to leverage resources and engage local actors because of a deeply embedded fear of the power of witchcraft (TaMA-CSO2; TaMA-CSO3). An interviewee highlighted this difficulty, “Sometimes when you ask a political head, they behave differently. So, it’s a system that almost everyone is afraid. Even the police. Sometimes when we engage with them, they ask us do you not fear witches too?” (TaMA-CSO2). One respondent questioned rhetorically whether the lack of interest is because the problem is not well understood or because individuals fear supporting actions that improve the lives of alleged witches (TaMA-CSO3). Stated another way, “They also believe that if you help, if you are someone who supports witchcraft, or someone who supports someone who has been accused, you can easily die too” (TaMA-CSO2). Respondents recognized that accused witches and all underserved groups needed support and training so they could engage with the local government and advocate for their needs. As stated, “They need information, armed with an understanding of how to lobby, advocate, and training them on how to lead. But if you want to do it community by community, it takes time” (TaMA-CSO5). The need for a committed local network dedicated to this training is clear.

5.5.2 Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly: The value of civic participation

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development recently embarked on a project with MMDAs, including STMA, that funded local government to engage with local CSOs in addressing community concerns. Similarly, STMA’s participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) provided incentive for engaging a broad network of institutional actors. Through these opportunities, STMA expressed an intention of adhering to the tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability in their collaboration with civil society and residents (STMA, 2018). The planning for these community projects engaged a diverse set of local institutions, including nongovernmental and CSOs, traditional authorities, religious leaders, trade
associations, media, and residents. Though some of these plans and projects have not achieved their objectives, STMA continues to act on external incentives to engage with actors to address complex community and governance challenges. Empirical data within STMA highlighted that outside of broad, externally supported consultation efforts, there is a dearth of meaningful public participation opportunities. A local government representative commented, “One way the Assembly can enhance civic participation is by doing the civic action plan that they prepare. It shouldn’t be a document that just lies on the shelf” (STMA-CSO1).

As part of a broader capacity building project, an international aid organization sponsored two iterations (2012, 2015) of a “Citizen Report Card” in STMA (Global Communities, 2015). This provided local leadership with aggregate feedback on how residents viewed the performance of the MMDA and provided a starting point for more granular problem identification. Another source of broad information on local challenges referenced in the interviews is the District League Table (DLT), a UNICEF-led partnership that ranks Ghanaian MMDAs on disparate levels across regions and districts. Despite its broad nature, the DLT is intended to be used to inform priorities, strategies, and programs. In comparison to other MMDAs, STMA ranked near the bottom at 193/216, though failure to provide data on multiple components diminished their overall score. Beyond this broad collection of opinions and indicators, the opportunities for civic participation in STMA are limited to town hall–style consultations. These events are executed in central locations throughout the MMDA and frequently during the quadrennial Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) or the Annual Action Plan (AAP) processes (STMA-LGA4). Local government officials tout these large public engagements as providing people with an opportunity to raise their concerns (STMA-LGA1). However, CSO representatives and residents do not find these events conducive to meaningful participation, stating, “Most of the time is
spent on fanfare. They organize a full day program and then MCE [mayor] shows up late and gives his long speech about how well they are doing” (STMA-CSO3). Local politicians expressed frustration with the meetings saying that even when residents get heard, “We are tired of them [meetings] because they don’t implement it. We’ve been making the issues known, but nothing is happening” (STMA-LGP3).

The frustration of community and association leaders with the inability of the MMDA to effectively identify and address complex social challenges was palpable throughout the interviews conducted in STMA. One question often posed was how STMA allocated their scarce resources and prioritized needs. An association representative indicated, “Yes, the assembly can help, but where are they? They won’t come around. They say they have many issues to address and sometimes I wonder why our problems are not the many issues the assembly has to address?” (STMA-LA1-FG). A government representative responded suggesting, “If their voices will be heard, it will be heard through the social welfare and the community development departments” (STMA-LGA2). However, representatives from these departments discussed situations where they have conducted needs assessments in communities, provided reports to the Assembly, and then avoided returning to the community because they were unable to address any of the expressed needs. An officer stated, “They [residents] only understand the person that they interact with and think that we have the power to do everything. But if I had that power, I would have done it. But I don’t. There is little I can do to help them” (STMA-LGA2).

STMA has a long history of slum communities within its boundaries, and numbers continue to expand. Although formal demographic data is challenging, it is estimated that 60% of STMA’s population live in slums (STMA-CSO1). Many of the residents are female-headed families or single men who moved into STMA to look for opportunities in oil or adjacent industries. As
expected, residents in these informal settlements are often the least educated and most impacted by health issues and seasonal disease outbreaks. This makes it difficult for many residents in slum communities to have their needs prioritized. Unlike the consistent tension and conflict between local government and slum communities in Accra (Ghana’s administrative capital), the parties generally coexist peacefully in STMA. However, this does not imply that the slum communities in STMA receive the local government support they desire, as most projects in these settlements are donor funded. One interviewee suggested that the primary reason a cordial relationship exists between the communities and the MMDA is the action taken by civil society to help foster and maintain the relationship (STMA-CSO3).

While residents are supposed to be represented by their local politicians, these members are frequently unable to effectively advocate for their constituents. Without this avenue, residents often do not know how to advocate for themselves. One respondent framed it this way, “They need capacity building, especially at the local level, on local structures. Who do [residents] have to talk to if they walk up to STMA or they walk up to any assembly offices?” (STMA-CSO4). One attempt in STMA to better engage vulnerable populations is supporting the creation of representational associations. A local government staff stated, “The Assembly does not deal with informal organizations, so we came in to help residents of the slum communities organize themselves and register their organizations in order to hold formal arrangements with the assembly” (STMA-CSO1). A specific example is the Queen Mother Association, which developed a series of workshops for the Market Queens (influential women leaders within the markets) to build their understanding of how to organize and advocate for their unique needs. Now, the association can transact business with the local government and private third-party organizations. Similarly, the City-Wide Settlement Upgrading Fund (CSUF), a local arms-length financing facility set up by
STMA to support the needs of slum communities, works with community leadership to loan or act as a guarantor for slum-upgrading projects. In the past three years, they worked with organizations including the Ghana Federation of the Urban Poor (GFUP) to provide loans, develop savings and loan groups for local trader associations, and communicate needs of the communities to STMA.

Even when the MMDA acknowledges needs within the slum communities and they allocate budget upgrades, the community does not trust that there will be follow through. A respondent stated, “The needs have been represented in the budget, but it all comes to whether the money exists for our needs” (STMA-LA2). Often once the initial consultations have ended, the participants wait in vain for some indication of whether their needs were understood and prioritized. A local government officer stated, “Over the years, when the assembly engages with the people and there is information that they are supposed to report back on, the assembly never gets back to the people” (STMA-LGA4). STMA reports acknowledged that inadequate opportunities for resident oversight have resulted in project delays and outright failure, which leads to mistrust in public officials (STMA, 2018).

5.5.3 Broad challenges: Why is social development not prioritized?

Three broad themes emerged within the case studies that can help frame the subsequent discussion. First, empirical data demonstrates that local governments prioritize funding physical infrastructure over social interventions, because national politics and local elites demand it. A CSO representative in TaMA said, “Most of the time the MMDA are interested in physical development where they are looking at building a school here so during campaign years politicians were able to say, I did this” (TaMA-CSO3). Similarly, in STMA, “When you measure the success of governments, or leadership, people look at the physical things, they want to see that projects have been completed” (STMA-CSO5). In contrast, “Social issues [interventions] are very difficult for
people to appreciate; they look at structures, things that they can see with their eyes. Human development is not part of their agenda” (STMA-LGA3). This was reiterated by a civil society representative, “There’s a real hyper focus on infrastructure as opposed to social development. How do you make that shift to make people understand the value of social?” (STMA-CSO5). The institutionalized focus on physical development creates disincentives for government staff to develop a nuanced understanding of complex social challenges.

Second, Ghana has instituted a national planning process for the MMDAs called the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) (four-year plan), composite budgeting, and the associated Annual Action Plan (AAP) (Government of Ghana, 2015). The MTDP limits the ability of local governments to be responsive to the emerging needs of their constituents and centralizes control of the development planning process because only priorities listed in each MTDP can be actioned within the four-year period (Anaafo, 2018). Given the above-mentioned prioritization of physical infrastructure, initiatives for addressing social challenges are often deprioritized in the plans. While central government oversight is arguably beneficial in low-capacity environments, policy and practice should be designed in a way that empowers local decision-making, facilitates civic participation, and allows for iterative and adaptive responses to local needs.

Third, in response to the limitations of the MTDP, many of the initiatives addressing social issues are short-term, externally funded projects. Interviewees highlighted the damage caused by a long-term pattern of “projectized” support within Ghanaian local government. This is a critical discussion to have within the context of PDIA, as the approach is to identify and address locally relevant challenges, instead of attempting to import broader systems reform. A respondent stated, “We must stop ‘projectizing’ activities. We do not continue the work because it was a project, that
is why we have issues of sustainability. This laptop is for this project so if the laptop stops working, the project stops. If the project staff lead is not there, the project stops” (STMA-RG1).

This challenge was echoed in STMA regarding a Bill and Melinda gates project, “Most decisions are tied to funding, once the contract for funding ends, the project comes to an end” (STMA-CSO3). The tension to be addressed within the Ghanaian context is how to institutionalize and sustain relevant capacity built by external projects, so that the progress is not lost when each “project” is finished. Considering these framing issues, the case study data facilitates our nuanced discussion on using an integrated open government and PDIA lens to understand how these two MMDAs identify and address local manifestations of complex social challenges. To answer our research questions, the discussion section has been organized around the four components of the PDIA approach and the associated open government tenets.

5.6 Discussion

The following discussion is organized around the four components of the PDIA literature infused with open government tenets, ultimately directing back to urban governance theory.

5.6.1 Problem identification

The emphasis in PDIA literature on validating the perspective of external (often) international organizations through the lived experience of local and national actors is relevant to constructing the multitude of “problems” associated with witchcraft allegations. Recent literature suggests that international organizations are removed from local context and view it through a Western lens, which ignores the complexity of locally embedded problems (Roxburgh, 2018). In the case of TaMA, international actors identify witch camps as the problem and abolishing them as the solution. In contrast, workers involved in resettlement work suggest that you first need to make the camps unnecessary (TaMA-CSO2). This highlights one of the inherent complexities in
addressing the issue of witchcraft allegations; the external perspective from the international actors and donors lacks the nuance of local perspective. One CSO participant stated, “It’s not about the banning. It’s about doing the work to get these women resettled into communities. This takes resources to help us move in this direction” (TaMA-CSO2). Traditional authorities express a desire for people to learn to peacefully coexist with witches, a perspective that is also in contrast with the international perspective (Roxburgh, 2018). Without adequate efforts to reintegrate the alleged witches into communities and eliminate false allegations and banishments, the complexity of the local problems cannot be addressed. This reflects the PDIA belief in the need to construct and deconstruct problems with a wide range of actors that have an intimate understanding of the local context to avoid the imposition of an external perspective and preordained solution. The absence of local government leadership in identifying and constructing a locally devised solution to address this issue is striking. While some of the local governments in the Northern Region of Ghana that have witch camps within their jurisdiction have moved forward on bylaws and other attempts at combatting the abuse alleged witches receive, TaMA has not acknowledged its responsibility as the source of many of the banishments. Engaging with local CSOs would enable TaMA to address their capacity deficits and to identify and devise local collaborative solutions.

Open government literature highlights that the civic participation required to adequately identify complex social challenges only occurs if transparency exists and residents and the organizations that serve them have the capacity to understand the information and government decision-making processes (IAP2, 2005; Harrison, & Sayogo, 2014). The empirical data highlighted that both case study MMDAs, like local governments around the world, struggled to meaningfully engage residents, especially those with complex vulnerabilities. While local government participants suggest that the lack of meaningful engagement is due to a lack of
resources, this view is contested by both CSOs and regional government participants. This is consistent with previous research in Ghana and in the Global South more broadly that suggests that residents and civil society must wrestle for meaningful participation and influence on the decisions made by government (Awal & Paller, 2016; Kamruzzaman, 2018). Proper problem identification is not possible without the participation of the impacted communities and local institutional actors. While civil society plays an important role, without local government facilitating activities the benefits of a network approach to governance are not realized (UN-Habitat, 2013).

To address their civic participation shortcomings, STMA has successfully experimented with innovative formats such as facilitating small group discussions with residents, CSOs, and the private sector for the development of a biannual plan to “open” government (Chatwin et al., 2017; STMA, 2018). While they have struggled to sustain these approaches, they have demonstrated an understanding that these techniques lead to meaningful participation by “allowing citizens direct access and participation in government decision-making [to ensure] that people drive what affects them most” (STMA, 2018). STMA’s efforts with innovative approaches to engaging local governance actors were the result of participation within an international network called the OGP Local Program and not the result of internal systemic incentives. As a part of their eligibility to be a member of the OGP Local Program, STMA must engage residents and civil society on a biannual basis to collaboratively create a strategy for addressing complex social challenges and government capacity deficits (OGP Participation, 2019). Regardless of the incentive, innovative approaches to civic participation are crucial to local problem identification in any jurisdiction globally.
5.6.2 Engaging a broad network

Globally, while local governments are responsible for the well-being of residents in their jurisdiction, that does not mean they always actively take the lead on engaging a network of local actors to identify and address complex challenges. The empirical data showed that rather than facilitating a network, MMDAs often provide one-time resources to temporarily meet basic needs (health, shelter, food) for vulnerable individuals/groups within their jurisdiction. A respondent stated, “Playing the lead role is our problem. We were thinking that they [local government] would be very active in that, so that we could all be playing the same game and if they came to support then we would get the attention we need. Alone, we struggle” (TaMA-CSO2). While this research demonstrated that any contributions of time and/or resources to identify and address complex social challenges were beneficial, CSOs often face limited resources and influence, leading to difficulties in facilitating an appropriate network of institutional actors without a sustained local government presence. In PDIA this is referred to as the “paradox of embeddedness,” where actors that identify the problems do not have the authority to address the problems, and actors with the power (in this case, the MMDA) do not acknowledge the problem (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Andrews, 2015).

In addition to CSOs, local politicians are often the ones engaging with stakeholders outside government. One local politician stated, “When I was not getting what I am supposed to from the Assembly, I decided to lobby other donor agencies to get some support for my people” (STMA-LGP2). On the surface, the role of local politicians as advocates aligns with the PDIA approach, but it is hindered by the political environment in Ghana in two distinct ways. First, the decentralization that has occurred has encouraged “self-help” in the various communities within an MMDA (Anaafo, 2018). This results in local politicians competing amongst themselves for
limited external funds rather than engaging a network and collaborating. Second, the scarcity of resources and the political climate that emphasizes physical construction over social improvements results in most local political advocacy being aimed at physical projects like roads, paving, streetlights, and drainage. These constraints reinforce the PDIA assertion that local governments need to take a leadership role in developing a strategy for engaging a network.

It is understandable that local governments do not have sufficient resources to adequately address all the complex social issues in their jurisdiction, but there is no substitute for government leadership in network development and facilitation (UN-Habitat, 2013). This is amplified by the fact that the issues like witchcraft allegations and slum dwellers are interjurisdictional and require intra-governmental negotiations. In the Northern Region of Ghana, there are multiple MMDAs that have camps and/or ongoing issues with witchcraft allegations within their areas, and the ability of CSOs to facilitate interjurisdictional planning is limited. Likewise, in the southern Ghana there are many MMDAs that have expanding slum communities. The responsibility for the well-being of alleged witches and slum dwellers is legislated to the local government, not civil society. Relying on local institutions and distancing themselves from the issues, governments abdicate accountability.

5.6.3 Creating an authorizing environment

The data from both case studies demonstrates that MMDA acknowledgement of their responsibility for specific vulnerable populations needs to precede any attempts to catalyze an enabling environment as proposed within PDIA. Unfortunately, in both case studies the trust between vulnerable populations and the local government appears to be limited. For example, one respondent noted, “They ask you questions and at the end you see nothing change. It is just a waste of time” (TaMA-LA1-FG). CSOs actively lay the groundwork, but it appears that any action will
require a catalyzing event or series of events that create incentives for the MMDA to value local stakeholder input and take a leadership role to facilitate an environment of experimentation and learning.

A precursor to creating an enabling environment for addressing complex social issues is the powerholder valuing the participation of impacted communities (Lee, 2013). As a governance expert at the national level stated,

We need strategies to ensure that their voices are heard. It may require more involvement from civil society for advocacy and programming and engagement that can create empowerment at the local level. If people are empowered and know their rights, then they can begin to demand for those rights. (N-GE1)

The small network of local actors working with alleged witches in TaMA demonstrate that they value the perspective of alleged witches. This is visible through initiatives to build leaders and a network within the camps and creating opportunities for the individuals to advocate for their rights to local government (TaMA-CSO3). However, it appears there is limited incentive and/or capacity for the local government to collect and act on it. Without this incentive, local government will not have or give the necessary authorizations to local governance actors for experimentation (Andrews, 2018).

While not always followed by action, empirical data from STMA demonstrated that some government officials valued the perspective of slum dwellers, as stated, “Once we bring them on board at least we can also learn a lot from them; some of their special needs, we can learn and then intervene in that area” (STMA-LGA5). Organizing specific groups (market women, fishmongers, etc.) into associations is an example of preparing stakeholders in anticipation of a catalyzing event that creates the enabling environment referenced in the PDIA approach (Andrews et al., 2013).
However, broadly, this is another area where the leadership of the MMDA is noticeably absent. Outside of CSO work or externally funded initiatives, there are few MMDA-led efforts to provide opportunities for vulnerable populations to influence decisions that impact their lives. A regional government interviewee suggested that local governments are not motivated to engage with vulnerable groups; there is no national incentive, and when residents do not know their rights, they do not keep the government accountable. The participant stated,

The scope of support for the marginalized is limited to women, children, and persons with disabilities. This is probably because these categories of persons are recognized by the common fund [national fiscal transfer system] and expected to be allocations for their support. The Assembly itself does not have a strategy for the broader marginalized groups.

(TaMA-RG2)

Further, the data showed systemic disincentives for engaging with vulnerable populations and organizations that served them because government staff could not act on the knowledge they collected.

The crux of PDIA is creating an authorizing environment within local governments, so that the local governance actors can experiment with approaches to addressing complex social challenges. However, local governments control only so much of their own enabling environment. As previously discussed, nationally directed budget allocations and planning occur every four years for the MTDP. The deprioritizing of social development within the MTDP, and the constraints felt by the MMDA to only act on plans within it, combine to limit the creation of an enabling environment for local actors. If CSOs are unsuccessful in lobbying for their interests to be included in the four-year plan, it is difficult to receive attention and resources from the local government. Additionally, even items that are planned in the MTDP may not receive funding, as
indicated by a national-level local governance expert, “Where they [national government] have failed is in the funding of the districts activities to implement their plan” (N-GE2). While the local government is the immediate face of the authorizing environment with local actors, their resource and capacity deficits are often perpetuated by external forces.

5.6.4 Evaluation and iterative feedback

PDIA literature highlights the need for quick feedback loops within the broad network engaged to act on locally identified challenges (Andrews et al., 2015). This requires involvement from all local actors, prioritizing the voices of those impacted the most. The only indication of ongoing evaluation in TaMA is the MTDP-related quarterly progress reports mandated by national government (Tama-LGA3; TaMA-RG2). An important question that emerges as it relates to witchcraft allegations is how to encourage MMDAs like TaMA to take a more proactive role in facilitating knowledge creation and exchange that is not externally mandated. Currently, to provide the MMDA with evidence that will catalyze action, CSOs monitor activities and changes in vulnerable populations throughout the various communities, as one participant observed, “We are always at the community. We try to reset and continue to identify the issues” (TaMA-CSO3). CSO leaders are compelled to prepare the network and collect evidence as they wait for windows of opportunity to present to local government authorities and create an environment for action. This highlights the cyclical nature of the PDIA approach; monitoring and evaluation can be both the culmination of a response to local challenges and the catalyst for problem identification and network development. Globally, traditional development monitoring and evaluation is relegated to a check-box activity at the end of project implementation.

While STMA also engages in MTDP monitoring and has committed to evaluation through their open government action plan, the number of projects in STMA that have been initiated and
abandoned emphasizes the need for knowledge management and rapid feedback loops through monitoring and evaluation. For example, interviewees recalled the development of a Client Service Unit (CSU) with a toll-free line and an online reporting program called SMART-Sol (STMA-CSO3). After much fanfare, neither the phone lines nor the online platform have been sustained (Chatwin et al., 2017). A recurring reason given for why donor projects are not sustained is that the MMDA lacks resources and capacity to sustain them (STMA-LGA4). This empirically demonstrates the global applicability of PDIA: the traditional development model of importing externally derived solutions into uniquely constrained local governments are often not successful. Local networks around the world need to insist on designing a system to document learnings and failures, so that future attempts deal with the learned shortfalls and do not replicate the failure.

5.7 Conclusion

This paper endeavored to answer two research questions: How do local governments in Ghana engage with residents to identify complex social challenges within their jurisdictions? How do they overcome the resource and capacity constraints to address these challenges? To answer these questions, the research used urban governance theory infused with open government tenets as guideposts to a PDIA approach. In both case studies, the local government is the central repository of information on community needs and projects meant to address local manifestations of global complex social challenges. A glaring shortcoming from the PDIA perspective is that the MMDAs are the major power-holders in the jurisdiction, and “engaging a broad network of actors” and “creating an enabling environment for experimentation” are unachievable without the active participation of local authorities. As previously stated, there is no substitute for local government as the convenor and facilitator of network governance activities (UN-Habitat, 2013). Local actors
did not demonstrate an ability to effectively catalyze an enabling environment conducive to experimentation.

Complex challenges are merely managed or mitigated, they are rarely solved. This means that the local network governance is never finished, and that transparency, civic participation and collaboration are required indefinitely. Unfortunately, both cases highlighted that transparency-guided participation and collaboration is fundamentally at odds with how the planning and budgeting process is structured. Further, MMDAs do not appear to have any systemic incentive to act on emerging locally experienced problems within their jurisdictions. While more cross-Ghana data would be required before making a definitive assertion, the national MTDP reflects the characteristics of isomorphic mimicry. When governments are asked to perform tasks that are too complex and/or resource intensive, based on external best practices, it often limits opportunities for organic capacity building.

The importance of this study is to apply urban governance theory and add nuance to the normative approach to government reforms aimed at identifying and addressing barriers to addressing complex social challenges. Beginning from a practical standpoint of resource and capacity deficits allows for developing immediately implementable actions rather than idealist good governance reforms. It also demonstrates the broad utility of PDIA for assessing government actions toward identifying and addressing complex social challenges. Using a PDIA framework infused with transparency, participation, and accountability can inform multilevel government investments globally. Further, it builds upon limited research on the practices that institutions use to collaborate with the public on solving the problems that impact their lives. There is a pronounced need for further research on how to institutionalize and sustain achievements gained using a PDIA approach to ensure that it does not devolve into another expression of the projectization of reform.
References


**CHAPTER 6**

**CAN METAGOVERNANCE SUPPORT BETTER RESPONSIVENESS TO HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA?**

**6.1 Introduction**

Canadian local governments are frequently the first and last stop for residents on Canada’s social safety net. When residents face complex social challenges, their access to services from their local government is crucial to their well-being. In Canada, and indeed, globally, the pervasiveness of complex social challenges continues to confound governments at all levels. Global institutions (e.g., UN-Habitat) define complex social challenges as issues that, despite sustained efforts, are never permanently solved and require the balancing of multiple interests within interorganizational and multilevel governance cooperation (Head & Alford, 2015: UN Habitat, 2016). While not necessarily within the scope of local government responsibility, the Canadian manifestations of pervasive complex social challenges like
homelessness, addictions and mental health, and poverty increasingly require the involvement of
the cities’ bureaucracy. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated already complex social
challenges and amplified their disproportionate impact on women, girls, gender-diverse people
and urban Indigenous populations (CCPA, 2021).

Using empirical data from two case study locations in Canada (Hamilton, Ontario, and
Surrey, British Columbia) combined with the perspectives of leading Canadian experts, this
paper examines the role cities play in leveraging resources to address homelessness within their
jurisdictions. Homelessness is used as a proxy for complex social challenges as a growing body
of literature suggests that individuals require a permanent residence before any other areas of
need can be addressed (Kennedy et al., 2017; Gaetz, 2020). It is a critical area to examine as
housing is a basic human right, yet homelessness has become an entrenched aspect of Canadian
society (AHRC, 2008; Culhane & Metraux, 2008). The research objective is to gain an
understanding of how local governments in Canada, working within constraints on their
autonomy and resources, are leveraging local governance actors to identify and address the
complex social challenges related to homelessness. The paper answers two specific research
questions: 1) How are local governments leveraging local institutional actors to identify and
address complex social challenges? 2) How effective are local governments as metagovernors
within the Canadian context?

This research, aligned with the perspective of urban governance theory, begins from a
place of local governments operating with resource and capacity constraints that catalyze a need
for networked forms of governance to leverage local actors with unique attributes (Kjaer, 2008).
Stoker (2009, p. 93) suggests that urban governance is “a concern with governing, achieving
collective action in the realm of public affairs, in conditions where it is not possible to rest on
recourse to the authority of the state.” Given the persistent resource gap within Canadian cities, beginning from a need for collective action due to an inability to rely on government is a salient perspective. Bramwell (2012) suggests that Canadian cities operate in the nexus between policy frameworks imposed by higher levels of government and self-organized networks of local actors. Employing an institutionalist perspective, this paper focuses specifically on governance networks that include civil society actors in a meaningful role yet center the responsibility and authority of local government as a “metagovernor” (Doberstein, 2013). While there is extensive literature available critiquing the lack of autonomy and resources in Canadian cities (see FCM, 2013), this paper focuses on ways that local governments have adapted to their constraints in order to identify and address complex social challenges. As local government is the focal point, multilevel collaboration with the provincial and federal government is considered a part of the local governance network.

To provide a structured analytical lens for this research, urban governance theory is infused with the open government principles of transparency, civic participation, and accountability as a pathway to a networked governance approach outlined within literature on Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA). PDIA originates in international development literature but is relevant to this research because it is designed to empower governments to resist externally imposed “best practices” through an active process of local network development to accurately identify complex social challenges and experiment with locally devised solutions (Andrews et al., 2012).

The paper starts with a brief review of the literature on complex social challenges and urban governance theory with an analytical lens that is infused with open government principles of transparency and accountability as well as PDIA. This is followed by a detailed overview of
the methodology employed. The results of each case study are detailed, and a discussion of the findings is articulated before the paper concludes.

6.2 Local Government and Complex Social Challenges

The emerging reliance on cities to lead efforts to identify and address complex social challenges is observable globally with supranational institutions exhorting their critical role in agreements like the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal #11 “making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (UN-Habitat, 2016; UNHCR, 2017). Despite the global recognition of the centrality of their role in meeting the complex social needs of their residents, local governments continue to operate with capacity and resource deficits.

In Canada, cities operate without constitutional recognition, and their existence is based in provincial law and thus subject to provincial intervention (Young, 2013; Taylor, 2019). Local government organization, authority, and capacity are predominantly determined by the establishment of laws, regulations, policies, and fiscal arrangements by the province (Taylor, 2019). While it is a contested statement, local governments in Canada are often referred to as “creatures of the province” as a commentary on their lack of autonomy and vulnerability to the changing priorities of the province (Smith & Spicer, 2018; Good, 2019).

Often framed in the literature as “wicked problems, complex social problems are those that resist traditional linear approaches and require collaboration between multiple actors with unique capacities and resources” (Head & Alford, 2015). Homelessness is categorized as a complex social problem as it has proven resilient in the face of traditional service delivery and policy changes at all levels of government (Brown, et al., 2009). The emergence of pervasive homelessness in Canada is an outcome of a neoliberal policy shift that reduced government
production of housing and other support measures (Gaetz, 2020). The rise of homelessness as a social problem in Canada in the late 1980s and through the 1990s was catalyzed by demands for smaller government and responses at both the provincial and federal levels of government that restricted the social safety net, reduced federal investment in health and education, and reductions of social welfare by both provincial and federal governments (Gaetz, 2020). While the macro-level causes are clear, the impacts and potential solutions are interconnected with a comprehensive approach to health and well-being, mental health and addictions, and structural inequity. Increasingly, homelessness is the target of calls for greater collaboration between all levels of government and civil society service providers in the sector (Pierre, 2007; Brown et al., 2009).

6.3 Urban Governance Theory, Open Government and Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation

Employing an institutionalist perspective, this research focused on the role of local government as a “systems manager” or “metagovernor” for addressing complex social challenges (Dobersetein, 2013). Situated in urban governance theory (UGT) as a foundation, this research focuses specifically on local governments leveraging civil society organizations to overcome inherent resource and capacity constraints (Stoker, 2000). UGT is appropriate for the practical nature of this research as it is focused on policy-implementing networked forms of governance. These networked forms of government are referred to as “governing coalitions,” “policy communities,” “stakeholders,” “policy networks,” and “governance actors” (Elander, 2002; Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; Lindell, 2008). While UGT offers value in guiding an understanding of the role of local government as an institution, empirical comparative research benefits from a more structured analytical lens. To address the inherent weakness of UGT in
interrogating issues of power, conflict, and accountability, this research integrates two additional distinct lenses: open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability as well as problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA). To facilitate the practical application of UGT to the comparative research for this paper, transparency, civic participation, and accountability are used as guideposts connecting UGT to the PDIA intention of local governments acting as metagovernors for a broad network focused on addressing locally relevant complex social challenges (Andrew et al., 2012).

While the concept of “open government” as a package of reforms has not demonstrated salience in Canada beyond the brief participation of the Government of Ontario and the ongoing membership of the Government of Canada, its relevance to this research is in applying the tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability to facilitate greater cooperation and effectiveness within local governance networks (Ingrams et al., 2020). If meaningfully adopted, the principles of transparency, civic participation, and accountability facilitate a network approach to urban governance and change the relationship between government and civil society and residents (Clarke, 2019).

Transparency—access to government data and information, collection techniques, and proceedings—enables civil society and residents to understand how to influence the decisions and policy of their government (Andrews et al., 2015). Institutionalizing a culture of transparency empowers local governance actors to contribute to the identification of complex social challenges and exert influence on government decision-making about how to address them.

Civic participation recognizes the need to empower coalitions from government, civil society, and vulnerable populations to address complex social challenges (Fox, 2014). In this
research, civic participation ensures that the individual and collective involvement of actors, and the provision of a privileged role for populations most impacted by government services and policy, are facilitated by local government as the metagovernor.

The third tenet, accountability, recognizes the obligation of government to provide records for the responsibilities for which they are entrusted (Gray & Jenkins, 1993). It is both a segue and a response to concerns within local governance networks; the increasing popularity of more dispersed decision-making across governance networks has led to a concern about a lack of accountability. In this research, accountability within networked forms of governance must exist within a hierarchical structure with the local government as the metagovernor who sits within their own accountability structures. The creative tension that exists and the place where local governments display their uniqueness is the degree to which accountability is to be oriented toward results versus process, and assets versus outcomes (Perrin et al., 2007).

PDIA adds a practical lens to assessing how local governments facilitate governance networks to identify and address complex social challenges. Its value lies both in its ability to provide an analytical lens and a framework for recommendations. PDIA is an approach based on four core principles:

- aim to solve particular problems in local contexts,
- create an authorizing environment for decision-making that allows “positive deviation” and experimentation,
- involve active, ongoing, and experiential learning and the iterative feedback of lessons into new solutions, doing so by
- engaging broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate, and relevant. (Andrews et al., 2012)

Although originally conceptualized in the field of international development, PDIA is applicable to this research as at its core, it is designed to empower governments that struggle with capacity and resource deficits to resist externally imposed best practices. PDIA suggests
that local governance networks, not external actors, should inform policy development, service
design, and the iterations necessary to improve effectiveness (Andrews et al., 2015).

6.4 Study Context

The City of Surrey is the second largest city in British Columbia and the 12th largest city in Canada (Sen Nag, 2019). Surrey continues to grow at a pace of 2% per year over the past 10
years, with projections that it will overtake Vancouver and become British Columbia’s largest
city within five to ten years (Osler et al., 2019). The City of Surrey is divided into six
communities: Whalley, Guildford, Fleetwood, Newton, Cloverdale, and South Surrey. Most of
the population lives in Whalley, Guildford, Fleetwood, and Newton, with Cloverdale also
growing rapidly. Most unhoused residents of Surrey live within Whalley, Guildford, and
Newton; these communities also host most of the services for multi-barriered individuals.

Hamilton, Ontario, is located approximately 70 km southwest of Toronto and is a part of
a large conurbation that includes Toronto and its western suburban areas known as the Greater
Toronto and Hamilton area (GTHA). The growth rate of the City of Hamilton was consistently
below the provincial average from the late 1990s until approximately 2016 (SPCR, 2016). In
2001, the six municipalities of the Hamilton-Wentworth Region—Ancaster, Dundas,
Flamborough, Glanbrook, Hamilton, and Stoney Creek—were amalgamated into the City of
Hamilton (SPRC, 2008). The geographic distribution of poverty in Hamilton generally aligns
with the communities that have affordable housing and services, predominantly in Hamilton’s
Downtown Core and Mountain communities. However, the inadequacy of social housing and the
rapidly increasing rents are displacing low-income families into surrounding suburbs with lower
market rates, but also lower levels of services and transit (SPRC, 2017). One participant noted
solemnly, “What I hear is people make their choices. They say they had to pay their rent so they
couldn’t pay their bill [Hydro]. Keeping that roof over their head is priority, and rents have gone up” (H-PS-1). A lack of adequate, affordable, and accessible housing options, combined with insufficient investment in social housing have led to ongoing growth of homelessness over the past decade (Dindyal, 2020). There are disproportionately high percentages of Indigenous people, immigrants, and refugees, and people with mental health, substance use, and co-occurring conditions in Hamilton’s homeless population (City of Hamilton, 2015).

6.5 Methods

This paper used a qualitative case study methodology in two Canadian local governments: Hamilton, Ontario, and Surrey, British Columbia. The qualitative approach is appropriate for this research as it supported the uncovering of insights into ever-evolving dynamics of power and social change as well as exploring the motivation of actors as they confront complex social challenges in their unique contexts (Simpson, 2007). The goal of the research was analytic generation rather than statistical generation (Yin, 2009). The use of two case study locations, supplemented by data from external experts, was an attempt to balance depth and generalizability, and provide insights that can be relevant to a broader audience (Gerring, 2009).

Hamilton, Ontario, and Surrey, British Columbia, were chosen due to their comparable populations of 536,917 and 517,887, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2017). Additionally, the two locations represent steadily growing mid-sized cities in proximity to the global cities of Toronto, Ontario, and Vancouver, British Columbia. While global cities have unique access to resources, mid-sized cities in their shadows often need to be creative in how they address their challenges. Neither case study jurisdiction has an individual charter so they must abide by the same legislation as all cities of various sizes in their province. Local institutional arrangements
vary, reflecting the unique evolution, provincial and local political interests, political culture, and particular circumstances over time in each city. Hamilton and Surrey also have well-documented innovative approaches to addressing complex social challenges with local governance actors.

The research employed key informant interviews using purposive sampling to ensure that the research contained the perspective of local government decision-makers in the administrative side, local government politicians, and nongovernmental actors engaged with the city in a governance network in each case study jurisdiction. In Hamilton there were eight key informant interviews and in Surrey there were seven key informant interviews. These individuals were recruited through local government networks, city websites, and civil society websites where the participants were named in relation to activities within the homelessness sector. To broaden the data and validate it within a larger sample, eight key informant interviews were conducted with expert actors outside of the case study jurisdictions, including civic participation consultants, academics, a provincial government representative, and a manager of intergovernmental relations at the municipal level. All key informant interviews were targeted through their role as a decision-maker within a local governance network. If the key informant interviewees suggested an actor involved in their governance network, the individual was contacted, and their participation was requested. These semi-structured interviews, one in Hamilton and three in Surrey, added breadth to the data and helped to triangulate the perspectives. Each participant was given an anonymizing code for the inclusion in the results and discussion (See Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Interview Participants and Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
<td>S-CSO-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S-CSO-2</td>
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<td>S-CSO-3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>S-CSO-4</td>
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The study employed a combination of key informant and semi-structured interviews both in-person and via phone calls, lasting between 35 and 75 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed immediately following the completion of the interview. Questions focused on developing an understanding of their role within local governance networks, their understanding of the complexity of homelessness, and their interactions with other institutional actors in the governance network. Desktop research was conducted pre-, and post-interviews as new related policy documents, meeting minutes, and reports were discovered. These documents are used in the Results and Discussion sections to add context to the empirical data from the interview participants. Empirical data was cross-referenced with meeting minutes when
participants mentioned decisions being made in specific meetings. The validation of participant perspective through meeting minutes allowed for an ongoing triangulation of data.

6.6 Results

The results of the empirical research are organized and presented by city, beginning with Surrey, BC, and concluding with Hamilton, ON. These sections are followed by a presentation of the results that combines the Surrey, Hamilton, and external expert perspectives.

6.6.1 Surrey: Can homelessness be addressed if it is not a council priority?

Surrey has seen a 7% rise in overall homelessness since the 2017 count (BCNPHA, 2020). The city’s proportion of people with compounding vulnerabilities (i.e., seniors, women, persons with complex health issues, and persons with mental health issues) is higher than the comparative population throughout Metro Vancouver as a whole (BCNPHA, 2020). Members of a committee formed to address violence against women report that the number and proportion of unhoused women and female youth is increasing and that services are unable to keep up with the demand (SVWG, 2017). Interviewees suggested that Surrey’s complex social issues include homelessness, vulnerable women and girls, urban Indigenous people, immigrants, and refugees; many of these challenges are intersecting and compounding, which contributes to their inherent complexity (S-CSO-3; S-LGA-2; S-LGP-1).

Surrey is home to the largest urban Indigenous community in British Columbia, and the rate of Indigenous children and youth in poverty is the highest in Western Canada (Skookum Lab, 2019). Though outside of the scope of this research, the disproportionate representation of Indigenous people in Surrey who are experiencing homelessness was a prominent topic, both within the interviews and the documents reviewed. A network called the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC) was established to represent the voice of urban
Indigenous people in Surrey and to work collaboratively with other governments and organizations (Tétreault, 2017). Three goals within a strategic objective are to increase culturally appropriate services, develop an accurate picture of Indigenous homelessness in Surrey, and lobby all levels of government for more appropriate and affordable Indigenous-run housing options (Tétreault, 2017). Notably, the City of Surrey does not play a formal leadership role but has final sign-off on funding and service contracts, and is responsible for the management, allocation, and reporting on funds associated with SUILC (SUILC, 2018).

Interviewees mentioned the Healthier Communities Partnership, Local Immigration Partnership, and the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group as additional examples of the types of local networks established to address complex social challenges. Until recently, the activities of these tables/committees were tracked and supported at a committee of council, called the Social Equity and Diversity Committee (SEDC) (formerly the Social Planning Advisory Committee). This 16-member committee consisted of influential community members, a representative of persons with disabilities, an Indigenous representative, an LGBTQ+ representative, and two representatives from civil society organizations. SEDC also included non-voting members from the Surrey Schools, Fraser Health Authority, and the Homelessness and Housing Society. In December 2020, Surrey’s Council dissolved SEDC and rolled its work into the Community Services Committee (CSC) (SEDC, 2020). The CSC consists of three members of council appointed by the mayor and three volunteer members who are City of Surrey residents who are appointed or re-appointed for a term of two years, except as otherwise determined by the mayor (CSC, 2021). Similarly, during a closed council meeting in June 2020, the current mayor and aligned council members decided not to approve the board of the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society (SHHS) for another term and bring the administration of the
fund back under the direct control of the city (S-LGP-1). SHHS was established as an arm’s length entity in 2007 to steward a $9.5 million endowment from the City of Surrey. The “board” of SHHS now consists of three council members appointed by the mayor. A civil society member expressed this concern, “There’s a lot of restructuring around all of these committees right now, and it seems there is less public participation, less opportunity for nonprofit [civil society] participation” (S-CSO-3). This participant continued by expressing their perception of the impact, “It does destabilize and lead to less confidence in the sector. ... There’s been an increasing trend around housing and secrecy and a lack of public confidence due to a lack of transparency” (S-CSO-3).

Despite the recent decrease in transparency, the City of Surrey has a long history of facilitating partnership tables to identify and address complex social challenges. One local government staff stated, “The thinking is that in order to address complex social issues, we are more effective if there is collaboration between multiple stakeholders” (S-LGA-2). The two-person Social Planning Department provides extensive in-kind support to issue-specific networks and is the central point of contact for each table. Although they do not have funding to allocate, they are seen as a neutral convenor and assist in administering funding, writing proposals, and offering use of various facilities for meetings and activities (S-LGA-2). While the Social Planning Department ultimately takes its direction from the mayor and council, it has demonstrated an ability to facilitate local actor networks around emerging priorities in the community without needing to engage with the politics of council. This approach appears to allow council to remain distanced from the more contentious issues outside of their sphere of control but allows the city to stay connected to civil society and issues that they see in their client base.
One of the most effective accounts of network governance emerged out of Surrey in response to a mutually identified need to support the transition of residents in a centrally located encampment into more permanent supported housing (S-CSO-1). At the end of 2016, the mayor announced a plan to create housing solutions, increase outreach and support through a newly formed “Surrey Outreach Team,” and improve education and engagement on social issues (City of Surrey, 2018). Partnering with local civil society organizations and the regional health authority, the City of Surrey created a new model for engagement and outreach by RCMP, bylaw officers, and other city staff. Many on the community side were afraid of the increase in RCMP and bylaw officers, but the project culminated in over 150 people being moved into temporary or long-term housing over a four-day period. The success was based on the investment from the city, as stated, “It took leadership from the top to say we are not going to deal with this issue the way we normally do” (S-CSO-3). The “network” created met weekly for 18 months and consisted of decision-makers and frontline staff from provincial and regional government entities, local civil society, fire department, RCMP, and the various city departments. One participant reflected, “A lot of trust was built through that process, by showing up and contributing and being a part of the solution. Working in a collaborative manner alongside each other, we made decisions that were consultative based on relevant and credible information” (S-CSO-3).

There was a clear indication from the interviews, documents, and media reviewed that the current mayor and council were pushing a distinctly different agenda than previous councils. Participants suggested that municipal elections brought new officials with a very definitive agenda, and so the priorities of staff had to change, which led to uncertainty and a lack of continuity (S-CSO-4; S-LGP-1). Among service providers, this has led to frustration; one stated,
“What many in the sector have felt hamstrung by [during] the last couple of years was the lack of interest in really pushing and promoting solutions around these social problems” (S-CSO-3). Civil society representatives suggested that there was still work that could be accomplished without the city, but not having municipal prioritization means there is stagnation in the convening of levels of government, land zoning, and approvals.

6.6.2 City of Hamilton: Can the “establishment” identify the needs of the most vulnerable?

Since 2010 the province has mandated that all municipalities in Ontario develop a 10-year action plan for housing and homelessness. In 2010, the City of Hamilton pulled together a committee, largely from existing tables in the sector, to specifically create the first iteration of this plan spanning 2013-2023 (City of Hamilton, 2019). Referred to as the “planning table,” the Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee (HHAC) is now an official committee of council and consists of 15 elected members from the community and a staff liaison to organize logistics, set the meeting agenda, and support the governance of the committee. It reports through the Emergency and Community Services Committee to council (ECSC, 2020). The mandate is:

To communicate and work to address the needs of citizens within the community for whom barriers exist to accessing safe, suitable, and affordable housing, including the supports needed to enable citizens to obtain and retain their homes. To support the City of Hamilton’s 10-year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan by providing information, advice, and recommendations regarding the Action Plan’s successful and meaningful implementation. (HHAC, 2020)

Member organizations are largely nonprofit service providers in the housing and homelessness sector and do not contribute resources to the actions deliberated upon at the HHAC
planning table (H-CSO-1). The table is intended to act as a two-way communication channel where members report on the activities of the other tables they represent, and the HHAC can communicate information back to the more grassroots tables (HCSO-3). Participants note that many HHAC members receive core or operational funding through the City of Hamilton (H-CSO-3; H-AI-1).

For over a decade, Hamilton has taken a unique approach to funding allocations for addressing Indigenous homelessness. While organizations focused on serving Indigenous homeless populations are represented on the HHAC and influence the strategy for the overall funding, the Aboriginal Community Advisory Board (AB-CAB) has historically received 20% of the city’s federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) funding to “autonomously address the Aboriginal homelessness priorities as defined by the Aboriginal community” (AB-CAB, 2014). In an interview, a member of AB-CAB stated, “We wanted to make the decisions and have the self-determination on how we will allocate the funding. This was the first time in Canada that the urban Aboriginal community was given complete decision-making [power]” (H-CSO-1). There is a demonstrated alignment in the priorities and implementation processes between the AB-CAB and the HHAC that are a result of representatives of AB-CAB being members on the broader community advisory board. This is reflected in a recent report on ending homelessness in Hamilton, “Indigenous Peoples are respected partners in the work of ending homelessness. This document is rooted in the spirit and actions of reconciliation” (City of Hamilton, 2019).

Ultimately, both the City of Hamilton and the AB-CAB are accountable to the federal government through the HPS for the funding, and the federal government has a fiduciary responsibility to Indigenous peoples across the country.
While the City of Hamilton, through its political and administrative functions, has well established trust relationships with major housing and homelessness service providers through their use of a network governance approach, there is a perceptible rift emerging. Several interviews, official letters, and news reports indicate a growing discontent from academia, human rights lawyers, harm reduction organizations, and activists (not mutually exclusive categories) who sit outside of the formal homelessness and housing circles (see HCLC, 2020). These voices highlight a disconnect they perceive between the city’s claims to be a leader in the sector and the actions taken when dealing with the visible manifestations of inadequate housing options for the most complex residents. One participant said, “These are complex problems that require a lot of resources, that they, the city, would say do not exist. But I would suggest if they looked at the way they use their resources now, they could respond appropriately without using additional resources” (H-AI-1). These individuals and organizations, described by an interviewee from a social service organization as “anti-establishment,” advocate for the city to respond in ways that respect the human rights of those residing in encampments, often individuals with the most complex and co-occurring challenges (Vaccaro, 2020).

6.7 Taking a Broader Perspective

The following section adds empirical data from experts across Canada to the case study data from Surrey, British Columbia, and Hamilton, Ontario. The themes chosen to frame the data were those that emerged within both case study local governments and were reinforced and/or expanded upon in the expert interviews.

6.7.1 Identifying and addressing complex social challenges

Local government participants agreed that the identification of challenges and the permission for staff to pursue solutions often originates from council directives or requests from
individual council members (S-LGA-2; E-LGA-1; H-LGA-1). There are three distinct ways that complex social issues become important enough to get on the agenda of council. First, some council members prioritize these issues and proactively put themselves in situations to hear from people with lived experience, identifying problems and designing solutions. Respondents in Surrey and Hamilton named council members, past and present, who regularly attended advisory committee meetings and were committed to understanding the complexities in the challenges being faced in the community. Second, complex social issues capture the attention of council because of the impact the issue is having on more affluent residents, “Often it’s through negative interactions, right? It is because there are complaints about issues. It’s homelessness, street-based homelessness, people that are unhoused, perceived impacts to public safety and crime, and these kinds of things, that often motivate a council” (S-CSO-3). Third, local organizations serving vulnerable residents advocate for the challenge to be put on the council agenda. CSOs acknowledged the necessity of public participation from both organizations and individuals in helping cities recognize emerging issues. One representative explained, “I think it’s their role to understand, but I think it’s our role, and others’, to advocate, to write letters, to inform council about the issues, and it’s through that public process that ultimately, hopefully they become aware” (S-CSO-3). An example of this advocacy emerged through a review of meeting minutes in Surrey. Within the minutes were years of examples of organizations across diverse sectors that presented their concerns about emerging issues to the Social Equity and Diversity Committee (SEDC, 2021). The structure of the committee allowed social planning staff and council members to initiate immediate action.

Participants outside of local government expressed that the ability to develop an in depth understanding of complex and intersecting social challenges was a capacity deficit. Cities
frequently engage with civil society to overcome this deficit. A participant stated it this way, “My strong sense is that local governments lack some combination of skills, and tools, and budget, and priority for doing this kind of sensing [identifying problems] work” (E-CSO-1). An example provided to address this concern came from a participant’s recollection of an engagement process where city council members were invited to listen and observe and think through how they could carry the lived experience of underrepresented populations forward (S-AI-1). Centering the lived experience of vulnerable populations is a critical component of identifying and addressing complex social challenges, but one that often competes with political platforms of local council members (S-CSO-3).

6.7.2 Prioritizing the involvement of vulnerable populations

The importance of prioritizing the voice of vulnerable populations in addressing the complex challenges associated with homelessness was expressed most frequently from the non-governmental participants. One participant suggested, “It will take more time and it will take balance and lots of work, but I think in the long run you end up with something that is built specifically for their purposes, with the services that are needed as opposed to what everyone else around them says are needed” (S-CSO-1). The risk of not engaging with the people impacted by these decisions is further victimization of already vulnerable individuals when the intervention developed does not match the needs.

In their recent publication Farha and Schwan (2020) outlined eight principles for addressing encampments in Canada based on international human rights law. Principle number two states, “Residents are entitled to meaningful participation in the design and implementation of policies, programs, and practices that affect them.” This sentiment is echoed in Hamilton’s strategy for addressing homelessness:
Those with *Living* and *Lived Experience* have an important role in the implementation of the homeless-serving systems framework. Participant input should be incorporated in strategic planning at the macro-level as well as via quality assurance processes, wherever possible and appropriate. (City of Hamilton, 2019)

Unsurprisingly, all interviewees indicated an ongoing challenge to meaningfully engage vulnerable and underrepresented populations in the decision-making and planning that impacts their lives. One of the predominant ways that cities appear to attempt to engage with vulnerable residents is through issue-specific committees. A participant suggests, “My sense is that most local governments choose to interface with underserved populations through advisory committees. That’s a common tool that local governments use” (S-AI-2). However, the efficacy of this approach was challenged by a participant on a homelessness committee:

> We are terrible at it. We don’t make it [committee participation] inviting to them. People would suggest that we do, but we give ourselves too much credit for what we do. We do not appreciate the nuances of the conversations and that dance that we all play in which we’re equal partners, with somebody who is deemed to be an unequal partner. (H-CSO-3)

Even cities well-intentioned to engage with vulnerable residents must proceed with caution and acknowledge the impact a commitment to participate has on a vulnerable individual. As stated, “They’ve got so many other things on their mind, just taking care of life, that it is so hard to get them to come out for this stuff [participation]” (H-CSO-4). This leads to one of the most frequently cited challenges of effectively engaging people with lived experience: the overuse of a small group of people. One participant in Hamilton said, “It seems to be the same people representing homelessness, they are going to all kinds of different events and sitting on all kinds of committees” (H-CSO-4). This was echoed in numerous expert interviews and a few
risks were highlighted. First, a participant stated, “Sometimes the same groups are being asked over and over and over again, so you are not getting diversity and you are also burning out these people” (E-LGA-2). Another expert pointed to the risk of their voices being co-opted, stating, “I have seen the city really dictated a strong perspective to a lived experience representative and basically telling them what their opinion should be about things” (E-CSO-2). However, despite the challenges and risks, the importance of centering the experience of vulnerable residents was repeatedly emphasized, as stated, “It is not always easy to involve people whose lives are extremely complicated. I think it makes the process a little bit difficult, but I think the challenge is necessary” (H-AI-1).

6.7.3 Effectiveness of networks

Both Surrey and Hamilton have numerous examples of networks created by the city to address a specific challenge or population group and their unique challenges. One respondent referenced the Hamilton’s predilection for committees and tables, stating colloquially, “I think that Hamilton has 101 different tables, and the same people sit at all of these tables, and I’m not sure how much work happens before and after the two-hour meeting” (H-AI-1). This was echoed in another interview from a service provider, stating, “If you look at the different advisory committees and who’s one of them, you will see that they seem to be the same people across the advisory committees” (H-CSO-4). This challenge also emerged in Surrey, as stated, “There is a lot of overlap in people working on these issues to some degree—one member talks about needing a table of tables because everyone feels we are maxed out of meetings and we are trying to figure out if there are efficiencies around how we organize ourselves” (S-LGA-2).

While it was understood that there would be overlap between those involved in committees for housing and homelessness, and those involved in committees for other complex
social challenges, the roles and time capacity of the people sitting at the tables was identified as a concern. A participant stated, “I think the people that sit on these tables are incredibly busy managing complex housing and social service organizations, so when they are asked to participate in a table, they do, but I think that in order for tables to run well they need to be well resourced and maybe have a paid coordinator” (H-AI-1). Another participant from Surrey echoed the sentiment of the need for committee meeting time to be maximized, saying, “I am not convinced that most of those advisory committees are always run in a way that is that empowering. … Some meet just because they’re supposed to meet” (S-CSO-2).

City and civil society networks in the housing and homelessness sector face similar challenges to the Local Immigration Partnerships and other governance groups brought together by external funding. A participant noted, “Another thing that makes it challenging is you’re competing, not collaborating for funding. I think that the competitive nature of the funding is also damaging to community organizations in that they’re not seen as people to collaborate with” (H-CSO-4). This comment was echoed in another interview: “It is a super delicate role in that they [local government] do decide who gets what money. There is that inherent understanding that we have to sing for our supper” (H-CSO-3). Participants suggested that local governments were not generally open to criticism from those within their networks, stating, “If you have ever criticized the city publicly, you’re not going to get funding” (E-CSO-2).

When interviewees were asked about the influence the governance networks were able to have on the approach of the city, participants indicated that members are able to influence shifts in strategy but do not have influence over the decisions the city makes in funding allocations, accountability measures, or how they address emerging issues like encampments. As noted by a participant, “We are supposed to be talking about the high-level strategy that we all get on board
with, but any specific direction of who is funding what, or who’s fundraising for what, would not be relevant to the planning group discussion” (H-LGA-2). The existence of the planning table helps local governments move between their role as service provider, funder, and collaborator, as stated, “The maintenance of the housing and homelessness groups are important because it keeps that system’s input piece available to the city, that otherwise may not be available if they’re trying to be the friend and the funder at the same time” (H-CSO-3).

6.7.4 Local governance: Small decisions that have big consequences for vulnerable populations

While respondents indicated several areas where the lack of local government autonomy and capacity limited their effectiveness, there was a clear belief that local government is still the best positioned level of government to identify and address complex social challenges. An interviewee said, “Even with a small army of staff at the provincial level, they are not going to have on the ground knowledge and experience, nor will they be able to respond as quickly as a municipality to changes and shifts on the ground” (E-PG-1). Respondents recognized that the increasing gap between resources and responsibilities placed on local governments was often a result of political decision-making at higher-levels of government. For example, a former local politician stated, “Municipal governments are getting more responsibility and authority, not by choice. A lot of it is being downloaded onto them by both the federal and provincial governments” (E-LGP-1). This sentiment was echoed by another participant who said, “Devolution has happened. Provincial and federal governments have demanded more and more of cities, without power and resources” (S-AI-1). Specifically, in the context of homelessness, a participant stated:
The biggest impact on municipalities came with the reorganization of who does what in the ’90s. Health and social transfers were broken apart and rationalized by the federal level. They sent less money to the province, initiating a significant reordering of which level of government responds to which issue. One of the outcomes was that municipalities were given the responsibility of social housing, but the provincial money never kept pace with the need. (E-CSO-2)

While the constraints were recognized, there was still a belief expressed that cities had the capacity and responsibility to play a critical role in meeting the needs of their most vulnerable residents. In response to questions about capacity, a former local politician stated, “They have huge capacity, some cities are billion-dollar corporations. Business taxes and residential property taxes allow them to have a wholesome budget to be able to decide who gets the proper support. How those dollars are spent has direct impacts on the quality of life of vulnerable residents” (E-LGP-1). Some participants suggested it was a matter of priorities, and taking a long-term view, one stated, “I think a little analysis needs to be done on how many programs can be set up to be cost recovery because you are taking people off the street and employing them and they become contributing tax-paying citizens. That view is very rarely put on these decisions” (H-AI-1). Civil society representatives suggest that big investments were not the only role the local government can play. Reflecting on their work with a local government dealing with encampments in Ontario, a participant stated, “You can, within the current legislative context, be as humane as possible. Municipalities, with no change in the legislation, can change how they function. Municipal bylaws do not need to change. You still cannot put a tent in a park; it is still there in the bylaws. What we have seen change is how it’s enacted” (E-CSO-2).
The critical role of local governments was highlighted by civil society members who experienced the detrimental effects when complex social issues were deprioritized. One participant stated that even when city councils are not actively obstructing activities toward identifying and addressing complex social challenges, their lack of interest in promoting solutions and providing the necessary authorizations can derail progress (S-CSO-3). The negative influence of politics was highlighted by a participant who said, “You have a lot of local government officials who do not have a lot of sympathy for the needs of homeless people. When you have a situation where elected officials, who need to get reelected, and you have the majority of the population who doesn’t want this [homelessness supports] in their neighborhood, you end up with people whose basic human rights are ignored, and their lifespan is being shortened because they do not have homes” (S-CSO-2). The extreme manifestation of this lack of prioritization of residents with complex social challenges emerges in local government laws, policies, or practices that provide the legal authority for homeless individuals to be harassed by police or bylaw officers (Farha & Schwan, 2020).

6.7.5 Multilevel governance: The inter-governmental tension is a feature of the system, not a bug

Participants acknowledged that an ongoing lack of coordination between the federal and provincial levels of government and local governments results in a growing resource gap in cities. The ever-shifting accountability requirements often limit the amount of innovation local governance networks can apply to identifying and solving local challenges. In a recent forum, a local politician suggested, “It’s very difficult to know which level to hold accountable because you all do tend to blame each other, and it’s a question of how, and how willing are you as city council members, provided you are empowered, to then take the responsibility and be held
accountable?” (CUI, 2020, p. 5). One participant proposed, “On one hand, provinces will say that they [local governments] are mature levels of government, and that they have the powers they need to raise taxes and govern their affairs, but on the other hand, provinces stir things up from a policy perspective, and give them funds, with any manner and assortment of pre-conditions and reporting” (E-PG-1). In regard to the ramifications of poor cooperation from provincial governments, one interviewee suggested, “You get our current provincial government that’s such a cheapskate, like they are, their thing is how can we maximize federal dollars with spending as little as we possibly can. They honestly could hardly care about providing direction [to cities]” (E-CSO-2). One participant, who suggests the solution is not to increase dependency on the federal government, stated, “It is easy to say the federal level is the answer because we actually have them doing something, providing direction, but we had 15 years of crickets [no communication] from the federal government” (E-CSO-2).

Interestingly, the perspective of CSOs working in local governance networks was that improving multilevel governance was preferable to increasing the autonomy of local governments. Interviewees from Surrey and Hamilton pointed to the various council-caused challenges within the homeless-serving sector as evidence that accountability to higher levels of government was necessary (H-AI-1; S-LGP-1). An expert participant highlighted the consequences of a council that does not prioritize vulnerable residents, stating,

A recent example in Surrey where the provincial government had agreed to fund a homeless shelter in Cloverdale, and all the approvals were done and then the council refused to give the necessary by-law amendments to allow the place to be built. That set us back another 5-10 years because by the time another application is processed and all
the due diligence is done, there are people who are going to suffer because of the lack of coordination on that decision (E-LGP-1).

The strength of intergovernmental relationships is not just the responsibility of the higher levels of government. It is imperative that local governments maintain ongoing connection to senior provincial and federal public servants and politicians, and look for ways to collaborate toward mutual benefits (StrategyCorp, 2018).

Participants expressed a desire to see an increase in commitment from all levels of government, with one stating, “My view is that all levels of government should be playing an active role, but currently they are short-sighted and there is not enough coordination between the three levels” (E-LGP-1). The involvement of the provincial and federal government was perceived as creating a necessary tension that helped manage biases built into local government: “Canadian local government is an institution that was created in an environment of much greater homogeneity, without the current levels of disparity, and so it has a bunch of assumptions built into it about who it is intended to serve and what their needs are” (E-CSO-1). The interdependencies with higher levels of government through long-term resource allocations ensure “that vulnerable populations are made to be a priority and that cities do not have to be reminded to put them on the agenda” (E-LGP-1). While the status quo is not considered sufficient, there was a clear desire for mutual accountability between levels of government. One respondent stated, “I think the solution lies in keeping a balance. It is not allowing any order of government to have too much control, because the challenge is, you can get the good, the bad, the ugly, at all three levels, or four levels [Indigenous]” (E-CSO-2).
6.7.6 Limited learning through feedback loops and evaluation

The use of feedback loops for monitoring and data-led evaluation was seen by civil society as insufficient throughout the sector. Statements included, “In terms of data to monitor the effectiveness of the housing and homelessness sector in Surrey, it is lacking” (S-CSO-3). One participant in Hamilton suggested that their sector has resistance to evaluation, stating, “Some of the sector is still working from the ‘moral high ground’ of just give us the money. We know what we are doing; you don’t know what you are doing. You do not understand the needs of our clients because they’re so unique” (H-CSO-3).

One of the reasons proposed as to why feedback and evaluation are not highly valued is that the data is not reported back to the communities. While reporting requirements exist, two-way communication about the content of the reports was a gap identified at each level of government. Local government staff acknowledged that although their homelessness and housing plans are reviewed each year (as per provincial requirements) no feedback loops exist with civil society, or individuals, as to how their information and data is used (H-LGA-1). One participant recollected a recent tension between civil society organizations and the city, stating, “When I oversaw the coalition, we said that we wanted community results. We want movement towards preventing and ending homelessness, not necessarily bureaucratic number outcomes, but real gain. That was obviously a challenge to them [the city].” (E-CSO-2). Similar challenges exist at the provincial level; one participant from Surrey stated, “BC Housing collects information on their funded programs; however, it is not shared with community agencies” (S-CSO-3). The data requested at the provincial level is not concerned with impact either, “They [provincial government] are not necessarily trying to dig into addressing the root cause. It is
more procedural, operations, and financial reporting. It is accountability for outputs over outcomes” (E-LGA-1).

Despite the gap in effective feedback loops and evaluation, there did appear to be an understanding of what a robust system would look like. In Surrey, one participant suggested, “We really need to do more work with coordinated access and mapping, both the service need in the community and the effectiveness of services” (S-CSO-3). Similarly, in Hamilton a service provider suggested, “It starts by the establishing what the desired outcomes are. If the objective is to avoid homelessness, the best way to avoid homelessness is to keep the housing you have. If we can show you that our clients are still housed a year later, we’ve accomplished that. That speaks volumes to the level of services” (H-CSO-3). There was an acknowledgement that the outcomes throughout the sector would be different based on what aspect of the homelessness spectrum organizations were addressing, but that a common way of collecting and communicating outcomes was possible.

6.8 Discussion

Considering the results presented above, we now return to our first research question:

How are local governments leveraging local institutional actors to identify and address complex social challenges? The empirical data from the two case studies and expert interviews demonstrate that local governance networks are entrenched as a way of doing business in Canadian cities. Consistent with earlier work on metagovernance in Canada, the most active and sustained networks are in response to a clearly identifiable purpose that government and civil society can organize around such as homelessness, urban Indigenous, and local immigration strategies (Bramwell, 2012; Doberstein, 2013). Often these networks are long-standing efforts funded by, or in response to, funding requirements of higher-levels of government. For example,
in Hamilton, the Homelessness and Housing Action Coalition was initiated in response to a provincial requirement for a 10-year strategy. However, the presence of networks frequently did not indicate effective identification of locally relevant problems, transparency about capacity challenges, appropriately dispersed power and accountability, feedback loops, and iteration of approaches, as suggested in our theoretical framework (Clarke, 2019).

The provision of enabling resources is a key factor in the creation and sustenance of governance networks but is also a tool for steering the activity under threat of withdrawing funds or in-kind support (Doberstein, 2013). The potential for local governments to manipulate the direction of the network highlights the importance of a diversity of actors. The collected empirical data reinforced that receiving operating funding, or being in competition for funding, puts CSOs in a poor position to advocate for innovative approaches to complex social challenges. Scholars concur that the effectiveness of networks require some autonomy for actors in the relationship (Head & Alford, 2015). Several participants mentioned the possibility of losing their place in the network if they held an adversarial position to the city on certain elements. This indicates a lack of transparency in how decisions are made and is a fundamental breach of the trust required for effective network governance. PDIA literature suggests that creating a collaborative environment involves an acknowledgement that a solution is unclear or beyond the reach of a single institution (Rao, 2014). It reinforces existing literature that warns that local governments are not a neutral arbitrator between competing interests, but rather, they are in a position to choose policy directions, collaboration partners, and who to exclude from influence, as well as often are merely looking for social license for a predetermined solution (Davies, 2005; Rao, 2014). An open question that emerged from the research was, “When do the
governance networks become a part of the structural problem that makes it difficult for the lived experience problem to be solved?”

With very few exceptions, accountability within the local governance networks remained hierarchical with the city, acting as the metagovernor on behalf of its own funding and funding from provincial and federal levels of government. The literature suggests that this vertical power structure is consistent in historic understandings of accountability, with recipient organizations liable or answerable to a superior authority who can enforce sanctions (Jarvis, 2014). In the case of Surrey, the hierarchy is leading to a decrease in transparency with the current mayor and council, effectively eliminating two opportunities for public and civil society participation in identifying and addressing social issues. Accountability generally implies some measurement of performance, but review of available documents and data from the interviews suggest that reporting, when required, is primarily related to outputs and procedures rather than a focus on outcomes (Jarvis, 2015). PDIA literature highlights the benefits of ongoing feedback and evaluation that is used to iterate on initiatives that are addressing complex social challenges (Andrews et al., 2012). Without attention to measuring results, programs and initiatives remain static and do not evolve along with the emergent needs. The long-term consequences of this lack of feedback and iteration can be seen in Canada’s failure to recognize that its emergency response to homelessness was not addressing the root causes or preventing people from entering homelessness (Gaetz, 2020).

One notable exception from the City of Hamilton was in its unique approach to providing block funding to Indigenous organizations to address issues surrounding housing and homelessness. In network governance arrangements like this example in Hamilton, indicators of accountability for a network are found in the perception of critical stakeholders and the influence
of the network within a policy domain (Doberstein, 2013). The City of Hamilton recognized that organizations directly working to address Indigenous homelessness had greater credibility leading their work than if the City attempted to act as a metagovernor. In the City of Surrey, the activities of the Social Planning office reflect a unique approach to accountability for network governance. For example, the work of the Social Planning office with the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC) reflects more of a social accountability that promotes consensual processes in forms of reciprocity (Conteh, 2016). While the focus of the SUILC expands beyond homelessness, it is the network structure within Surrey that identifies and addresses the complex social challenges related to housing and homelessness for urban Indigenous people. While both examples demonstrate a more dispersed form of accountability, they continue to operate in the “shadow of hierarchy,” with reporting requirements to federal government (Conteh, 2016).

The results also provide empirical data to answer the second research question: *How effective are local governments as metagovernor’s within the Canadian context?* Though they depend on civil society and other local institutions to address some of the capacity, representation, and resource deficits, local governments are the best positioned institutions to catalyze, facilitate, and sustain network structures, and to be accountable for their activities (Jessop, 1997; Doberstein, 2013). This study supports previous findings that the direct or indirect participation of local governments, through public support from mayor and council, senior staff, and/or funding, lends important political support and legitimacy to urban governance initiatives (Bramwell, 2012). For example, in Hamilton, participants on the HHAC highlighted that the city plays an important role in coordinating the various actors, processes, and sources of funding in the sector (H-CSO-3; H-LGA-2). Further, the city advocates on behalf of, and provides buffering
between, the service providers and higher levels of government. In contrast, the ongoing
disinterest of Surrey’s current mayor and council in addressing complex social challenges creates
barriers for civil society and highlights the negative impacts of a city’s lack of public support.
One specific example was the failure of local government to provide the necessary approvals for
development, resulting in the city forfeiting provincial and federal funding for addressing
homelessness.

The case studies and expert contributions highlighted very few examples of effective
local governance networks where transparency about the extent of a problem and the inherent
complexity in designing potential responses catalyzed effective collaboration. However, the
limited examples that did emerge provide important learning about the potential for collaboration
between local governance actors. The most striking example is in Surrey, when the city initiated
a collaborative attempt to address a high-profile, central encampment that housed multibarriered
residents. The City of Surrey appointed an existing employee to coordinate various municipal
departments, regional and provincial government agencies, and local civil service organizations
to address the needs of the residents effectively and sustainably (S-CSO-3). The collaboration
was strengthened by existing relationships developed through other network governance
structures. Additionally, the effectiveness was achieved through having decision-makers and
frontline staff be a part of the solution ideation. This is a distinct contrast to the sidelining of the
HHAC in Hamilton, as the city made decisions that led to fighting a court injunction to forcibly
remove an encampment. From a PDIA perspective, ad hoc networks convened to identify and
address a locally relevant challenge through collaborative problem solving and feedback that
leads to iterating on the approach is far more effective than stagnant networks (Andrews et al.,
2012). Unfortunately, the case study data aligned with previous research that suggests
governance networks or boards are frequently designed as nonserious attempts to incorporate diverse views and may be used by the metagovernor to diffuse accountability (Doberstein, 2013).

6.9 Conclusion

The normative benefits of local governance networks are not being realized at the local level in the large, city-established and -led, examples. The presence of local governance networks is not an indication of authentic collaboration that leverages local institutions to identify and address complex social challenges. When local governments control the funding, there is limited evidence that they are engaging in networks with more horizontal accountability for results instead of outputs. However, when networks of local actors form organically, often because of insufficient local government investment, the leveraging of knowledge, experience, and resources occurs at small scales. Sometimes local government actors are invited into these networks and often they are informed in an ad hoc way.

The findings of this study agree with previous research that found that the dynamics at higher levels of government have an impact on the opportunities and constraints within which local governance actors operate (Bramwell, 2012). There was a plethora of data that pointed to the detrimental impacts of absentee federal and provincial governments, power struggles between the two, and the resource gap being perpetuated by downloading responsibilities without concurrent resources. However, the response from local governance actors was not to advocate for increased autonomy. Higher levels of government represented a necessary tension for local governments and ensured that complex social challenges were never completely off the agenda for local politicians. For local governance networks to identify and address complex social challenges, all levels of government will need to agree to mutual roles and commit to sustainable cooperation.


CHAPTER 7

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY

7.1 Introduction

This dissertation empirically examined local applications of network governance in diverse cities around the world to investigate *how effectively local governments are leveraging local institutional actors to identify and address complex social challenges*. This chapter provides an overview of the dissertation by summarizing key research findings and linking them to three distinct research contexts and an urban governance framework introduced in Chapter One and expanded upon in Chapter Two. The first section provides a contextualized summary of the findings of the dissertation, indicating points of intersection and divergence, which are then organized by individual manuscript. The next section provides discussion on the contributions of the dissertation to scholarship as well as policy and practice. This is followed by a section on the limitations of the study, and finally, the dissertation concludes with potential directions for future research.

7.2 Contextualizing the Findings

Despite sustained global efforts, complex social challenges continue to confound governments at all levels. Academic literature and practitioner reports suggest that the proximal advantage of local governments make them the best positioned level of government to develop place-based approaches to identify and address these complex social challenges (Fessha & Kirby, 2015; UN-Habitat, 2016). The global centering of local governments in attempts to address complex challenges is highlighted through various recent agreements such as the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (UN-Habitat, 2016; UNHCR, 2017).
While the sociopolitical and geographic context of each local government is unique, research and experience highlight that there are shared social challenges and impediments to addressing them in local governments in both mature and maturing economies and democracies.

This dissertation began from a belief that local governments around the world operate with resource and capacity deficits and ever-increasing unfunded mandates due to a gap between available finances and legislated functions (Knox & McCarthy, 2012; Dafflon, 2013; Crook, 2017; Anaafó, 2018). As discussed in Chapter One, the catalyst for this research was my own professional experience of these resource and capacity deficits working within and supporting local governments in Ghana and Canada. The repercussions of these deficits were amplified when local governments were relied upon to identify and address complex social challenges. The geographic limitations of my professional experience led me to research the global manifestations of complex social challenges and the local government capacity and resource deficits that impede attempts to address them. This research is timely and important because despite the known limitations, modern governance is increasingly reliant on local government to identify and address globally pervasive complex social challenges.

While a broad and normative conceptualization of “governance” has been co-opted by global institutions and attached to the nebulous and paternalistic ideals of “good governance” imposed on maturing democracies, at its core, governance is primarily an approach to decision-making and service delivery. My research focus on local government in cities led me to urban governance theory to support a localization of governance discourse. Urban governance theory, aligned with my professional experience, begins from a place of local governments collaborating with local institutional actors as a result of their resource and capacity constraints (Stoker, 2000; Kjaer, 2008). Adopting an institutionalist perspective, this research centered local government in
the governance network, placing higher levels of government as institutional actors alongside
civil society organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector. As outlined in Chapter
One, the broad consensus of the importance of local governments obstructs the divergent views
on how to support them through resource allocations and autonomy. The promoted benefits of
decentralization of authority and decision-making are based on normative arguments that lack a
nuanced consideration of contextual differences (Plehwe et al., 2006). Prescriptions from the
Global West are often founded in an idealized version of “good governance” rather than being
based in principles that can be adapted to unique sociopolitical environments. This dissertation
intentionally avoided arguments about how local governments should be empowered by higher
levels of government. Rather, the objective of this dissertation was to understand how local
governments are working within their current constraints and engaging local governance actors
to identify and address urgent complex social challenges. This understanding can lead to
recommendations about how better to leverage local institutional actors in different and diverse
government systems.

This dissertation provided a new theoretical framework applied to local governments in
distinct sociopolitical and geographic locations through a document analysis, and then
supplemented that knowledge by applying the same theoretical framework to comparative case
studies in two local governments in Ghana and two in Canada. While the individual components
of urban governance theory, open government tenets, and problem-driven iterative adaptation
have been applied extensively in local governance research, the integration of their core
principles is unique. This framework allows for a novel empirical assessment of the situations
that catalyzed local governments to engage with local institutional actors, the principles upon
which the networks were established, and how network governance was applied to identifying
and addressing complex social challenges. Within this unique framework, Table 7.1 provides a summary of the range of findings that emerged from the empirical research. It shows the key findings from individual manuscripts and summarizes some of the salient arguments advanced in each manuscript, highlighting those that are cross-cutting and those that are context specific.

**Table 7.1 Summary of the Dissertation’s Key Findings, Conclusions, and Implications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript One: OGP Local Participants Data and Methods: Content analysis of OGP Local Participant “Action Plans” (n=15)</th>
<th>Manuscript Two: Local Government in Ghana Data and Methods: Tamale = key informant interviews (n=6), in-depth interviews (n=8), focus groups (n=7; n=4); Sekondi-Takoradi = key informant interviews (n=7), in-depth interviews (n=11), focus group (n=5; n=6); National = key informant interviews (n=2)</th>
<th>Manuscript Three: Local Government in Canada Data and Methods: Hamilton = key informant interviews (n=6), semi-structured interviews (n=1); Surrey = key informant interviews (n=4), semi-structured interviews (n=3); Experts = key informant interviews (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Findings</strong> (see below): 1,2,3,7</td>
<td><strong>Key Findings</strong> (see below): 1,2,3,4,5,8</td>
<td><strong>Key Findings</strong> (see below): 1,2,3,4,5,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.1 (continued) Key findings

1) **External incentives for network governance are necessary, but insufficient, to produce results.** The network governance approach in Manuscript One, and an example in Manuscript Two, are mandated by the OGP. Manuscript Three discussed network governance approaches mandated by higher levels of government. The findings of this dissertation show that merely mandating collaboration between local government and civil society does not produce the exponential benefits desired through the combining of unique resources. In fact, these mandated network governance approaches may be detrimental to more organic emergence of cross-sectoral collaboration. (*Manuscripts 1,2,3*)
2) **Engaging residents with lived experience of complex social challenges is minimal.** The research in Manuscript One demonstrated minimal focus on creating opportunities for underrepresented and underserved residents to participate in government decision-making that impacted their lived experience of complex social challenges. Manuscript Two highlighted that local governments in Ghana do not demonstrate an understanding of the value of residents with lived experience, but civil society organizations invest a significant number of resources in equipping marginalized populations to voice their own needs. While local governments in Canada demonstrated more understanding of the value of residents with lived experience, the research in Manuscript Three highlighted that meaningful engagement still does not happen consistently. *(Manuscripts 1,2,3)*

3) **Evaluation and iteration are not integrated into local government.** Complex social challenges are rarely solved by rational-technical approaches or through the isolated acts of one institution. They are resilient to efforts to identify and address them, and often their solutions are not known and need to be created. The research demonstrated that local governments do not effectively employ monitoring and evaluation strategies to collect data that can be used to iterate on the interventions. *(Manuscript 1,2,3)*

4) **Higher levels of government have a significant influence on the local government authorizing environment.** Identifying and addressing complex social challenges requires testing and iterating on innovative approaches to address the context specific manifestations of the challenges. However, Manuscript Two demonstrated that the politicization of development at the national level limited the resources dedicated to social challenges. Similarly, in Manuscript Three, the dependency of the local government on provincial and federal funding limited the scope for innovation in addressing complex social challenges. *(Manuscripts 2,3)*

5) **Autonomous civil society is a prerequisite to effective network governance.** The case study research in both Ghana and Canada demonstrated that civil society cannot be dependent on local government for resources or authorizations to engage in effective network governance. If local government controls the funding for civil society, there is limited opportunity for meaningful participation as equals with shared accountability. *(Manuscripts 2,3)*

6) **Multilevel governance tension is beneficial.** In Canada, the relationship between levels of government is often contentious with blame cast in all directions. However, experts in local governance suggest that the tension is necessary to ensure that complex social challenges are never completely off of the agenda. *(Manuscript 3)*

7) **Problem identification is not given enough priority prior to action planning.** In the OGP Local Program, participants were not clear in what specific problems or challenges they were addressing, how the need was identified, and who was involved (i.e., were residents who were directly impacted, or the civil society organizations that serve them, directly consulted?). *(Manuscript 1)*
8) **Local government need to prioritizing local challenges.** In Ghana, there is an ongoing tension between external influences and local knowledge. Local government is the intermediary, and it is critical that they support local governance actor to prioritize addressing local challenges over implementing external solutions. *(Manuscript 2)*

The most important finding to emerge from this dissertation is that mandating and/or funding network governance approaches, by supranational multilateral collectives or higher levels of government, is not enough to catalyze the collaboration required to realize the potential benefits of a network approach and leverage the unique resources of institutional actors to address the capacity and resource deficits of local government. The findings in all three manuscripts demonstrate that the mere existence of governance networks that include civil society and other nongovernmental organizations does not lead to an improved identification of, or ability to address, complex social challenges. The hierarchical relationships and accountability structures that local governments operate within limit their willingness to acknowledge their internal capacity deficits and leverage the unique resources of local governance institutions. Further, each manuscript demonstrated that independent and well-funded civil societies and other institutional actors is a prerequisite for effective network governance. Evidence found in the three manuscripts of smaller, more organic network governance approaches that were a result of unique catalyzing events and varying degrees of power-sharing between local government and local governance actors offer lessons that can be applied to strengthening the practice of network governance.

Given the global nature of complex social challenges and the impediments to local governments’ ability to address them, it was important to find a way to begin the research in a way that captures a broad understanding from distinct sociopolitical and geographic contexts. In
response, the empirical portion of this dissertation begins in Chapter Four (Manuscript One) with an investigation of how a global multilateral collective, the Open Government Partnership (OGP), is supporting local governments around the world to apply the open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability to collaborate with local institutional actors. While not explicitly stated, the OGP promotes a network governance approach with local government as the accountable institution. In urban governance literature, this approach is referred to as metagovernance (Doberstein, 2013). The biannual action plans mandated by the OGP allowed for a unique opportunity to begin this research with a broad sample of local governments around the world and then build an understanding of how local governments are engaging in network governance as a strategy for dealing with their unique challenges. Further, beginning with research on a broad subset of local governments ensured that the theoretical framework was globally applicable.

The research for Manuscript One reinforced the benefits of viewing network governance through open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability. The action plans of the participants in the OGP Local Program demonstrated how to apply the tenets as a foundation for collaboration on complex social challenges. Out of the research for Manuscript One emerged underexplored themes related to addressing capacity and resource deficits and the long-term benefits of network governance that were then focused upon in the comparative research for Manuscripts Two and Three. Whereas Manuscript One focused on nuances in language around applying open government tenets, Manuscripts Two and Three focused on the broad application of open government tenets as guideposts for problem-driven iterative adaptation. The learnings from Manuscript One provided a solid foundation to recognize transparency, civic participation, and accountability initiatives even when those labels
were not explicitly used. Although many of the findings are cross-cutting between the three manuscripts in the dissertation, some are peculiar to the individual manuscripts (See Table 7.1). The findings for each individual manuscript are explored in more detail in Sections 7.2.1, 7.2.2, and 7.2.3.

In light of the ongoing effects of colonization and the negative impact that neoliberal economic policies have on countries in the Global South, this dissertation intentionally avoided comparing local governance in Ghana and in Canada. However, there were some interesting similarities to note. First, while literature often states that the political and administrative environments of local government in Ghana and Canada strip them of their power respectively, this research demonstrated that local governments in both countries are central to governance in their geographic jurisdiction. Local governments in both Ghana and Canada are negatively impacted by the politics of the higher levels of government, but optimal governance in both countries is multilevel. One interesting distinction is that in Ghana, the role of local governments in identifying and addressing complex social challenges are clearly indicated in legislation. In contrast, the direct responsibility for many complex social challenges in Canada fall outside of the legislated jurisdiction of local governments.

**7.2.1 Research Manuscript I (Chapter Four)**

This chapter considers the practice of network governance through a content analysis of 15 participating jurisdictions in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local program. Participants in the OGP Local program are required to produce a biannual action plan that presents a unique opportunity to investigate how local governments are engaging local governance actors in using open government tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability to identify and address complex social challenges. Although not explicitly
identified as a metagovernance form of network governance, the OGP requires participating jurisdictions to collaborate on developing the “action plans” or strategies for governance reform.

This chapter provided an opportunity to apply the theoretical framework to a broad set of jurisdictions spread across five continents. As the research was assessing open government documents, the focus was on how the tenets of transparency, civic participation, and accountability were used to facilitate network governance. The documents reviewed were coded to determine the salience of different themes related to the three overarching tenets. This coding enabled an investigation into how the tenets were being applied to collaboration with local governance actors to address complex social challenges. Data from this research includes the language and focus of the action plans as well as the absence of language and focus on key network governance and problem-driven iterative adaptation characteristics.

Overall, this study found that even with an explicit mandate to engage with civil society in creating action plans for governance reform, participating jurisdictions were not realizing the full benefits of network governance. There was a noticeable lack of intentionality on behalf of the participating jurisdictions to build their own capacity through facilitating a network of governance actors. Civil society organizations were not featured prominently in the implementation of the action plans, and the accountability structure remained hierarchical with little authorization for innovative approaches to solving locally identified challenges. It was also unclear whether local governments had clearly identified the unique resources the civil society organizations could lend to identifying and addressing local problems.

However, there was evidence of governments applying the tenets of open government to identifying complex social challenges. Aligned with this dissertation’s attempt to reclaim the governance narrative from vague notions of “good governance,” the application of open
government tenets to tangible and locally identified challenges is positive. Continued application of the open government tenets to solve tangible local problems has the potential to catalyze an increase in transparency regarding the capacity and resource deficits that local governments are operating within. An increase in transparency around deficits is a precursor to local institutional actors being able to contribute their unique resources and assets, and build the capacity of the entire local governance network.

7.2.2 Research Manuscript II (Chapter Five)

The second research chapter examined the use of network governance with local government acting as metagovernor in two local jurisdictions in Ghana: Tamale Metropolitan Assembly (TaMA) and Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA). Building off of the learnings in Manuscript One, the theoretical framework was applied to comparative case study research. As discussed in the chapter, local governments in Ghana often have externally devised solutions imposed on them in an attempt to overcome the resource and capacity deficits they operate within. While there has been considerable investment in local government reform, much of it is focused on achieving the normative ideals of “good governance.” In contrast, this research focused on how local governments were acting within their current capacity and resource constraints and the extent to which they were engaging with local governance actors to identify and address complex social challenges.

To understand the actions of local government, the research began with a broad focus on complex social challenges and then narrowed into one specific and contextually appropriate challenge. In Tamale, the locally relevant challenge that emerged was the issue of violence toward witches and the community banishment of the alleged witches. In Sekondi-Takoradi, the issue that emerged was the existence and growth of informal housing and slums. These issues are
rooted in the sociocultural environment of their respective jurisdictions, and their proliferation as complex social challenges is directly related to capacity and resource deficits within the local governments.

The findings of this chapter demonstrate that local governments are indeed seen as the metagovernors of their jurisdictions, with local governance actors using them as a central repository for information on needs and available interventions. However, the local governments in Tamale and Sekondi-Takoradi are not seen as the facilitators of the relationship, rather they are often passive. This passive approach puts undue pressure on the local governance actors to catalyze change and/or be ready for moments of authorization and engagement when they become available.

Within the local institutional actors exists substantial and unique knowledge and resources that are of significant benefit to the local government in each case study location. However, the current sociopolitical culture does not encourage the necessary transparency that is a prerequisite to local governments building their capacity to identify and address complex social challenges through a network governance approach. Often, national-level priorities influence local decision-making and lead to local governments focusing on physical infrastructure rather than meeting the social and livelihood needs of residents.

7.2.3 Research Manuscript III (Chapter Six)

The third research chapter also examined the use of network governance with local government acting as metagovernor in two local jurisdictions in Canada: Surrey, British Columbia, and Hamilton, Ontario. Aligned with the approach in Chapter Five, this study began by exploring broad complex social challenges faced by the case study jurisdictions and then narrowed the scope to focus on homelessness in response to the empirical data. Homelessness
was used as a proxy for complex social challenges in Canada, as it is multidimensional, pervasive, and although technically within provincial jurisdiction, local governments by necessity play a significant role.

The findings of this chapter highlight that cities operate within an authorizing or enabling environment created by provincial and federal government. The hierarchical accountability relationship between local and higher levels of government discourages local governments from collaborating with local institutional actors to develop innovative solutions to complex social challenges. Local governments in turn, maintain the hierarchical approach to accountability in their interactions with local governance actors working on housing and homelessness. While a network of local service providers is facilitated by local government, as required by provincial mandate, the local institutional actors in the housing and homelessness sector are primarily beholden to the local government for operations and project funding. There is little empirical evidence of local governments creating opportunities for local institutional actors to meaningfully influence decision-making and accept accountability for producing results.

While the dysfunction of multilevel governance relationships permeates the system from federal to provincial to local government and from local government to local governance actors, the dispersion of decision-making and accountability is a necessary feature of the system. In Surrey, service providers highlighted that without provincial involvement and the advocacy of the local institutions, complex social challenges would not be prioritized by the current council. Whereas in Hamilton, without the local government advocating to the provincial government, there would be little prioritization of complex social challenges in Ontario.

However, in each case study there were examples of successful forms of network governance that existed outside of the externally mandated homelessness committees. In Surrey,
an ad hoc task force of decision-makers and frontline staff representing government, civil society, health, and other relevant institutional actors collaborated to provide adequate housing for over 100 people in the span of a few days. This was the result of the complexity of the issue being beyond what the city could address on its own, and the urgency of the situation required the local government to cede some control and collaborate with network actors. In Hamilton, recognizing the unique cultural challenges that contribute to urban Indigenous homelessness, the local government has conducted block transfers to a committee of Indigenous serving organizations. While the city remains involved in the planning and there is alignment between the initiatives to address homelessness for Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents, the decision-making is solely the responsibility of the Indigenous committee members.

Finally, the empirical data in both Surrey and Hamilton suggests that as the complexity of the needs of unhoused people increases, the role for local government metagovernance is reduced. As the challenges become more unique to individuals or groups of residents, the need for specialized expertise and iterative approaches increases. In Surrey, the Social Planning Office within the City of Surrey supports local networks that sit outside of the control of the local government. In Hamilton, a group of academic, medical, and civil society actors are taking the lead in identifying and addressing the complex needs of the most vulnerable people that are unhoused. Unfortunately, non-city led initiatives are often discouraged by local governments and not meaningfully engaged until the status quo becomes untenable.

7.3 Contributions of the Study

This dissertation makes theoretical and practical contributions to network governance and to the functioning of local government more broadly. The diversity of sociopolitical and geographic contexts within the dissertation creates opportunities for the lessons to be applied to
scholarship and policy in a broad spectrum of local governments. Out of the broad analysis of local governments across sociopolitical spectrums on five continents, and the in-depth analysis in both a maturing and a mature democracy, emerges learning to assist in identifying and addressing complex social challenges in distinct contexts.

7.3.1 Contributions to Scholarship

This research was interdisciplinary at its core and includes theoretical perspectives from public administration with a global perspective, comparative urban politics, and political geography. Many studies have been conducted exploring the reasons why local governments have capacity and resource deficits that limit their ability to meet the needs of residents in their jurisdictions. However, very few studies begin from a place of acknowledging that deficits exist and investigating how local governments are engaging with local institutional actors to identify and address the immediate complex social challenges experienced by residents. At the broadest level, this study sheds light on the relationship between local government and local institutional actors in distinct geographic areas. My research was concerned with how effectively local governments were leveraging the unique resources and assets of local governance actors to overcome their own deficits. It draws attention to the untapped knowledge and expertise available to local governments. However, it also illuminates that local governance actors are often overly dependent on the resources of local government, and are not in a position to apply pressure to or contradict the stance of local government.

A novel theoretical contribution of this dissertation is the infusing of urban governance theory with open government tenets as guideposts into problem-driven iterative adaptation. Applying additional analytical lenses to urban governance research responds to the critique that it is not well suited for comparative urban research. The open government tenets of transparency,
civic participation, and accountability provide a lens for looking at how collaboration within
governance networks is formed and how relationships are managed. The problem-driven iterative
adaptation approach provides a lens for how local governance networks are identifying and
addressing complex social challenges. Additionally, this research applies PDIA to local
government in Canada, representing the first time in my knowledge that it has been used outside
of developing country contexts.

7.3.2 Contributions to Policy and Practice

The findings of this dissertation can provide critical learning to local governments and
local governance actors globally to inform policy and practice. The research shows that there are
examples of network governance approaches that work, but the way they are established and the
form of accountability between government and nongovernment institutional actors significantly
impact their effectiveness. While local governments are mandated by higher levels of
government to form networks of local actors, establishing these imposed committees should be
considered a means to an end. The true value found in network governance comes from smaller
groups of local actors emerging organically around a locally relevant and timely challenge.
Whereas a homelessness committee consisting of high-level individuals from local institutions is
mandated to address the overarching issues, there is perhaps more value in ad hoc working
groups emerging around more specific manifestations of challenges related to homelessness and
the capacity and resource deficits that impede local government from addressing them.

Local governments have yet to fully recognize the value in collaborating with local
institutional actors through network governance approaches. As expressed throughout the
dissertation, local governments globally are operating with unfunded mandates. The unique
sociopolitical and geographic context of each local government will influence the local
consequences of the capacity and resource deficits, but the deficits are global in nature. Applying the problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) approach to identifying and addressing complex social challenges would encourage local government to develop an understanding of the lived experience of the local challenge, as well as interrogate which systemic limitations may impede their own ability to address it. The aim of PDIA is to build government capacity through leveraging the unique resources and assets of local governance actors in identifying and solving complex challenges. If the capacity of the local governance network is not enhanced by the collaboration, it is a missed opportunity.

A final consideration is that local governance networks are not embracing an iterative approach to addressing complex social challenges. Developing an authorizing environment that allows for innovative responses to complex issues requires processes that mitigate the risk of failure and minimize the time between implementation and recognition of failure or the need to iterate. To accomplish this requires monitoring through ongoing feedback and evaluation that are built into the development of an intervention. Monitoring and evaluation are not new, but PDIA suggests that quick feedback loops that lead to learning and responding are required because complex challenges have unknown solutions. Often, what appears as a solution to one problem will have unintended negative consequences on other parts of the system. Monitoring helps mitigate these damages by alerting the governance actors in a timely way.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

The objective of this dissertation was to advance the understanding of the effectiveness of a metagovernance approach to network governance to identify and address complex social challenges in distinct sociopolitical and geographic contexts. Despite the empirical and practical contributions of this dissertation, there are also a number of limitations that must be recognized.
The broad nature of the research necessitated a compromise in breadth and depth of scope that is evident in the following reflections on study limitations.

Although Chapter Four was global in nature, it was limited to 15 participating jurisdictions in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local program. The case studies provided more in-depth research in two distinct sociopolitical and geographic contexts but are still limited in their scope. For example, in Canada there are over 3500 local governments and in Ghana there are 254 Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies.

A subsequent limitation is that, in Chapter Four, the documents reviewed are limited in scope, and participating jurisdictions simply respond to a template provided by the OGP. A noticeable limitation of the documents was that they lacked nuanced explorations of the challenges that they were trying to address. Additionally, the documents did not require that the local governments explore the capacity or resource deficits that limited their ability to address the challenges. The content analysis was a singular point of data collection that could be strengthened by additional methods to overcome the limitations of the OGP documents.

The case studies, Chapters Five and Six, were limited to the actions of local government in one specific complex social challenge. This was done intentionally to make the scope manageable and elicit concrete examples from the participants, but it did limit the study to how local governance actors interacted with one particular issue. Additionally, there are limitations to the expert sampling approach employed in this research (Chapter Five and Six). It creates an opportunity for sampling bias and is not necessarily representative. Although it was supplemented by snowball sampling, the early limitations of expert sampling impact the overall group of research participants.
Inherent in qualitative research that occurs in distinct contexts, the findings of this dissertation are limited in their direct application to alternative contexts. As stated in Chapter One, and repeated throughout the dissertation, the intent of this research was not to provide content for replication in different contexts. Rather, the intent was to provide an approach and be transparent about its theoretical framework. However, context-specific case study research is often adopted uncritically into dominant policy narratives and spread throughout governance networks.

Finally, despite my extensive experience working and living in Ghana, my foreignness is ultimately a limitation of the study for Chapter Five. I was highly conscious of how I was being perceived and what my research participants were hoping to achieve by interacting with me. On multiple occasions, I had to remind participants that I was an academic researcher and was not connected to any funding or resource-providing institutions. As someone who spent considerable time working in similar environments in Ghana, I was attuned to these perceptions, but ultimately it impacts the quality of the data that I, as a foreigner, can collect.

7.5 Directions for Future Research

This dissertation provides a unique theoretical foundation on which to build future research. Specifically, the adaptation of PDIA into Western local government environments provides a new and unique lens for urban comparative research. This can be parlayed into future research on the efficacy of network governance in Canadian local governments through additional case studies using surveys, interviews, and in-depth document analysis. However, in Canada and beyond, attention should be paid in future research into the sustainability of the PDIA approach. Its foundation in addressing locally relevant problems through rapid iteration risks becoming a projectized approach, similar to many of the externally imposed initiatives
around the world. The question for future research is: How does the learning from a PDIA approach make a sustainable impact on the ability of local governments to address future complex social challenges?

There are numerous future research possibilities within the OGP Local program. In late 2020, the OGP expanded its local program to include 56 additional jurisdictions. These participants will likely submit action plans similar to the documents reviewed for this study. Expanding the content analysis methodology to the action plans of the new jurisdictions would allow for comparative and longitudinal research between the three distinct cohorts of OGP Local Participants. Additionally, future research with the existing jurisdictions could include surveys and/or interviews of local government and civil society partners to gain insight into their interpretation of the documents.

This research employed a metagovernance lens and centred the role of local government in network governance. Future research could continue to use an institutional lens, but center civil society and other community mobilization efforts. This research demonstrated that as the complexity of the challenge increased, the value of local government facilitation decreased. On the periphery of this research were examples of mutual aid efforts catalyzed in the community that involved government in a limited role, and at the discretion of the network. The efficacy of this approach deserves further investigation.

Finally, the research demonstrated that marginalized populations, those with the most direct lived experience of complex social challenges are not consistently engaged in problem-identification and solution-finding in a meaningful way. There are emerging efforts to center the lived experience of these populations, but there are many complications to work through before it is a safe and valuable experience for all actors.
7.6 Final Remarks

This dissertation does not provide a sure-fire formula to solve the capacity and resource deficits of local governments around the world. There is no ultimate solution. The research does, however, investigate how local governments can leverage a major underutilized resource that can be found in any community across the globe: local institutional actors. Local governments collaborating with outside agencies, as part of the network governance approach, will not solve all problems created by neoliberal austerity measures, but partnerships, idea sharing, and leveraging resources already in place by organizations on the front lines can be effective in addressing deficits. Local governments have been hesitant to engage in this type of relationship, which means much in the way of potential benefit has not been documented. This research highlights ways that local governments can engage with local partners to better identify and address complex social challenges.
References


APPENDIX A: LETTERS OF ETHICS APPROVAL

A.1 Letter of Ethics Approval - Ghana Case Studies

Date: 22 May 2018

To: Dr. Godwin Aku

Project ID: 111550

Study Title: Context Matters: Examining the role of local governance systems in mitigating the civic exclusion of multi-burdened populations in distinct geographies

Application Type: NMEB Initial Application

Review Type: Full Board

Meeting Date / Full Board Reporting Date: 06 Apr 2018

Date Approval Issued: 22 May 2018

REB Approval Expiry Date: 22 May 2019

Dear Dr. Godwin Aku,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMEB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMEB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMEB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

Documents Approved:

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<th>Document Type</th>
<th>Document Date</th>
<th>Document Version</th>
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No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMEB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMEB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMEB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMEB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Patterson, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randolf Graham, NMEB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).
A.2 Letter of Ethics Approval - Canada Case Studies

Western Research

Date: 12 July 2018
To: Dr. Godwin Akwu
Project ID: 112241

Study Title: Inclusive Civic Participation: The extent to which local governments can identify and address the challenges of excluded populations.

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application
Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: August 3, 2018
Date Approved Issued: 12/06/2018
REB Approval Expiry Date: 12/31/2019

Dear Dr. Godwin Akwu,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above-mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

Documents Approved:

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No deviations from or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPSE), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on study studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00009441.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Patterson, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randall Graham, NMREB Chair
Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).
APPENDIX B: LETTERS OF INFORMATION

B.1 Letter of Information – Ghana Interviews

Context Matters: Examining the role of local governments in mitigating the civic exclusion of underserved populations in distinct geographies
Letter of Information and Consent (Interview)

Dr. Godwin Arku, Principal Investigator
Department of Geography,
The University of Western Ontario,

Merlin Chatwin, Co-Investigator
Doctoral Student,
Department of Geography,
The University of Western Ontario,

Introduction
My name is Merlin Chatwin, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Geography at the University of Western Ontario. My academic supervisor and I are conducting research in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA) and Tamale Metropolitan Assembly that is studying the extent to which local governments can identify and address the civic exclusion of underserved and underrepresented populations.

Purpose of Study
The study is designed to gain an understanding of how contextual variables at the local government level contribute to, or impede, the civic participation of underserved populations. To do this, we are conducting research within government and non-governmental actors, to learn about the existing initiatives, capacities and challenges. We are eager to learn from people like you and want your voice to be reflected in the research.

We will be speaking with people who represent various stakeholder groups, and look for emerging themes across data collected from all interview respondents. Because we will be covering a lot of information and do not want to miss anything you say, we will record the interviews and take notes. We will ask for your permission before doing so, and will only use your information based on the preferences you indicate.

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately 45 min in duration. The interview covers topics such as what your role is within the local government decision-making process, how you typically interact with government and non-governmental partners, and your experience with local civic participation processes. We will also ask you to send out the study information to members of your community, colleagues and/or associations who you think can contribute valuable information to a focus group on their
experience engaging with the local government decision-making process. Refusing to pass on the study information will not impact your ability to participate in the interview.

**Confidentiality**
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and your name will not be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. We will be categorizing participants into general categories of; local government, regional and national government, traditional authorities, civil society, association, media, other (international ngo, police, national government, etc.). While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. The inclusion of your occupation may allow someone to link the data and identify you as a participant. The principle investigator (Dr. Akru) and co-investigator will be the only people to handle the raw interview data. That is, all information will be kept in a secured on an encrypted thumbdrive and destroyed seven years after the completion of the study. The findings will be published in a journal after the information has been aggregated. We intend to use direct unidentified quotes in the publication based on your consent. The data collected for this study will not be used for any purposes other than those related to this project. Please note that representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

**Risks & Benefits**
There are no known risks associated with your participation in the study. This research may benefit participants by identifying key features that are important to them when considering how to design a more inclusive civic engagement process. More broadly, these discoveries may be incorporated into future research and practice in public engagement, as well as urban and local economic development discourse, and policy development practices.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. To withdraw your participation or contributions please indicate your desire to the co-investigator. There is no penalty for withdrawing or not answering all questions. You do not waive any legal rights by participating in this study. We will provide you with any new information that might affect your decision to stay in the study.

**Questions**
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Merlin Chatwin or Dr. Godwin Arku.
B.2 Letter of Information – Ghana Focus Groups

Context Matters: Examining the role of local governments in mitigating the civic exclusion of underserved populations in distinct geographies
Letter of Information and Consent (Focus Group)

Dr. Godwin Arku, Principal Investigator
Department of Geography,
The University of Western Ontario,

Merlin Chatwin, Co-Investigator
Doctoral Student,
Department of Geography,
The University of Western Ontario,

Introduction
My name is Merlin Chatwin, and I am a Doctoral Student in the Department of Geography at the University of Western Ontario. With my supervisor, we are conducting research in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA) and Tamale Metropolitan Assembly that is studying the extent to which local governments can identify and address the civic exclusion of underserved and underrepresented populations.

Purpose of Study
The study is designed to gain an understanding of how contextual variables at the local government level contribute to, or impede, the civic participation of underserved populations. To do this, we are conducting research within government and non-governmental actors, to learn about the existing initiatives, capacities, and challenges. We are eager to learn from people like you and want your voice to be reflected in the research.

We will be speaking with people who represent various stakeholder groups, and look for emerging themes across data collected from all focus group participants. Because we will be covering a lot of information and do not want to miss anything you say, we will record the focus groups and take notes (permission to audio-record is mandatory).

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group of approximately 1 hour in duration. You will be joined by 6-8 other members of your community and engage in conversation that covers topics such as how you engage with the local government decision-making process, when you typically interact with government and non-governmental partners, and your experience with local civic participation processes.

Confidentiality
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and your name will not be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus
groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. We will be categorizing participants into general categories of; local government, regional and national government, traditional authorities, civil society, association, media, other (international ngo, police, national government, etc.). While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. The inclusion of your occupation may allow someone to link the data and identify you as a participant. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential, we will be assigning each participant a pseudonym and tracking them on a master list. The principle investigator (Dr. Arku) and co-investigator will be the only people to handle the raw focus group data. That is, all information will be kept on an encrypted thumbdrive and destroyed seven years after the completion of the study. The findings will be published in a journal after the information has been aggregated. We intend to use direct unidentified quotes in the publications based on your consent. The data collected for this study will not be used for any purposes other than those related to this project. Please note that representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

**Risks & Benefits**
There are no known risks associated with your participation in the study. This research may benefit participants by identifying key features that are important to them when considering how to design a more inclusive civic engagement process. More broadly, these discoveries may be incorporated into future research and practice in public engagement, as well as urban and local economic development discourse, and policy development practices.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. To withdraw your participation or contributions please indicate your desire to the co-investigator. There is no penalty for withdrawing or not participating in the full duration of the focus group. You do not waive any legal rights by participating in this study. We will provide you with any new information that might affect your decision to stay in the study.

**Questions**
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Human Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Merlin Chatwin or Dr. Godwin Arku.
B.3 Letter of Information – Canada Interviews

Inclusive Civic Participation
Letter of Information and Consent (Interview)

Dr. Godwin Arku, Principal Investigator
Department of Geography,
The University of Western Ontario,

Merlin Chatwin, Co-Investigator
Doctoral Student,
Department of Geography,
The University of Western Ontario,

Introduction
My name is Merlin Chatwin, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Geography at the University of Western Ontario. My academic supervisor and I are conducting research in the City of Hamilton, Ontario, and the City of Surrey, BC, that is examining the extent to which local governments can identify and address the civic exclusion of underserved and underrepresented populations.

Purpose of Study
The study is designed to gain an understanding of how contextual variables at the local government level contribute to, or impede, the civic participation of underserved populations. To do this, we are conducting research within government and non-governmental actors, to learn about the existing initiatives, capacities, and challenges. We are eager to learn from people like you and want your voice to be reflected in the research.

We will be speaking with people who represent various stakeholder groups and look for emerging themes across data collected from all interview respondents. Because we will be covering a lot of information and do not want to miss anything you say, we will audio record the interviews and take notes. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, we will give you the option of participating with the researcher taking field notes or inputting your answers directly onto the interview script. We will ask for your permission before doing so and will only use your information based on the preferences you indicate.

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately 45 min in duration. The interview covers topics such as what your role is within the local government decision-making process, how you typically interact with government and non-governmental partners, and your experience with local civic participation processes. We will also ask you to send out the study information to members of your community, colleagues and/or associations who you think can contribute valuable information to a focus group on their experience engaging with the local government decision-making process. Refusing to pass on the study information will not impact your ability to participate in the interview.
Confidentiality
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and your name will not be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. You will be assigned a pseudonym that is attached to a master list that is only accessed by the Principle Investigator and co-researcher. We will be categorizing participants into general categories of; external expert, local government (administration and political), regional and national government, traditional authorities, civil society, association, media, other (international ngo, police, national government, etc.). While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. The inclusion of your occupation may allow someone to link the data and identify you as a participant. The principle investigator (Dr. Akru) and co-investigator will be the only people to handle the raw interview data. That is, all information will be kept in a secured on an encrypted thumb drive and destroyed seven years after the completion of the study. The findings will be published in a journal after the information has been aggregated. We intend to use direct unidentified quotes in the publication based on your consent. The data collected for this study will not be used for any purposes other than those related to this project. Please note that representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may also have access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Risks & Benefits
There are no known risks associated with your participation in the study. This research may benefit participants by identifying key features that are important to them when considering how to design a more inclusive civic engagement process. More broadly, these discoveries may be incorporated into future research and practice in public engagement, as well as urban and local economic development discourse, and policy development practices.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. To withdraw your participation or contributions please indicate your desire to the co-investigator. Your name on the master list will be connected to the pseudonym and all the data provided will be eliminated. There is no penalty for withdrawing or not answering all questions. You do not waive any legal rights by participating in this study. We will provide you with any new information that might affect your decision to stay in the study.

Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Human Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Merlin Chatwin or Dr. Godwin Arku. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.
APPENDIX C: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

C1. Ghana Interview Script

Mitigating Civic Exclusion (Ghana) - Interview Script

**Local government**

1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself (for instance, where is your family from [in Ghana]? Where were you raised? When did you move here? What languages do you speak?)

2. When did you join [local government/department] What were you doing before?

3. Broadly, what does your department do? What is your broad mandate and what are you trying to achieve?
   - Probe: Is working with the public a core part of your mandate or a side project?

4. Who outside of government are you regularly engaging with? When did this last occur? What is the value of collaborating with this group?
   - How do you choose which partners to work with?
   - Who funds the collaboration?

5. Broadly, what groups would you identify as underserved, underrepresented, and facing complex barriers to civic participation in your area?
   - How have you identified these individuals or groups?
   - Would they also identify this way?
   - Who primarily brings up their needs in discussion?

6. How are you involved in issues of civic inclusion for traditionally underserved groups and individuals?
   - Is working to improve the livelihoods of underserved populations a core part of your job or a side project?
   - Who is directly responsible for identifying and addressing the needs of underserved people?
   - Where do the resources [human/financial] for this work come from?
7. Can you tell me of a [activity, project, initiative] that the assembly pays for that directly targets underserved communities? Is it a one-time initiative or ongoing?
   • Who advocated for this project?
   • Where does the funding come from?

8. Could you please tell me what amount of IGF goes directly to underserved communities?
   • What other funds are available for these purposes?

9. Who are the stakeholders in addressing the needs of underserved communities? What unique role do they each play [Funding, design, relationships, social capital]?
   • Regional Government?
   • National Government?
   • Civil Society (please explain)
   • Traditional authorities
   • Media
   • Others?

10. Who is responsible for funding basic social services for the community?
    • Housing; Employment; Education; Food; Health

11. Who are the residents and groups in your area that are typically underserved by the local government and what are the challenges and barriers they face?
    • How do you identify them and develop an understanding of their unique needs?
    • Do these barriers limit their employment?
    • Do these barriers cause social exclusion?
    • Do these barriers limit their ability to be engaged with the assembly?

12. What opportunities exist at your level of function to improve the ability of these individuals to interact with the assembly and receive the resources and supports that they need to thrive?
    • What are the barriers at your level to supporting these individuals?

13. What are the benefits of hearing from these individuals directly? Can you tell me of a time where consultation occurred, resulting in a positive change?
14. What prevents you from addressing their needs? Can you tell me a story about a time that you tried to take action and were prevented from doing so? How are their unique needs represented in government decision-making and the design of services?

15. Do you know of any programs that are targeting the inclusion of underserved people in assembly services or decision-making?
   - Who initiated the program? Who funds the program?
   - Who are the stakeholders in the program?

16. What [initiative, activity, project] worked well in the past, but is no longer operating? Why can’t you do this anymore?
   - What are the structural, attitudinal, or relational barriers?

17. Do you have any final thought on the issues we have explored throughout our discussion?
Interview script for non-government stakeholders [Traditional authorities, associations, civil society, and media]

1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself (for instance, where is your family from [in Ghana]? Where were you raised? When did you move here? What languages do you speak?)

2. When did you join [organization/association] What were you doing before?

3. What does your organization do? What is your broad mandate, and what are you trying to achieve?
   - Is working with the government a core part of your mandate or a side project?

4. Broadly, based on your experience, what groups would you identify as underserved, underrepresented, and facing complex barriers to civic participation in your area?
   - How have you identified these individuals or groups?
   - Would they also identify this way?

5. In thinking about individuals or groups that are underserved and underrepresented, how could they be empowered to advocate for themselves at the assembly level?

6. What kinds of activities are currently taking place that help ensure individuals that are traditionally under-represented are included in the decision-making at the assembly?
   - How are the needs of underserved communities being recognized?
   - What is the motivation of the [administration/politicians] to fund this project?
   - How did it originate? Who advocated for it?

7. In your experience, what are some of the ways that the assembly contribute to the exclusion of underserved and underrepresented groups?
   - What causes the assembly to contribute to these barriers (structural, attitudinal, relational)?

8. In your opinion, does the assembly recognize the value in the direct participation of underrepresented communities?
• What are the formal laws, rules, and/or regulations that cause the assembly to engage with underrepresented communities?
• How does the assembly demonstrate that they desire to engage with underrepresented individuals?
• How is the input of underrepresented individuals reflected in the budget and expenditures of the local government/assembly?

9. How can local stakeholders be mobilized to improve the civic inclusion of individuals with barriers?
   • Who represents their interests within the assemblies decision-making processes?

10. In your view, what should be done to improve the inclusion of underserved and underrepresented populations?
    • What is the process of improvements that could ensure the voices of underrepresented populations are integrated into decision-making?

11. Who do think are the people [outside the local government] that influence decisions made at the local government level?
    • What sector/organization are they from?

12. What [initiative, activity, project] worked well in the past, but is no longer operating? Why can’t you do this anymore?
    • What are the structural, attitudinal, or relational barriers?

13. Based on your knowledge what support or limitations do the regional and national levels of government provide to the local government to ensure broad participation of individuals who are underrepresented?

14. Do you have any final thought on the issues we have explored throughout our discussion?
Focus Group Discussion Framework for Community Members

1. What are the major barriers you face in receiving support from the local assembly when you face life challenges?

2. What opportunities are you given to interact with staff of the assembly? Politicians? Can you describe to me a time when the government reached out to you and asked for your participation in making a decision or designing a program/intervention?

3. Who advocates for your rights? How do they learn what it is that you need? Do you feel adequately represented?

4. Are there challenges you face that the assembly is not able to help you address? If there are, please identify and describe them. In your experience, who would be able to address these challenges with you?

5. Are there barriers to receiving the resources to address your identified needs? If yes, what are they?

6. Do you think the assembly value your input into decisions?
   - Do you see your needs reflected in the budgets and expenditures?
C.3 Canada Interview Script

Inclusive Civic Participation - Interview Script

External Experts

18. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself (for instance; Where are you from? Where did you live before here? When did you move here? What languages do you speak?)

19. When did you join [government/university/research institute/private]? What is your current role and how do you interact with [central/regional/local] government?

20. Broadly, what does your organization do? What is your mandate and what are you trying to achieve?
   - Probe: Is supporting inclusive civic engagement a core part of your mandate or how is it related?
   - Probe: Is supporting local government a core part of your mandate or how is it related?

21. What organizations do you work with most often? Can you tell me about a recent experience collaborating on a governance project? What is the value of collaborating with them? Who funds your collaborations?

22. In your context, how do you identify underserved, underrepresented, and facing complex barriers to civic participation?

23. What level of government is responsible for addressing the needs of underserved and underrepresented populations?

24. What is the local governments responsibility to hear from and address the needs of underserved and underrepresented populations?

25. What is the capacity of local governments to design inclusive civic participation?
26. What prevents local governments from addressing the needs of underserved and underrepresented groups? Can you tell me a story about an experience you had with a local government that tried to act and were unable?
   - How were the needs represented in government decision-making and the design of services?

27. Who are the stakeholders in addressing the needs of underserved communities? What unique role do they each play [Funding, design, relationships, social capital]?
   - Regional Government?
   - National Government?
   - Civil Society (please explain)
   - Traditional authorities
   - Media
   - Others?

28. In your experience, what are some of the ways that local governments contribute to the exclusion of underserved and underrepresented groups?
   - What causes these barriers (structural, attitudinal, relational)?

29. What are some ways upper levels of government influence the ability of local government to create inclusive civic participation?

**Local government**

1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself (for instance; Where are you from? Where did you live before here? When did you move here? What languages do you speak?)

2. When did you join [local government/department] What is your current role? Is this a new area of focus or is it a clear career path? What were you doing before?

3. Broadly, what does your department do? What is your broad mandate and what are you trying to achieve?
   - Probe: Is working with the public a core part of your mandate or a side project?

4. Who outside of government do you regularly engage with? When did this last occur? What is the value of collaborating with this group?
   - How do you choose which partners to work with?
• Who funds the collaboration?

5. Can you tell me an example of one (or more) benefits that you’ve experienced from a municipal public engagement exercise?
   a. When did this occur?

6. Broadly, what groups would you identify as underserved, underrepresented, and facing complex barriers to civic participation in your area?
   • How have you identified these individuals or groups?
   • Would they also identify this way?
   • Who primarily brings up their needs in discussion?

7. What is your role in getting traditionally underserved groups and individuals involved in decision-making at the municipality?
   • Is working to improve the livelihoods of underserved populations a core part of your job or a side project?
   • Who is directly responsible for identifying and addressing the needs of underserved people?
   • Where do the resources [human/financial] for this work come from?

8. What are some of the most pressing and complex social challenges that you are facing in your city right now?
   • Is it more prevalent in one population group over another?
   • How do you receive information about it? Directly or through an intermediary?

9. Can you tell me of a [activity, project, initiative] that the municipality pays for that directly targets underserved communities? Is it a one-time initiative or ongoing?
   • Who advocated for this project?
   • Where does the funding come from?

10. Who is responsible for funding basic social services for the community, how does this impact your ability to address the needs in these areas?
   • Housing; Employment; Education; Food; Health

11. Could you please tell me what amount of municipal revenue goes directly to underserved communities?
• What other government funds do you have available to fund these services?
• What other funds are available for these purposes?

12. Who are the stakeholders in addressing the needs of underserved communities? What unique role do they each play [Funding, design, relationships, social capital]?
   • Regional Government?
   • National Government?
   • Civil Society (please explain)
   • Traditional authorities
   • Media
   • Others?

13. Who are the residents and groups in your area that are typically underserved by the local government and what are the challenges and barriers they face?
   • How do you identify them and develop an understanding of their unique needs?
   • Do these barriers limit their employment?
   • Do these barriers cause social exclusion?
   • Do these barriers limit their ability to be engaged with the assembly?

14. What opportunities exist at your level of function to improve the ability of these individuals to interact with the assembly and receive the resources and supports that they need to thrive?
   • What are the barriers at your level to supporting these individuals?

15. What are the benefits of hearing from these individuals directly? Can you tell me of a time where consultation occurred, resulting in a positive change?

16. What prevents you from addressing their needs? Can you tell me a story about a time that you tried to take action and were prevented from doing so?
   • How are their unique needs represented in government decision-making and the design of services?

17. Do you know of any programs that are targeting the inclusion of underserved people in the design of services or other municipal decision-making?
   • Who initiated the program? Who funds the program?
   • Who are the stakeholders in the program?
18. What [initiative, activity, project] worked well in the past, but is no longer operating? Why can’t you do this anymore?
   • What are the structural, attitudinal, or relational barriers?

19. Do you have any final thought on the issues we have explored throughout our discussion?

**Interview script for non-government stakeholders [Associations, private sector, civil society, and media]**

1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself (for instance, Where are you from? Where did you live before here? When did you move here? What languages do you speak?)

2. When did you join [organization/association] What were you doing before? Is this a new career path or consistent with your past positions?

3. What does your organization do? What is your broad mandate, and what are you trying to achieve?
   • Is working with the government a core part of your mandate or a side project?
   • Is working with marginalized groups a core part of your mandate?

4. Broadly, based on your experience, what groups would you identify as underserved, underrepresented, and facing complex barriers to civic participation in your area?
   • How have you identified these individuals or groups?
   • Would they also identify this way?

5. In thinking about individuals or groups that are underserved and underrepresented, how could they be empowered to advocate for themselves at the assembly level?

6. What kinds of activities are currently taking place that help ensure individuals that are traditionally under-represented are included in the decision-making at the assembly?
   • How are the needs of underserved communities being recognized?
   • What is the motivation of the [administration/politicians] to fund this project?
   • How did it originate? Who advocated for it?
7. What are some of the most pressing and complex social challenges that you are facing in your city right now?
   a. Is it more prevalent in one population group over another?
   b. How do you receive information about it? Directly or through an intermediary?

8. In your experience, what are some of the ways that the city officials contribute to the exclusion of underserved and underrepresented groups?
   - What causes the city to contribute to these barriers (structural, attitudinal, relational)?

9. In your opinion, does the city recognize the value in the direct participation of underrepresented communities?
   - What are the formal laws, rules, and/or regulations that cause the city to engage with underrepresented communities?
   - How does the city demonstrate that they desire to engage with underrepresented individuals?
   - How is the input of underrepresented individuals reflected in the budget and expenditures of the local government/assembly?

10. How can local stakeholders be mobilized to improve the civic inclusion of individuals with barriers?
    - Who represents their interests within the cities decision-making processes?

11. In your view, what should be done to improve the inclusion of underserved and underrepresented populations?
    - What is the process of improvements that could ensure the voices of underrepresented populations are integrated into decision-making?

12. Who do think are the people [outside the local government] that influence decisions made at the local government level?
    - What sector/organization are they from?

13. What [initiative, activity, project] worked well in the past, but is no longer operating? Why can’t you do this anymore?
    - What are the structural, attitudinal, or relational barriers?
14. Based on your knowledge what support or limitations do the provincial and national levels of government provide to the local government to ensure broad participation of individuals who are underrepresented?

15. Do you have any final thought on the issues we have explored throughout our discussion?
CURRICULUM VITAE

Merlin Reid Chatwin
Department of Geography
University of Western Ontario

1. EDUCATION

PhD, Geography, University of Western Ontario 2016 - Present
- Award- Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship-Doctoral
- Senior Fellow- The Centre for Urban Policy and Local Governance
- PhD Thesis- “Working within constraints: Examining the effectiveness of local network governance in addressing complex social challenges.”

MA, Leadership, Royal Roads University 2012
- Thesis: “Attendance Matters: School Staff and Administrator’s Perceptions of Chronic Absenteeism”

2. RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

- Multilevel governance and subsidiarity in diverse settings
- Local government policy development
- Digital and open governance
- Civic participation and inclusion
- Critical urban studies, path-dependence theory
- Gender, power, inequality and development
- Urban policy migration and the influence of supra-national organizations

3. SCHOLARSHIPS, FUNDING, AND AWARDS

2020- Mitacs Research Training Award- $6000
2019- Western Graduate Research Scholarship, University of Western Ontario- $11,200
2019- Sumac Travel Award in Geography- $1800
2019- Graduate Research Award, University of Western Ontario- $200
2018- Western Graduate Research Scholarship, University of Western Ontario- $11,200
2018- Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship- $105,000
2018- Ontario Graduate Scholarship (declined)- $15,000
2018- Graduate Research Award, University of Western Ontario- $200
2017- Gender and Taxation Research Fund, Institute of Development Studies- $10,000
2017- Western Graduate Research Scholarship, University of Western Ontario- $11,200
2017- Graduate Research Award, University of Western Ontario- $750
2016- Western Graduate Research Scholarship, University of Western Ontario- $3733

4. PUBLICATIONS

Journal Articles


Book Chapters


Commissioned Technical Reports


5. ONGOING RESEARCH

2018-Present Monitoring and evaluating digital reforms and associated civic technology in local government
   • Examining the impact and sustainability of technology mediated civic participation globally
   • Assessing the application of theory-based evaluation to digital government and civic tech platforms

2016- Present Local government in diverse geographic contexts
   • Urban policies and the impact of supra national organizations
   • Fiscal transfers and multilevel governance
   • Government reform evaluation

2016- Present Inclusive civic participation
   • Application of ‘Right to the City’ in diverse geographic locations
- Enabling environments and local government ability to be responsive to the needs of residents

2017- Present  Gender and local taxation in Ghana
- Examining the perceptions and lived experience of women interacting with the local tax system
- Identifying differences between policy and practice
- Comparative research on regional similarities and differences

2017- Present  Sanctuary Cities in Canada
- Exploring the media discourses and political debates on sanctuary cities
- Identifying the rationales, challenges, policy processes, and policy outcomes for these programs
- Methodology: Content analysis; interviews

6. CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS


7. TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Undergraduate Courses Taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summer 2019</th>
<th>GEOG 2060A: World Cities</th>
<th>45 students</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Course Description: “Provides a global perspective on urbanization through exploring different cities around the world to consider pertinent topics as international agreements, national and local urban planning and design, urban growth and de-growth, sustainability and resilience, poverty, violence, and socio-economic inequality.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Roles and Responsibilities: Developed and delivered course lecture and exam material, integrating textbook and other relevant literature with real-world debates and concepts; Created, delivered, and marked</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
class assignments, presentations, and exams; Organized and led seminar-style presentations on major global challenges in cities.

Winter 2020
GEOG 3463: Geography of Housing
( Co-teaching with Professor Michael Buzzelli)
• **Course Description:** This course explores the geography of housing in North American cities from an historical perspective, with a detailed investigation of the effects of land development, construction, financing, planning, public policy, demographics and lifestyle changes on the production and consumption of residential landscapes.
• **Role and Responsibilities:** Responsibilities included leading seminar sessions; Delivering predetermined lectures; Co-developing course outline and grading scheme; Marking course assignments; Assisting in the development, implementation, and review of the term project; Adapting to online environment during Covid-19

*Teaching Assistantships*

Fall 2020
GEOG 3465F: Urban Economic Development and Policy
• **Course Description:** “This course examines policies used in economic development to ensure growth and competitiveness of urban economies. Topics include theories of urban economic development, analytical techniques for evaluating urban economies, business recruitment and retention policies, creative economy and quality of life policies, technology policies, and place-based economic development policies.”
• **Role and Responsibilities:** Main responsibilities included assisting in the development, implementation, and review of the term project; Consulting with students on key issues related to the course and their assignments.

Winter 2019
GEOG 3463: Geography of Housing
• **Course Description:** This course explores the geography of housing in North American cities from an historical perspective, with a detailed investigation of the effects of land development, construction, financing, planning, public policy, demographics and lifestyle changes on the production and consumption of residential landscapes.
• **Role and Responsibilities:** Responsibilities included leading seminar sessions; Guest lecturing; Marking the course assignments; Assisting in the development, implementation, and review of the term project.

Fall 2018
GEOG 3465F: Urban Economic Development and Policy
• **Course Description:** “This course examines policies used in economic development to ensure growth and competitiveness of urban economies. Topics include theories of urban economic development, analytical techniques for evaluating urban economies, business
recruitment and retention policies, creative economy and quality of life policies, technology policies, and place-based economic development policies.”

- **Role and Responsibilities:** Main responsibilities included assisting in the development, implementation, and review of the term project; Consulting with students on key issues related to the course and their assignments.

**Winter 2018**

**GEOG 2460: Introduction to Urban Development**

- **Course Description:** “Growth, structure and morphology in industrial and post-industrial cities; theories of, and empirical research on, urban form and structure; land development decision making; development feasibility modelling; urban land-use policy.”

- **Role and Responsibilities:** Main responsibilities included developing slides and supplemental material to present in tutorial sessions, focusing on teaching both qualitative research and financial modeling; Assisting in undergraduate course preparation, presentation, and marking; Advising students on original research projects; Consulting with students regularly to clarify and explain major concepts and debates in the course.

**Fall 2017**

**GEOG 2162A: Planning Sustainable Cities**

- **Course Description:** “Principles and processes of land use planning for urban and regional development; current issues and case studies. The course emphasizes the need for contained/intensified/environmentally responsible urban areas.”

- **Role and Responsibilities:** Main responsibilities included grading assignments and examinations; Advising students on course projects and material.

**Winter 2017**

**GEOG 2460: Introduction to Urban Development**

- **Course Description:** “Growth, structure and morphology in industrial and post-industrial cities; theories of, and empirical research on, urban form and structure; land development decision making; development feasibility modelling; urban land-use policy.”

- **Role and Responsibilities:** Main responsibilities included developing slides and supplemental material to present in tutorial sessions, focusing on teaching both qualitative research and financial modeling; Assisting in undergraduate course preparation, presentation, and marking; Advising students on original research projects; Consulting with students regularly to clarify and explain major concepts and debates in the course.

**Fall 2016**

**GEOG 2162A: Planning Sustainable Cities**

- **Course Description:** “Principles and processes of land use planning for urban and regional development; current issues and case studies. The
course emphasizes the need for contained/intensified/environmentally responsible urban areas.”

- **Role and Responsibilities:** Main responsibilities included grading assignments and examinations; Advising students on course projects and material.

**Invited Guest Lectures**

2020 CPELS9202: Critical Policy Studies in Education
- **Lecture Title:** Analyzing the strength of sanctuary city policies in Canadian municipalities

2019 POL3363F: Power in the City
- **Lecture Title:** Sanctuary cities in Canada: Symbolic or Supportive?

2018 GEOG2460: Introduction to Urban Development
- **Lecture Title:** Civic inclusion in urban decision-making
- **Lecture Title:** What’s all the Yelling about? Exploring discourse around sanctuary cities in Canada and the US.

8. **RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS**

**Interim Executive Director – Open North**

- Lead business development and partnerships for an international non-profit
- Direct oversight of and applied research lab with 10 staff
- Budget accountability for $1 million annual budget
- Develop organizational monitoring, evaluation and research agenda
- Management of a staff team of 15

**Manager, Monitoring and Evaluation - Code for Canada**

**Responsibilities:**

- Promote robust monitoring and evaluation for government reform
- Design and implement monitoring and evaluation process for the organization and individual programs
- Train management and staff on data collection, management and analysis
- Support government partners in developing project specific monitoring and evaluation

**Senior Policy Analyst- Province of Ontario**

**Responsibilities:**

- Support ministries in designing public engagement and open data/information strategies through training, tool development and consultation
• Prepare policy briefs and presentation decks for Ministers office
• Liaise with Indigenous education partners across Ontario, with a focus on the north
• Engage with external stakeholders to co-create government open dialogue, data, and information priorities
• Develop and implement evaluation for open government initiatives
• Develop evaluation for external Transfer Payment Agreements
• Liaise with Government of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat and Office of the Privy Council through Community of Practice
• Liaise with Ontario municipal governments on public engagement, open data, and open information
• Responsible for the design and implementation of the Ontario Multi-Stakeholder Forum
• Design and facilitation of large and small group training across the OPS for public engagement and open government strategies
• Develop train the trainer modules for integrating open government principles across the OPS
• Developed mid-term and year-end self-assessments for the Open Government Partnership
• Initiate and lead civic engagement community of practice with local, provincial, and federal representatives.

Project Manager- Reboot (Brooklyn, New York) 2016
Responsibilities:
• Lead design research process in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (Ghana)
  o managed a research design team for a governance project leading to reform in public participation, accountability, and transparency
  o worked with governance stakeholders to understand motivations, capacities and constraints in reform design and implementation
  o facilitated design research process resulting in commitments for Open Government Partnership Action Plan
  o developed qualitative research protocol, interview scripts, collect data, synthesize, and analyze
  o prepared policy briefs, funding reports, member checking documents
• Lead open government design research process with the Provincial Government of Ontario
  o conducted pre-engagement interview process to assess state of civil society relationship with the open government office
  o designed and facilitated a series of public engagement workshops leading to commitments for Open Government Partnership Action Plan.
• prepared policy briefs, funding reports, member checking documents
• Support design research in Kenya, Nigeria, Mexico
• Business development (Africa, North America)

**Owner/Managing Director- Amplify Governance International**

**Responsibilities:** 2012 – 2016

• Designed and implemented sub-national tax reform within local government municipalities in Ghana
• Developed a successful unsolicited funding proposal ($1.2 million funded by the governments of Canada and Ghana)
• Successfully advocated for valuation-led taxation reform leading to a change in national process to make it more financially accessible for local government
• Expanded business operations to 14 local assemblies in 5 regions
• Managed a team of 13 Canadian and Ghanaian staff, volunteers, and consultants
• Accountable for approximately $500,000 annual budget
• Developed strategic partnerships between local and central government, development partners, private sector, implementing partners and civil society organizations
• Prepared policy briefs and policy advisory advocacy for support to decentralized governments
• Monitored and evaluated activities for all initiatives (quantitative and qualitative research)
• Designed training for public servants in the areas of public engagement, taxation reform, and spatial database creation.
• Developed successful project and research proposals; lead ongoing donor engagement, budget development, and financial reporting
• Worked alongside government officers to conduct capacity needs assessments

**Country Director- Village Bicycle Project (Ghana)**

**Responsibilities:** 2015 – 2016

• Responsible for strategic/long range planning
• Partnership development for bike donations and marketing
• Re-designed board of directors, develop and implement long-range board strategy
• Developed communications strategy for Ghana, USA and UK
• Budget allocation and reporting- Ghana and USA
• Recruited, developed and supervised staff team throughout Ghana and the USA
• Proposal/grant writing and reporting
• Developed necessary policy and procedures (ie. Informed consent)
• Designed and implemented diversified fundraising strategy
• Designed knowledge management strategy to support leadership transitions

**Department Manager- Surrey School District (Surrey, BC)**
*2007 – 2012*

**Responsibilities:**
• Responsible for all activities of a department of 3 managers and 20 unionized staff
• Accountable for $1.5-million-dollar annual budget
• Expanded operations from 12 schools to 50 within 2 years
• Aligned priorities of service provision for vulnerable students and their families within an educationally based organization
• Monitoring and evaluation of department activities and specific interventions
• Develop strategic partnerships with provincial and local government, community agencies and businesses
• Worked alongside schools to conduct needs assessments, identify gaps in service and
• Mobilized community and private resources to support student learning
• Developed strategic direction and priorities
• Developed responsive programs based on best practice and recognition of local context; focus on new immigrant/refugee families, first nations and aboriginal, addressing negative effects of poverty.
• Liaised with community coalitions and civil service organizations
• Proposal/grant writing and evaluation reports

**Program Manager- Options Community Services Society (Surrey, BC)**
*2004-2007*

**Responsibilities:**
• Monitoring and evaluation of various programs and interventions
• Assessing the needs of the school community and designing services to address them
• Focused on marginalized youth from new immigrant/refugee families, first nations and aboriginal families
• Designed and allocated department and program budgets-$200, 000 annually
• Supervised staff team and multiple volunteers and practicum students
• Proposal/grant writing and reporting
• Ensured a culturally diverse and sensitive environment is maintained in programs
• Originally hired as a youth worker and created a partnership department that is still operational
9. COMMUNITY SERVICE

Academic Appointments

Co-President
Geograd Society (Geography Graduate Students Association) 2017-2018

Responsibilities:
• Elected representative for Geography Graduate Students
• Coordinate social, advocacy, and departmental relationship activities of the Geography Graduate Students Association
• Liaise with the Canadian Association of Geographers (CAG)

Representative
Research Committee, Western University, Geography Department

Responsibilities:
• Coordinate guest lectures on various topics of interest for the graduate students

Community Appointments

Representative
City of London 2016-2019
Community Diversity and Inclusion Committee

Responsibilities:
• Collaborate with community leaders to develop a community diversity and inclusion strategy
• Liaise with City of London staff to develop implementation plan

Representative
Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (Accra, Ghana) 2013-2016
Internally Generated Funds National Steering Committee

Responsibilities:
• Represented Canada’s interest in the IGF reforms in Ghana
• Analyze current project proposals for “goodness of fit” with ongoing projects
• Harmonize IGF reform component along donor and project lines
• Contribute to the production of Ghana’s national IGF strategy

Representative
City of Surrey- Social Planning Committee (Surrey, BC) 2010-2012

Responsibilities:
• Represented the School District Management
• Heard presentations from various Civil Society, Non-Governmental
Organizations and Citizens in regard to identifying and addressing social issues

- Voted on recommendations for Mayor and Council for budget and expenditures on social welfare initiatives
- Represented Social Planning Committee as necessary with other relevant groups

Coordinator 2008-2011
Fraser Valley Region- Harvest Box Association (Langley, BC)

Responsibilities:
- managed operations of a local bulk food buying club targeting individuals on low and fixed incomes
- arranged drop off locations for fresh produce
- advertised and recruit new members of buying club
- developed long range plan for sustainability
- introduced 2 new offerings for sale within my tenure