

The Role of Hybrid Governance and Networking Mechanisms in Enhancing Good Governance: Relative Advantages and Constraints

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Abstract

This academic paper examines how hybrid governance and networking mechanisms can enhance good governance in African states, particularly in contexts where traditional Western liberal models have proven inadequate. The authors argue that the post-colonial African state faces a governance crisis that requires moving beyond centralized, hierarchical structures toward more flexible, multi-actor arrangements.

The study explores the evolution from traditional Weberian bureaucratic models to polycentric governance systems that incorporate state and non-state actors, including civil society organizations and the private sector. It analyzes two main theoretical schools: the interest intermediation school (which views policy networks as analytical tools) and the governance school (which treats networks as actual governance forms).

The paper emphasizes that effective governance in Africa requires collaborative partnerships across sectors, operating through delegated authority, expertise-sharing, and resource mobilization. The authors introduce the concept of "shadow of hierarchy" to explain functional relationships where both state and non-state actors play essential roles in policymaking and service delivery.

The research concludes that hybrid governance arrangements can strengthen international standards of good governance—including transparency, accountability, human rights, and participatory decision-making—particularly when traditional state capacity is limited. Success depends on maintaining alignment between state preferences and civil society outputs, while building trust-based, non-hierarchical relationships among diverse actors.

Keywords: Hybrid Governance; Policy Networks; Multi-level Governance; State-Society Relations; Participatory Development.

Introduction

The issue of democratization and good governance constitutes one of the core themes on the agenda of African political studies, as it establishes a linkage between the development impasse and the crisis of governance in the post-colonial African state. This has led to the formulation of a set of principles and standards aimed at contributing to the establishment of governmental institutions founded on stable constitutional and legal bases, characterized by effectiveness and prudent governance, and at strengthening the state's capacity to achieve efficiency in the performance of its assigned functions, such as transparency, accountability, anti-corruption measures, and respect for human rights.

In light of the retreat of the Western liberal model, the decline in its level of acceptance across most developing countries, the failure of bureaucratic oversight mechanisms, and the limitations of expanding the role of the market as a means of restoring balance to the state and reforming it, the necessity of reconsidering the foundations and characteristics of state-building and reinforcing the standards of good governance has become increasingly evident. This has been accompanied by a growing orientation toward adopting optimal approaches to stimulate and activate the role of actors within the state, both governmental and non-governmental, through emphasizing the importance of incorporating a mix of different governance patterns. These patterns often transcend the state as the sole central actor and deepen management processes that focus on organizational pluralism rather than centralization.

From this perspective, the analysis focuses on the concept of hybrid governance and on networking strategies among the state, civil society, and the private sector as key actors in good governance, based on the assumption that rising levels of interdependence contribute to the development of a participatory, multi-actor logic of action. Such a logic goes beyond penetrative interaction patterns that tend to weaken state authority and its capacity to promote good governance standards and democratic quality.

The present study seeks to shed light on the outcomes of positive interaction among various formal and informal actors, and on the importance of developing networking strategies in enhancing the standards and values of good governance and the sustainability of development. This is pursued through addressing the following central question: How can a strategic, supportive logic be created within the interactions among the state, civil society, and the private sector in a manner that promotes the principles of good governance and sustainable development?

1. Good Governance: An Interrelated Conceptual Framework

Good governance, as both a concept and a term, gained widespread usage at the beginning of the 1990s, particularly by international organizations, as a methodological approach to achieving societal development in developing countries, in response to the limited effectiveness of governmental administrations in fulfilling this role. The substance of this concept has gained increasing significance in recent decades for both developed and developing countries alike, as a means of realizing citizens' aspirations for comprehensive and sustainable development.

Accordingly, the commitment of developing countries to the standards and values of good governance has become critically important, given its implications for the integration of roles among public administration, the private sector, and civil society organizations. This integration is achieved through participation and partnership, enabling a redefinition of roles among these actors in order to promote societal development and institutionalize principles of transparency, accountability, and participatory policymaking and decision-making.¹

In an effort to overcome the conceptual ambiguity arising from the multiplicity of definitions and interpretations of good governance, Mohamed Sayed Ahmed proposed a set of classifications for definitions found in the relevant literature, encompassing the following dimensions:

First dimension: Examines the relationship between market mechanisms and governmental intervention in the provision of public services, as well as the tendency toward privatization, as indicators reflecting limited government intervention except when necessary.

Second dimension: Approaches good governance through a focus on private organizations, emphasizing interest group demands and mechanisms for satisfying clients.

Third Dimension: Reflects the orientation of the new public administration, introducing new values such as competition, performance measurement, empowerment, and others.

Fourth Dimension: Attempts to link the political and administrative aspects within the concept of good governance.

Fifth Dimension: Suggests that public policies are essentially the outcome of formal and informal interactions among a variety of actors, including governance institutions, the private sector, and civil society.

Sixth Dimension: Posits that good governance involves managing a set of organized networks across multiple governmental bodies.

Answering the question of whether the private sector, alongside local non-governmental institutions, can provide a more suitable mechanism for building effective governance systems that incorporate the principles of good governance—and examining its effects on state capacity, political legitimacy, and public accountability—highlights the importance of understanding collaborative arrangements among governmental agencies, the private sector, and local institutions that fill gaps in state functions. This reflects a shift from a normative approach toward a more pragmatic state-building approach, moving from the “good governance” agenda of building a new liberal state toward focusing on integrating non-governmental institutions into formal governance arrangements capable of delivering public services and tangible outcomes.

In doing so, this constitutes a qualitative shift that surpasses the distorted neo-liberal prescriptions for state-building in Africa, as documented in colonial experiences of indirect rule and postcolonial state ideals.²

2. Good Governance from a Policy Network Perspective: From Hierarchical Centrality to Polycentric Governance

The intellectual roots of policy networks can be traced to structural changes in socio-political systems that occurred in Western industrial societies after World War II. Following the

gradual expansion of state responsibilities, governments encountered difficulties in the formal implementation of public policy and the delivery of public services. Consequently, they began sharing authority with non-governmental actors. As a result, policymaking gradually became less reliant on formal political and administrative mechanisms (e.g., hierarchical bureaucratic models of Max Weber) and shifted toward greater cooperation based on partnership models and polycentric governance.

To explain these changes, policy analysts began developing specific concepts, models, and frameworks such as the concept of a “**policy network**” or “**policy network approach**” has become one of the most significant concepts in political science, applicable in the study of policy formulation and implementation. However, within the fields of public policy and administration, the policy network concept encompasses a number of specific approaches that emerged from the evolution of the literature in two distinct intellectual schools: the interest intermediation school and the governance school.

The following table provides an overview of the approaches to studying policy networks adopted by both schools, and evaluates their usefulness as analytical frameworks in contexts involving numerous formal and informal actors engaged in policy arrangements and in achieving democratic quality as a form of good governance.

interest Intermediation School (Policy Networks as Analytical Tools)	governance School (Policy Networks as a Form of Governance)
Definition: A comprehensive framework for analyzing changes in state–society relations in public policymaking.	Definition: A specific form of governance; a real change in the structure of the political system reflecting transformations in state–society relations.
Explanatory Elements: Used to explain all types of relationships between public and private actors in public policymaking. • Actors form links for negotiation and policy implementation (e.g., business and trade relationships/interests). • Links constitute the structure of policy networks. • Analysis of links within this framework. • Policy networks reflect the status and strength of specific interests. • Influence the effectiveness of policy processes and outcomes.	Explanatory Elements: Uses a combination of relevant theories to explain specific types of relationships between public and private actors in policymaking. • Actors form flexible relationships for resource sharing and collaborative policymaking. • Flexible relationships are part of an ongoing policymaking process. • Difficult to determine the impact of policy networks on the effectiveness of policymaking processes and outcomes.
Analytical Prospects: A relatively simple and straightforward model that can effectively describe policy networks as they exist. • Descriptive • Practical.	Analytical Prospects: A model that can help describe policy networks as they ought to be. • Reporting • Theoretical.
Limitations: • A static analytical framework • Cannot explain how policy networks change • Cannot systematically link the	Limitations: • An idealized analytical framework • Not a fully developed theory and still has limited explanatory power •

nature of a policy network with the characteristics of the political process and outcomes.	Does not account for resistance to change, ambiguity, and other shortcomings.
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Table 1: Comparison between the Interest Intermediation School and the Governance School

The search for the best ways to create a supportive pathway among a broad range of actors and the collaborative efforts of the public sector, private sector, and voluntary sector has become increasingly urgent, particularly regarding the creation of new organizational arrangements to strengthen international standards of good governance and capitalize on the relative advantages and opportunities they offer.

Following the decline of the Western liberal model, its reduced acceptance in most developing countries, the failure of bureaucratic oversight mechanisms, and the expanded role of the market as a means to rebalance and reform the state, the necessity to reconsider the foundations and characteristics of state-building has intensified. There has been a growing emphasis on adopting the best approaches to stimulate and activate the role of actors within the state, whether governmental or non-governmental, and on recognizing the importance of incorporating a mix of governance patterns that often go beyond the state as the sole central actor.

Furthermore, the duality of state reconstruction—between fixed and variable elements—has raised persistent questions regarding the content of central concepts such as redesigning state capacities and functions. This duality has also acted as a stimulus to reach a more genuine concept of state-building, based on the standard of responding to the needs of both individuals and society.

At the same time, this shift has had a significant impact on the theoretical and methodological orientations of African state formation, broadly speaking. It marks a transition from Weberian notions of the state—as a set of functions following a fixed bureaucratic pattern—toward more flexible, multi-actor governance arrangements capable of responding to contemporary societal needs.³

The acceleration of this transition—from idealized, model-based analyses of political systems, in which the rational-legal model embodies a stable and prudent form of legal authority—has opened the way for renewed attention to forms of hybrid governance in the contemporary Third World. It has also enabled the inclusion of non-state actors within a state structure composed of a heterogeneous set of actors.⁴Particularly, the African reality indicates that most postcolonial African states were by no means close to the Weberian model, or to the modern state at the level of international relations. They have been portrayed as states possessing legal sovereignty while lacking the substantive content of empirical sovereignty, which necessitated filling the power and presence gap through a wide range of non-state actors to manage deteriorating social and economic conditions and to respond to emerging needs in Africa, such as human rights, debt, refugee issues, environmental problems, and the spread of diseases.⁵

The concept of the “shadow of hierarchy” (Börzel&Risse) clarifies the functional equations where the state or non-state actors play an essential role in governance and policy-making. It

distinguishes between the effectiveness of the state (functions and objectives) and the strength of state authority (institutional capacity). Hierarchy incentivizes cooperation with non-state actors, shaping governance through or without the state, depending on the extent of hierarchical methods.

In exploring how to sustain the standards of good governance, the concept of multi-level governance—linking local, national, regional, and global levels—has become highly prioritized. This approach emphasizes the inclusion of both **state and non-state actors** within a cooperative and negotiated framework, rather than hierarchical, top-down policies subject to strict command and control. Its importance lies in its capacity to achieve key governance standards such as **human rights, democracy, rule of law, participatory decision-making**, as well as **welfare and environmental sustainability**.⁶

This approach relies on a set of mechanisms reflecting various forms of cooperation between state and non-state actors, according to the following dimensions:

1. **Decision-making and institutional forms of governance:** This dimension addresses the need to compensate for capacity gaps and examines how state and non-state actors collaborate to solve problems requiring collective action. It includes the provision of services through resource sharing, education, and persuasion, with a focus on **co-governance**, or involving non-state actors in governmental functions, rather than exerting pressure as an influence strategy.
2. **Coordination across governance levels:** This involves linking policies at local, national, international, and cross-border levels, through various actors such as international organizations, non-governmental international organizations, private sector partnerships, individuals, and other civil society actors.
3. **Historical context and determining the appropriate governance type:** This highlights the importance of historical conditions in evaluating experiences in implementing good governance standards.
4. **Theoretical adaptation:** This entails applying suitable methodological and theoretical concepts to analyze and understand the challenges of implementing good governance standards in African states.

3. Networking as a Mechanism to Enhance Good Governance: Towards Functional Governance

Networking as a mechanism provides a practical context for identifying patterns of structural cooperation that generate effective global responses by mapping interactions and institutionalized authority relationships among various actors. It builds a cooperative transnational response network, offering a method to study the structural characteristics of engaged actors and to compare types of organizational structures and gaps that distinguish international responses to global challenges.⁷

In international relations, networks represent complex systems involving multiple actors with agency and the capacity to act and interact, depending on the framing of specific issue areas (e.g., peace and security, human rights, international trade, economic development, and the

environment). In light of the importance of revitalizing eroded state-society relationships, the concept of networking refers to cross-sectoral interactions that generate synergistic effects, aiming to achieve convergent goals through the joint efforts of both formal and informal actors.⁸

Networking is essentially a process of establishing partnerships among multiple units to coordinate actions within a collaborative framework, reaching agreed-upon policies and operational procedures. It also aims to exchange knowledge and information, mobilize capacities, and integrate resources to achieve shared objectives and public interests, while allowing each organization or unit to maintain its autonomy.⁹

Academic studies on networking policies generally draw on governance literature, following two main approaches:

- The first approach treats governance as an analytical concept and model to examine structural relationships, interdependence dynamics, and linkages among actors in policy processes. In this context, networks provide a perspective for analyzing cases where a policy cannot be explained solely by centrally coordinated actions toward common goals. Instead, the network concept in international relations highlights the interaction of multiple interlinked sectors coordinating activities by pooling resources, aligning interests, and accounting for the costs of certain strategies. In this sense, networking policy serves as an analytical model to measure relational configurations, their structural characteristics, and to interpret the interactions of various actors across specific policy sectors.
- The second approach goes beyond using networking merely as an analytical concept to understand the behavior of an individual unit as the outcome of inter-organizational relationships. It focuses on the pattern of reciprocal relations, considering the interaction as the unit of analysis. Alongside understanding the structures and processes through which shared policies are organized, networking policies/mechanisms become a form of governance in modern political systems, capable of solving problems through a set of specialized sub-systems of actors under conditions of limited capacity and resources.¹⁰

The importance of working within a participatory framework lies in the ability of partners within the network—including actors from the public sector, private sector, and voluntary or civil society organizations—to leverage delegated authority and expertise to strengthen standards of good governance, particularly in contexts with resistant governments or low-capacity states. Value-based authority can be used to mobilize additional support from like-minded partners and stakeholders. These standards may include liberal democratic values such as fundamental freedoms (expression, religion, assembly), human rights, accountability, and social inclusion.

Consequently, the concept of networking emphasizes the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation while ensuring the sustainability of the following features:

- Jointly defining objectives.

- Collaborative and consensual decision-making.
- Non-hierarchical and horizontal structures and processes.
- Support for formal and informal trust-based relationships.
- Synergistic interactions among partners.
- Shared accountability for outputs and outcomes.

Partnerships between the public sector, private sector, and civil society represent alternative governance approaches to hierarchical and market-based mechanisms. They are typically employed to achieve one or more of the following objectives:

- **Enhancing efficiency and effectiveness** through reliance on comparative advantages, rational division of labor, and resource mobilization, a combination that can lead to incremental improvements in designed objectives.
- **Providing resources and integrated, multi-actor solutions** required by the scope and nature of the problems being addressed.
- **Transitioning from a zero-sum situation** among multiple actors toward compromise and potential win-win outcomes.
- **Achieving greater openness in decision-making processes** to reinforce the normative dimension of democratic sustainability and to broaden the activation of the public interest.

Conclusion

The capacity of partnerships between the public sector, private sector, and civil society to enhance or significantly strengthen international standards of good governance varies, depending on the type of authority that network members can access or mobilize. These partnerships often operate within the context of delegated responsibilities, making it crucial to maintain alignment between state preferences and the outputs produced by civil society and private sector actors.

Non-governmental participants in public-private partnerships can increase their delegated authority through expertise and capacity to achieve the intended objectives of networking. Simultaneously, they may rely on principle-based authority to establish, promote, and reinforce good governance standards, which can have a more lasting impact than governments that may hold only nominal or limited commitments to these standards.

Furthermore, incorporating hybrid governance as an analytical tool for understanding the interactions among diverse actors in institutionalizing good governance standards revolves around four main considerations:

1. **Opening the discussion of governance issues beyond the state:** Using hybrid governance allows for exploring whether this form of governance institutionalizes a **multi-level logic** or creates new forms of institutional cohesion. It also addresses the nature of interests and strategies shaping hybrid governance processes, requiring a

shift from normative dimensions toward functional effectiveness based on outputs, processes, and actual strategies, linking analytical models with empirical reality.

2. **Expanding the focus to international actors:** This highlights different levels and forms of hybrid governance and emphasizes arrangements and actors operating both within and beyond the state. The role of active international actors—such as aid agencies, multinational corporations, and foreign governments—is often overlooked.
3. **Assessing the legitimacy of regulatory authority:** It is necessary to move beyond negative assumptions regarding the alignment of hybrid governance arrangements with local standards of legitimate authority, emphasizing the importance of institutionalizing good governance principles.
4. **Understanding the varied processes and outcomes of governance:** Attention to the diversity of pathways and outcomes in hybrid arrangements is essential for understanding the real impacts of governance on public authority cohesion and social accountability. It also enables empirical analyses in specific cases, rather than reducing them to theoretical foundations and frameworks.

Additionally, there is a need to renew and develop operational approaches of these actors in parallel with emerging issues and events and to design innovative adaptive responses within an interacting set of necessary conditions, including:

- Activating relevant international rules aligned with priority issues in good governance pathways.
- Establishing communication channels with targeted state elites.
- Creating structured linkages and coordination mechanisms connecting local groups with non-state actors at the transnational level.

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