Evidence Brief

Enhancing Public Accountability Committees (PACs): Lessons from across Africa

By Soukeyna Ouedraogo; Peter Wasswa; Paul Kato; Abdullah Ibrahim; Jarvis Ebua Ebua; Amina Matheka; Doris Ottie-Boakye; Moses Wabusya; JarmarSammy; Onyekachi Nwafor Dorothy Kavindu King'oo; Ismaila Salawu.

Key Messages

> Strong legal and institutional frameworks are essential for the independence and effectiveness of Public Accountability Committees (PACs). Legal reform must prioritize granting PACs sufficient authority to conduct investigations and enforce their recommendations without political interference.

> Investing in resources and technology is crucial for enhancing the technical and operational capabilities of PACs. Adequate financial and human resources, alongside digital tools, can significantly enhance transparency, efficiency, and data-driven oversight.

> Public and civil society engagement is a cornerstone of accountable governance. Strengthening community awareness and participation enhances the legitimacy of PACs, fosters public trust, and holds governments more accountable to their citizens.

> Regional cooperation and international partnerships provide opportunities for shared learning, policy harmonization, and joint anti-corruption strategies-especially relevant for addressing cross-border issues and establishing peer support mechanisms.

> Significant evidence and implementation gaps remain, particularly in areas such as enforcement follow-through, measuring the impacts of public engagement, and the scalability of digital solutions. Addressing these gaps through targeted research and continuous legislative updates is critical to sustaining progress in PAC reforms.

Executive Summary

Public Accountability Committees (PACs) in Africa play a crucial role in governance, but they face significant challenges, including limited independence and insufficient resources, weak legal mandates, and low public engagement. Drawing on a thematic review of 30 studies and key stakeholder consultations, this evidence brief outlines reform priorities, including strengthening legal frameworks, boosting resource allocations, integrating advanced technology, and enhancing public engagement. Implementing these recommendations can significantly enhance transparency, accountability, and public trust across African governance systems, thereby improving PACs operation.

AFIDEP
African Institute for Development Policy

arin
AFRICA RESEARCH & IMPACT NETWORK

Background

PACs have existed in many countries for a long time. The general understanding of these committees can be based on their key terms; 'public' and 'accountability'. PACs enhance high levels of competence, reliability, and honesty in the public sector [1]. Africa is one of the continents that has made profound use of Public Accountability Committees, particularly in the financial management and regulation of service delivery. Historically, the modern PAC can be traced back to 1861 in the United Kingdom when its government raised concerns about examining its expenditures in all departments associated with the management of public funds. The committee was tasked with scrutinising corruption-related issues (1).

Since the establishment of the PAC, numerous improvements have been implemented to address fraudulent issues involving public funds. In the case of African countries, improving PAC entails approaches that address existing challenges and utilise them to develop better strategies for achieving a solution. Considering the socio-economic and political issues prevalent across many countries in Africa, effective PAC should be independent, foster capacity building, enhance transparency, strengthen legal frameworks, engage with civil society, utilise modern technology, and promote cross-border cooperation [2]. Most of these strategies have served as important models for combating corruption in government institutions across many African countries.

Many African countries have strengthened their legal frameworks to fight corruption [3,4]. For instance, various laws have been enacted to empower Public Accountability Committees to function independently and establish penalties for non-compliance. Some African countries are now utilising modern technology that entails transparency and accountability in the work of their PAC. In Kenya, digital platforms such as Action for Transparency and *Uwajibikaji Pamoja* have enabled citizens to track public resources and report irregularities in real time [5] (TI-Kenya, 2021). Ghana's Open Data Initiative has also facilitated public access to government datasets, supporting transparency and data-driven oversight [6]. It is through this that the PACs have been able to utilise digital platforms for financial reporting, data collection, and recording and analyses

for making informed decisions. PAC's involvement of citizens has demonstrated accountability in governments across various African countries. For instance, civil societies in Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria participate in monitoring the work of PACs, focusing on key issues such as corruption [5–7]. Regional cooperation is another model employed by some African countries that are members of organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These regional organisations have interests in promoting cooperation and fighting corruption-related cases across Africa. Other models for improving PACs used by African countries are ethics and integrity training, whistleblower protection, and peer review mechanisms.

Despite the adoption of these promising approaches, PACs across Africa continue to face persistent institutional and operational challenges that undermine their overall effectiveness. In many countries, PACs struggle with limited financial and human resources, political interference, weak enforcement of recommendations, and inadequate legal safeguards to ensure their independence [8–10]. Furthermore, the lack of systematic follow-up on PAC findings and insufficient citizen engagement, often due to poor public awareness, fear of retaliation, or restricted access to information, further diminishes their accountability function [5,7]. These constraints raise critical questions about how PACs can be better supported and reformed to fulfill their mandates effectively. It is within this context that a comprehensive review is needed to examine existing barriers and identify practical, evidence-informed solutions for strengthening PACs performance and impact.

This policy brief explores how Public Accountability Committees (PACs) across Africa can be strengthened to play a more effective role in promoting transparency, combating corruption, and fostering accountable governance. By synthesising lessons from diverse African contexts, the review identifies structural, legal, and operational reforms that can enhance PAC autonomy, build institutional capacity, and improve

public engagement. The ultimate objective is to generate evidence-informed policy recommendations that support the realisation of stronger, more responsive PACs aligned with broader democratic governance and development goals.

Methodology

The brief draws on a review of academic and grey literature sources published in 2000–2024, selected using thematic relevance and critical appraisal skills programme (CASP) criteria. Table 1 lists the studies included in the review. Findings from the diverse sources were synthesised to distil effective practices and key lessons. This synthesis formed the basis for developing targeted recommendations aimed at strengthening PACs across Africa, ensuring that they are grounded in empirical evidence and reflective of the complexities observed in the studies.

Insights from a range of stakeholders, including government officials, members of PACs, and civil society experts, were integrated into the final recommendations. This step was crucial to ensure that the proposed strategies are not only theoretically sound but also practically feasible and tailored to the specific needs and conditions of the target environments.

Data extraction was performed using a standardised tool to capture key study characteristics, intervention details, main findings, and their relevance to strengthening PACs. Thematic analysis and narrative synthesis were then applied to generate context-specific recommendations, with particular emphasis on aligning them to Kenya's policy priorities and programmatic needs.

Findings

Based on the comprehensive review and analysis, several key policy priorities have emerged to enhance the effectiveness of PACs across Africa. First, legal reform and enforcement must be prioritised to ensure PACs have the autonomy and strong investigative powers necessary to operate free from political interference [11, 12]. Strengthened legal mandates support government expenditure oversight, transparency through information disclosure, and the development of sound institutional policies.

Second, adequate resource allocation is essential [4, 11]. PACs require sufficient financial and human resources to conduct audits and investigations effectively. Dimant and Tosato (2018) emphasise that well-funded PACs demonstrate improved oversight capacity, technical expertise, and enhanced communication and outreach(13).
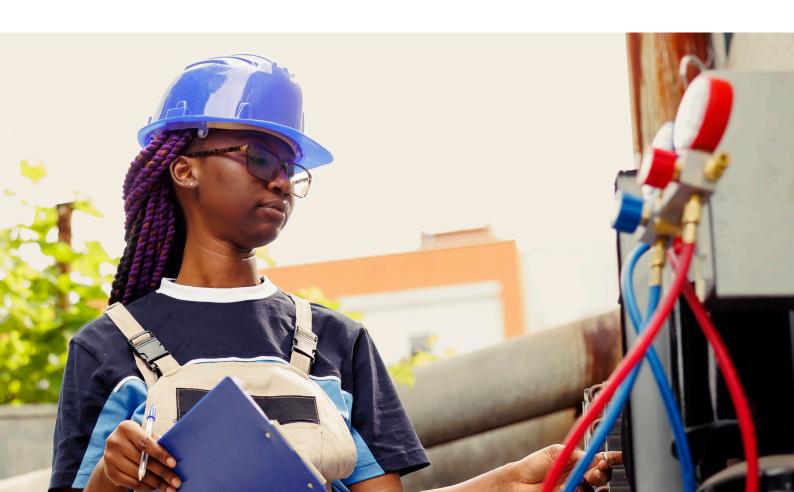
Third, public engagement enhancement is critical. Raising public awareness and involving civil society in PAC processes fosters a culture of transparency and strengthens accountability. Fjeldstad and Isaksen (2008) emphasise the role of civic participation in enhancing legitimacy, improving access to information, and strengthening democratic institutions [14, 15].

Fourth, technology integration should be advanced by embedding modern digital tools into PAC operations, including data management and financial tracking systems [16]. Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) notes that such integration enhances transparency, operational efficiency, capacity building, and innovation [16].

Lastly, from the stakeholders interview, it was noted that strong regional and international collaboration should be strengthened to allow African countries to learn from one another and coordinate responses to cross-border corruption. Collaborative platforms enable knowledge exchange, mutual support, and the adoption of best governance practices. These policy priorities together lay the foundation for more resilient, transparent, and effective PACs across the continent.

Table 1. Included studies, insights and recommendations included studies and interviews, insights and recommendations

Citation	Study insights and recommendations
Besley & Persson (2011)	Strong legal frameworks reduce political interference, improve oversight, and empower PACs to hold governments accountable.
Dimant & Tosato (2018)	Enhanced resourcing enables PACs to tackle complex corruption cases, improve oversight quality, and build technical capacity.
Stakeholder Engagement Findings	Technology improves real-time tracking, reduces errors, supports analytics, and enhances transparency in PACs operation.
Fjeldstad & Isaksen (2008)	Public engagement improves accountability by mobilising external pressure, increasing PAC legitimacy, and supporting civic monitoring.
Stakeholder Engagement Findings	Cross-border collaboration facilitates knowledge exchange, capacity building, and coordinated responses to transnational corruption.
Diale (2016)	Legal protection, such as whistleblower protections enables safe reporting of misconduct and increases detection of hidden corruption.
Mungiu-Pippidi (2015)	Training in audit techniques, digital tools, and anti-corruption strategies improves PAC effectiveness and adaptability.
Fjeldstad et al. (2003)	Audit follow-up deters public fund misuse, enhances transparency, and strengthens trust in public financial management.

Recommendations

> The national legislatures, Ministries of Justice, Parliamentary Legal Affairs Committees should develop and enforce legal frameworks to ensure PAC independence and power.

> The National Treasuries and the Parliamentary Budget Committees should allocate sufficient financial and human resources to PACs.

> The PAC secretariats, e-Government agencies, ICT Ministries should adopt digital tools for data management, transparency, and efficiency.

> The PACs, civil society organisations (CSOs), national civic education bodies and media agencies should raise civic awareness and promote citizen/civil society involvement.

> PAC leadership, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and anti-corruption agencies should build partnerships with global anti-corruption bodies and peer PACs.

> The Parliamentary Committees on Oversight/ Legal Reform, PAC Members, and Law Commissions should periodically update PAC legal mandates and tools.

> The National legislatures and anti-corruption commissions should enact and enforce laws to protect corruption whistleblowers.

> The Parliamentary Service Commissions and training institutes should provide ongoing professional training for PAC members.

> The PACs, Supreme Audit Institutions, the Auditor General, and Parliamentary Oversight Committees should ensure PACs follow up on audit discrepancies and irregularities.

Conclusion

This review on enhancing PACs in Africa highlights their crucial role in governance and the challenges they face, such as political interference and resource limitations. Recommended actions for improving the effectiveness of PACs include legal reforms to boost independence, enhanced resource allocation, use of advanced technology, increased public engagement for greater accountability, strengthening whistleblower protection and audit oversight and regional cooperation to share best practices. Continuous adaptation of strategies is essential due to the evolving nature of corruption. These insights provide a basis for implementing reforms to enhance the effectiveness of PACs across African nations.

Acknowledgement

References

1. O'Regan B, King R, Smith D. Combining accountability forms: transparency and "intelligent" accountability in a public service organization. Account Audit Account J. 2021;35(5):1287–315.

2. Schoeberlein Jennifer. Author: Jennifer Schoeberlein, tihelpdesk@transparency.org. 2022;

3. AFROPAC. About Us – AFROPAC [Internet]. [cited 2025 Aug 2]. Available from: https://afropac.net/about-afropac/

4. African Union. African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption | African Union [Internet]. 2003 [cited 2025 Aug 2]. Available from: https://au.int/en/treaties/african-union-convention-preventing-and-combating-corruption

5. Transparency international. TI-Kenya Digital Platforms - TI-Kenya [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2025 Aug 2]. Available from: https://tikenya.org/ti-kenya-digital-platforms/

6. GODI. Ghana Open Data Initiative - Wikipedia [Internet]. 2012 [cited 2025 Aug 2]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana_Open_Data_Initiative

7. Fatile JO, Adejuwon KD. Legislative Oversight as Accountability Mechanism: The Nigerian Perspective. Adv Afr Econ Soc Polit Dev. 2023;39–57.

8. Pellizo R, Kinyondo A. Public Accounts Committees in Eastern Africa: A Comparative Analysis by Riccardo Pelizzo, Abel Kinyondo :: SSRN [Internet]. 2014 [cited 2025 Aug 2]. Available from: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2426199

9. Hussein M. Integrity Committees as Anti-Corruption Strategies in Malawi's Public Service: Opportunities and Challenges | Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives [Internet]. 2023 [cited 2025 Aug 2]. Available from: https://journals.co.za/doi/full/10.55190/TXGA7256

10. Chikuni A. Procurement and Corruption Nexus in Construction Industry in Malawi: A Governance Enquiry. J Public Adm Dev Altern. 2024 Dec;9(3):1–20.

11. Besley T, Persson T. Pillars of Prosperity, The Political Economics of Development Clusters. 2011;

12. Diale A. Whistleblowing and Whistleblower Protection in South Africa (2001-2015): A Path Traversed. J US-China Public Adm. 2016 June 28;13.

13. Dimant E, Tosato G. CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION: WHAT HAS PAST DECADE'S EMPIRICAL RESEARCH TAUGHT US? A SURVEY. J Econ Surv. 2018;32(2):335–56.

14. Fjeldstad OH, Moore M. Revenue authorities and public authority in sub-Saharan Africa. J Mod Afr Stud. 2009 Mar 1;47:1–18.

15. Fjeldstad O. Fighting fiscal corruption: lessons from the Tanzania Revenue Authority. Public Adm Dev. 2003 May;23(2):165–75.

16.   Mungiu P. The Quest for Good Governance: Learning from Virtuous Circles [Internet]. Journal of Democracy. 2016 [cited 2025 Aug 2]. Available from: https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-quest-for-good-governance-learning-from-virtuous-circles/

LEEPS
Learning together to advance
Evidence and Equity in Policymaking

Alliance for Evidence and Equity
in Policymnaking in Africa

AFIDEP
African Institute for
Development Policy

ORiN
AFRICA RESEARCH & IMPACT NETWORK