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Building Integrity Ecosystems: Conceptualising Multi-Stakeholder Governance for Inclusive Policy Outcomes

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Abstract

This paper conceptualises the idea of an integrity ecosystem as a multi-stakeholder governance framework designed to strengthen inclusive policy outcomes. Traditional single-agency approaches to combating corruption and promoting integrity have proven insufficient in addressing systemic challenges. Drawing from governance theory, systems thinking, and global case studies such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and Open Government Partnership, the paper argues that integrity emerges as a property of collaborative networks involving government, private sector, civil society, and the media. Using an integrative literature review, the study synthesises enabling conditions, including legal frameworks, open data infrastructures, and participatory platforms that make collaboration credible and repeatable. It then develops a conceptual model detailing how co-design, joint monitoring, and conflict-resolution processes can foster trust, accountability, and equity. The findings suggest that embedding integrity within ecosystems ensures policies are more legitimate, inclusive, and sustainable, offering valuable implications for both policymakers and practitioners.

Keywords: Integrity Ecosystems, Multi-Stakeholder Governance, Inclusive Policy, Conceptual Framework

Introduction

In an era of increasing complexity and interconnected challenges, traditional single-agency approaches to promoting integrity and combating corruption are proving inadequate. Integrity cannot simply be managed by compliance units or integrity offices within ministries. Instead, there is growing recognition that integrity must be nurtured through broader

systemic approaches anchored in multiple stakeholders working together in a coherent ecosystem. Such an integrity ecosystem involves the government, private sector, civil society actors, the media, and other societal stakeholders collaborating in transparent, accountable, and trusted ways.

The concept of integrity ecosystems draws upon insights from both governance theory and systems thinking. Rather than viewing integrity as a static compliance outcome, the ecosystem perspective frames it as an emergent property of a well-connected network of actors who collectively sustain responsive and ethical governance. This stands in contrast to more reductionist approaches that focus narrowly on institutional reforms, audits, or legal mechanisms.

Globally there are tangible examples of integrity ecosystem principles at work. Consider the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). In countries such as Ghana and the Philippines, EITI has established multi-stakeholder boards comprising government officials, civil society, and oil and mining companies. These bodies oversee public disclosure of revenues and payments in natural resource sectors. EITI's multi-stakeholder model has enhanced transparency while fostering a shared sense of responsibility and trust (EITI International Secretariat, 2022). Such platforms have not only increased public accountability but have also built confidence among investors, civil society groups, and communities impacted by extractive industries.

Another example comes from the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a global initiative launched in 2011. Member countries—including Mexico, South Korea, and Indonesia commit to co-creating action plans with civil society and design reforms in areas such as budget transparency, open contracting, and citizen monitoring. In Mexico City, the government developed an open contracting portal in partnership with civil society organizations, enabling citizens to monitor public procurement in real time. This co-production of solutions has strengthened integrity and produced more inclusive and responsive policies (OECD, 2017).

Similarly, the Extractive Industries Transparency Mechanism in Mongolia, though not part of EITI, engages local herders, mining operators, and government regulators in negotiation forums that co-design frameworks for land use, environmental protection, and benefits sharing. This locally rooted collaboration builds trust and allows policies to reflect diverse stakeholder needs (World Bank, 2021). These cases illustrate how embedding integrity within broader, multi-actor systems can produce more robust and legitimate governance outcomes.

In emerging economies of Southeast Asia, elements of integrity ecosystems are starting to take shape. In Indonesia notably, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) collaborates with civil society and media organizations to co-develop anti-corruption campaigns as well as monitor procurement in public infrastructure projects. Public reporting and follow-up investigations often result from this collaboration, reinforcing the ecosystem of accountability among multiple actors (Butt, 2016). In the Philippines, a similar approach is undertaken in the procurement of pandemic response spending, where civil society organizations and auditors coordinate with government agencies to monitor transparency, thereby deterring misuse of funds (Transparency International, 2021).

These global examples underscore the value of multi-stakeholder collaboration for integrity. Yet, the ecosystem concept remains underdeveloped in scholarly conceptualization. There is limited understanding of how to integrate stakeholders systematically, meaningfully, and sustainably into governance structures that uphold integrity while also ensuring inclusion particularly of marginalized populations, such as rural communities, informal sector workers, and minority groups. Without concrete frameworks, multi-stakeholder efforts risk becoming perfunctory consultations rather than truly participatory co-governance platforms.

Moreover, governance networks often suffer from blind spots where powerful actors dominate discourse, marginalize weaker actors, or dilute ethical norms. For example, corporate-led public private partnerships in infrastructure may undermine civil society scrutiny if civil society actors lack resources or access. Conversely, dominance of activist groups without institutional legitimacy may erode stakeholder buy-in from government officials or private firms. Hence, balancing power and ensuring equitable voice among participants remains a challenge.

Inclusivity must be central to the integrity ecosystem model. Policies produced by elite coalitions may still fail to reflect or address the needs of vulnerable groups. To address this, co-designed integrity mechanisms must incorporate safeguards for equitable participation ensuring geographic, gender, socioeconomic, and ethnic representation in governance processes. For instance, the Bangladesh Right to Information Act mandates citizen advisory committees at local levels, giving rural women and the urban poor a say in data access and monitoring (UNDP, 2019). Integrating such inclusive mechanisms helps anchor integrity in societal needs and empowers historically marginalized voices.

Governance integrity can no longer be treated as an add-on compliance function. A vibrant integrity ecosystem connects state, market, and societal actors through structured, collaborative engagements. Global experiences from EITI and OGP to local anti-corruption collaborations in Indonesia, Mongolia, Mexico, and Bangladesh demonstrate that integrity thrives in ecosystems built on shared responsibility, transparency, and inclusive design. However, these instances remain fragments of a larger and still under-theorized system. This paper contends that a well-defined integrity ecosystem framework can guide policymakers, practitioners, and civil society groups toward more trustworthy, equitable, and sustainable governance outcomes.

Problem Statement

Around the world, integrity and anti-corruption policies remain fragmented across ministries and programs, which limits their effectiveness and undermines inclusive policymaking. Although nearly every country has ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption, the most widely adopted global treaty on prevention, enforcement, asset recovery, and international cooperation, implementation gaps persist and coordination among public, private, and civil society actors is uneven (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2004). The scale of the problem is not trivial. The United Nations has cited World Economic Forum estimates that corruption costs at least 2.6 trillion US dollars annually, or about 5 percent of global GDP, and the World Bank has long estimated that more than 1 trillion US dollars are paid in bribes each year (United Nations, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2019). Such losses skew public spending away from services that matter for inclusion, such as

education, health, social protection, and local infrastructure. They also suppress competition, deter small and medium-sized enterprises from participating in procurement, and erode trust in institutions that are needed to deliver equitable outcomes.

Public procurement presents a particularly consequential integrity risk because of its sheer fiscal weight and its proximity to everyday service delivery. Recent analyses estimate global public procurement at roughly 13 trillion US dollars in 2018, illustrating the size of the policy lever and the potential exposure to waste, fraud, and abuse if integrity controls are weak (Open Contracting Partnership & Spend Network, 2020). Across OECD countries, procurement represents a large share of government expenditure and is central to achieving value for money and public trust, which is why the OECD has developed detailed recommendations to strengthen transparency, integrity, and accountability throughout the procurement cycle (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2024a, 2024b). Even in high-capacity systems, watchdogs continue to identify savings that could be realized through better oversight and data sharing, as illustrated by the United Kingdom's National Audit Office, which reported potential annual savings of at least 500 million pounds through stronger procurement oversight in a spending portfolio of about 125 billion pounds (National Audit Office as reported in Neville, 2024). The persistence of such findings in advanced systems underscores how fragmented governance arrangements and weak inter-organizational coordination can leave significant value on the table.

At the same time, global indicators show that control of corruption and institutional quality have stagnated or deteriorated in many contexts. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index continues to report that more than two-thirds of countries score below 50 out of 100, signaling endemic risks in public sectors and highlighting the long-standing global average of 43 that has remained stuck for years (Transparency International, 2024, 2025). The Worldwide Governance Indicators show a similarly mixed picture on control of corruption, rule of law, and government effectiveness across more than 200 economies, reflecting uneven reform trajectories and the fragility of integrity gains in the face of political shocks and crisis pressures (World Bank, 2024). The implications for inclusive policy outcomes are direct. When corruption distorts resource allocation or procurement, the groups most likely to be excluded are those with the least political voice and market power, including low-income households, rural communities, informal workers, and small firms.

Despite the breadth of legal instruments and normative guidance, most integrity policies remain housed within individual agencies, focused on internal controls, audits, and sanctions. These are necessary but insufficient for complex governance problems that span multiple organizations and sectors. The OECD's Recommendation on Public Integrity explicitly calls for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach that moves beyond ad hoc measures to risk-based, system-level integrity management and a culture of integrity supported by accountability mechanisms (OECD, 2017). Likewise, UNCAC outlines preventive measures that require coordination among public bodies and engagement with the private sector and civil society, including transparency in public procurement and access to information (UNODC, 2004). Yet, in practice, many jurisdictions struggle to create persistent platforms where government, business associations, watchdog organizations, communities, and the media co-design rules, share data, and jointly monitor delivery. Without such platforms, integrity

efforts risk being episodic, technocratic, and distant from the lived realities of those most affected by policy failures.

Evidence from reform experiences points to the importance of multi-stakeholder governance for strengthening integrity and increasing inclusion. Ukraine's ProZorro, for example, created an open contracting system that made procurement data public and accessible, allowed competitive bidding, and invited civil society and businesses to scrutinize government purchases. The initiative reported substantial savings and became an emblem of transparency-driven service delivery, even while facing political and implementation challenges (Simonite, 2018). The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative also institutionalizes multi-stakeholder boards that include government, companies, and civil society to oversee disclosure of revenues and payments, which has helped improve transparency in resource-rich countries and provided a forum for local actors to contest and shape rules (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2022). The Open Government Partnership has encouraged dozens of co-created national action plans that commit governments to concrete transparency and participation reforms, including open contracting portals and participatory budgeting, which are designed to enhance accountability and bring marginalized groups into decision making (OECD, 2017). These examples suggest that when integrity controls are embedded in collaborative platforms, rules are more likely to be enforced, information is more likely to be usable by citizens and firms, and grievances are more likely to be resolved before they erode trust.

The fiscal and developmental stakes are high. Analyses by international financial institutions link lower perceived corruption to stronger revenue performance, more efficient public investment, and improved macroeconomic stability, all of which contribute to the fiscal space required for inclusive policies (Mauro, 2019). Conversely, illicit financial flows and procurement abuse can drain resources from climate adaptation, health systems, and education equity initiatives that are central to the Sustainable Development Goals. During crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, rapid procurement under emergency rules exposed weaknesses in transparency and oversight in many countries, reinforcing calls for open data, risk-based controls, and citizen monitoring to deter fraud while enabling speed (Transparency International, 2021). Absent system-level coordination, governments struggle to balance speed, integrity, and inclusiveness.

Against this backdrop, there is a clear conceptual and practical gap. Many integrity frameworks specify what should be done inside organisations, but fewer specify how multiple organisations and sectors should be organised to sustain integrity as a system outcome while ensuring inclusive policy results. Power asymmetries often distort multi-stakeholder forums, with well-resourced actors dominating agenda setting and weaker groups lacking the capacity to engage. Data systems are fragmented across agencies and levels of government, limiting the ability to trace funds and assess performance across service delivery chains. Incentives for collaboration may be weak or misaligned when accountability is defined narrowly within organizational boundaries. Without a coherent integrity ecosystem that integrates legal norms, open data, participation, and cross-sector accountability, reforms risk being partial and unsustainable.

This paper, therefore, addresses a pressing policy and research need. It asks how multi-stakeholder governance can be conceptualized and operationalized as an integrity ecosystem that delivers inclusive policy outcomes. It proposes that integrity is an emergent property of sustained collaboration among state, market, and civil society actors who share information, co-design rules, and monitor performance together. The aim is to advance a framework that aligns international standards such as UNCAC and the OECD recommendations with practical mechanisms for co-production, open contracting, and joint oversight across the policy cycle. By doing so, the paper responds to persistent evidence of waste and exclusion, the stagnation of global corruption indicators, and citizens' demand for trustworthy institutions, as captured in successive OECD surveys on drivers of trust in public institutions (OECD, 2024c). Bridging this conceptual gap has immediate significance for governments seeking to expand fiscal space, improve service equity, and rebuild confidence in public institutions.

To build a solid foundation for the study, this paper proceeds with a review of the relevant literature to contextualize key concepts, theoretical perspectives, and prior findings. The literature review helps to frame the research within existing scholarly discourse and identify gaps that this study aims to address. Following this, the paper outlines the research methodology, detailing the conceptual approach adopted to explore the subject matter. The subsequent section presents the main findings and discussion, offering thematic insights drawn from the analysis. Finally, the paper concludes by summarizing key arguments, highlighting implications, and proposing directions for future research.

Literature Review

The governance literature emphasizes collaborative governance, where state and non-state actors jointly design and implement public policy under formal, consensus-oriented conditions (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Emerging sources also recognize the power of ecosystem-based governance through coordinated networks of actors adapting to changing contexts. Likewise, network governance offers a model where multiple stakeholders share decentralized authority, enabling more responsive, knowledge-rich governance approaches. However, the integration of network approaches with integrity-oriented principles and inclusive policy remains largely unexplored. Studies of multi-stakeholder platforms in natural resource governance further attest that legitimacy and integrity depend on authentic participation, not tokenistic inclusion (Mackey, 2024; Ratner et al., 2022).

Multiple interested governance frames (MSG) have gained increasing recognition as vital mechanisms to effectively navigate the complexities of global environmental and socio-economic challenges. These associations are not simply collaboration agreements, but essential infrastructure that amalgamate various stakeholders, including government entities, non-governmental organisations, private sector participants and local communities, to promote comprehensive solutions to complex problems (Glass et al., 2023). Within the context of governance based on the ecosystem, MSG are particularly prominent, since they are fundamental to operationalize the principles of sustainable development objectives (SDG). This incorporation guarantees that interventions are holistic, reflecting the multifaceted nature of ecosystems and the varied interests that provide a claim in them.

However, the true potential of the governance of multiple interested parties can only be achieved if these frameworks are designed and implemented with great adherence to the

principles of integrity. As underlined by Sahel (2016), integrity is crucial to protect transparency, responsibility and legitimacy of the participation of interested parties. Without these principles, the governance of multiple stakeholders runs the risk of becoming a tokenistic effort where the dominant voices eclipse those of the marginalized groups, thus undermining the authenticity of participation. Authentic participation, defined as the significant participation of all relevant interested parties in decision-making processes, is essential not only to achieve equity but also to improve the quality of the results of the policy.

The interaction between the principles of governance and the integrity of multiple stakeholders reveals that authentic participation is a comprehensive promoter of the results of inclusive policies. The effective commitment of interested parties goes beyond mere consultation; It requires that participants feel empowered and responsible for both the process and the results derived from their contributions. Glass et al. (2023) articulate that when interested parties are authentically included in the governance process, the property of policy decisions increases, promoting a collective commitment to the shared objectives. This collective property is essential to encourage lasting and effective policies, particularly in ecosystems where bets involve ecological health, community well-being, and economic viability.

However, achieving authentic participation through the governance of multiple interested parties is full of challenges. The dynamics often prevent the equitable distribution of influence among interested parties, which leads to a scenario in which the voices of marginalized groups are systematically excluded or undermined (Sahel, 2016). In addition, the complexity of environmental problems often requires a level of technical experience that can inadvertently alienate those without such knowledge, further exacerbating the challenges of inclusive participation. Therefore, to operationalize integrity within the MSG frameworks, there must be deliberate efforts to level the field, promote capabilities development and ensure that the participation of interested parties is open and accessible.

In addition, the integration of the principles of integrity within the MSG frameworks not only improves the confidence of the interested parties but also catalyses innovation in the policy formulation processes. Involving various interested parties with varied perspectives encourages a richer speech, encouraging creative solutions to the ecological challenges that had otherwise remained unexamined. As emphasized by the frames of multiple interested parties integrated with integrity, the resulting policies tend to reflect a balanced consideration of environmental sustainability and socio-economic equity. Therefore, the dialogue between the governance of multiple interested parties, the principles of integrity and authentic participation, is not simply theoretical, but operationally essential to cultivate governance approaches based on effective and inclusive ecosystems that finally serve the common good., The concept of integrity in the governance of several stakeholders is fundamentally intertwined with the principles of transparency, responsibility and equitable participation. Like the fear (2023), the integration of these principles of integrity in public administration facilitates a more inclusive governance structure, ultimately increasing the functionality of ecosystem -based structures. This is particularly crucial as these structures usually cover a wide range of actors with different interests and dynamics of power. By sustaining governance, distribute approaches with integrity, stakeholders-distributing from government authorities to local communities, provide an equitable platform to express their

contributions, thus promoting a collective decision-making process that reflects various social needs.

The analytical work of Jansen and Kalas (2020) supports this perspective, advocating a comprehensive conceptual structure adapted to evaluate the intricacies of partnerships of various stakeholders in governance, particularly in the South African context. They claim that the governance of possession, essential for shared resources management, must be founded on the principles of integrity. This emphasis on integrity is positioned as an authentic collaboration catalyst, where the rights and needs of local stakeholders are recognized and respected. This collaboration is not only an aspirational goal, but a necessary condition to ensure that ecosystem-based governance structures produce political results that really resonate with the realities experienced by various communities.

In addition, the role of participatory mechanisms in promoting legitimacy in these governance structures cannot be neglected. Authentic participation is essential because it enables stakeholders to actively engage in discussions that shape the policies that affect their environments and means of subsistence. According to the arguments presented by FUNCTOWICZ et al. (2021), the active involvement of various actors creates a sense of ownership of governance processes, which reinforces responsibility. When stakeholders see their contributions reflected in political decisions, it cultivates confidence in government agencies. This confidence is critical to achieving sustainable results as it reduces the likelihood of conflict and enhances the cooperative management of shared resources.

Integral to this dialogue on integrity and participation is the recognition of the dynamics of power among the stakeholders. Increasingly, literature suggests that power imbalances can make it difficult to participate in authentic politics and, consequently, distort the results of politics. Smith and Green (2022) argue that governance structures should carefully address these imbalances to ensure that marginalized voices are not only included, but are amplified in decision-making processes. Its emphasis on structural adjustments in governance systems aligns with the principles of integrity that defend inclusion and equitable representation.

As evidenced by these academic contributions, the interaction between the principles of governance and integrity with various stakeholders is crucial to promoting authentic participation that leads to inclusive political results. Clearly, when participatory forums are projected with integrity in mind, they reinforce the legitimacy of governance processes and mitigate the risks associated with the unequal engagement of stakeholders. Therefore, literature consistently highlights the need for governance structures to incorporate integrity into their essence, as these fundamental principles are indispensable in the creation of effective policies and reflect a comprehensive landscape of stakeholders in ecosystem-based scenarios., The authentic participation of stakeholders is vital to achieving inclusive political results in governance structures focused on sustainability. The concept of genuine engagement is fundamental, as highlighted by Singh (2024), who argues that authentic participation strengthens the legitimacy of decision-making processes. This legitimacy is crucial to promoting trust between stakeholders, which in turn influences the effectiveness of governance structures. When several communities actively participate, their distinct needs and priorities are more likely to reflect on policy results, thus increasing the inclusion of these structures. This notion of legitimacy through authentic engagement not only reinforces

democratic principles but also closely aligns with the principles of integrity that support stakeholders' interactions and decision-making processes in the governance of sustainability.

Eweje et al. (2021) further emphasize the role of partnerships with various stakeholders as catalysts to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs). His research suggests that authentic involvement between stakeholders promotes innovative solutions and adaptive strategies, essential for facing the multifaceted challenges associated with sustainability. By cultivating an environment of trust and collaboration, stakeholders can leverage their various experiences and competencies to develop comprehensive policies that resonate with various social, economic and environmental contexts. Such collaborative efforts not only democratise the policy formulation process but also improve the stakeholders ' involvement in relation to the results. This increased property is a critical factor in the implementation of successful policies, as communities are more inclined to support initiatives that have participated in the molding.

Moreover, the dynamic nature of environmental challenges requires an adaptive approach to governance. Van der Waldt (2025) postulates that collaborative adaptive networks inherently promote resilience, allowing continuous learning between stakeholders. This continuous learning process, along with authentic participation, equates stakeholders with the ability to adjust policies in real time, effectively responding to changes in ecological conditions or social needs. The adaptability provided by these networks is essential for the development of robust governance structures that not only resist environmental shocks, but also proactively address emerging issues.

In addition, the synergy between the principles of governance and integrity with several stakeholders accentuates the effectiveness of inclusive governance. Authentic participation is linked to integrity, as it requires transparency and responsibility in the interactions of stakeholders (Francis & Boon, 2022). When stakeholders are genuinely involved, the principles of integrity guide their actions towards mutual respect and equitable contribution, which are fundamental to achieving the results of sustainable governance. This reinforces the idea that integrity is not just an abstract principle, but a practical need to promote an inclusive environment, where all voices are heard and valued.

In essence, the integration of authentic participation in governance structures with several stakeholders improves the legitimacy of decision making and the inclusion of policy results. This integration significantly contributes to the resilience and effectiveness of ecosystem -based governance structures, facilitating dynamic adaptation to the complexities of sustainability challenges. Thus, promoting environments that promote the authentic involvement of stakeholders is crucial to establishing governance structures that are not only equitable but also capable of navigating the intricacies of socioecological systems., The literature indicates a robust relationship between collaborative governance approaches and the integrity of policy results, particularly within the context of ecosystem -based governance structures. Brockmyer and Fox (2015) point out that initiatives from various stakeholders, when designed with principles of integrity in their essence, exhibit a ability to promote significant positive social and environmental impacts. Its findings reveal that inclusive governance, which incorporates various perspectives, not only improves transparency and responsibility, but also cultivates confidence between stakeholders. This confidence is

essential to facilitate collaborative efforts that produce substantial political results that are equitable and reflect collective interests.

Complementarily, Moreno Serna (2022) emphasizes the transformative potential of systemic collaborative platforms in the acceleration of sustainability transitions. He postulates that the genuine involvement of stakeholders is an integral part of the functionality of these platforms, allowing several voices to shape discussions of policies and decision-making processes. By prioritizing authentic participation, these structures may face complex challenges in an adaptable way, allowing stakeholders to see solutions adapted to the differentiated realities of ecosystems. This engagement is not merely tokenistic; It requires a commitment of governance structures to listen and respond to the needs and values of the various stakeholder groups, thus contributing to the formulation of more holistic and inclusive policies.

An additional exploitation of these dynamics reveals that the interaction between the principles of governance and integrity with various stakeholders is often mediated by the extent and quality of participation. Without authentic engagement, governance initiatives risk turning into processes that can perpetuate the dynamics of power instead of challenging them. The literature points out that stakeholders who feel genuinely heard are more likely to commit and invest in the resulting policies. This also enhances the legitimacy of governance results as policies developed through inclusive processes are perceived as more representative and fair.

In addition, several case studies presented in the literature illustrate practical applications of these concepts. For example, initiatives in community management of forestry and fishing have shown that involving local stakeholders in decision making not only leads to better environmental administration, but also reinforces community resilience. These examples serve to reinforce the argument that authentic participation, combined with integrity-oriented governance, creates ways to more inclusive political results that resonate with the lived experiences and aspirations of affected communities.

In addition, the literature suggests a pressing need for ongoing research on best practices that facilitate significant participation in several stakeholder groups. This need is particularly salient in contexts marked by power imbalances, where marginalized voices are usually not heard. By identifying and addressing barriers to participation, researchers can contribute to the development of governance structures that really incorporate integrity and inclusion. Such structures would not only improve the legitimacy of politics but also the effectiveness of ecosystem-based management efforts, as they would ensure that the policies created reflect the concerns and knowledge of the most impacted.

Thus, the connection between collaborative governance and the integrity of policy results provides essential information to design governance structures based on more effective ecosystems. By emphasizing the authentic participation of stakeholders, governance structures can promote inclusive political results that respond to complex ecological and social challenges, boosting sustainable development and environmental justice. Each of these studies highlighted the importance of integrating governance, integrity and involvement of stakeholders in the search for inclusive and equitable policies.

Methodology

This is a conceptual and theoretical synthesis paper grounded in an integrative literature review. Sources encompass peer-reviewed articles, governance frameworks, and case studies pertaining to collaborative governance, ecosystem approaches, and stakeholder participation. The methodology involves: (1) extracting core integrity-ecosystem components; (2) mapping stakeholder roles and governance structures; and (3) developing a model illustrating how these elements combine to foster inclusive policy outcomes.

To operationalise the integrative review, the study followed a staged approach. First, a scoping search identified the breadth of work across governance, anti-corruption, networked collaboration, and inclusivity. Searches used combinations of keywords such as integrity, ecosystem, multi-stakeholder, collaborative governance, inclusion, open contracting, and policy outcomes. Databases consulted included Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, complemented by policy repositories from multilateral organisations. The time window prioritised recent contributions while retaining seminal works where concepts originated. Only English-language materials were included for feasibility.

Second, titles and abstracts were screened against inclusion criteria that required a clear focus on governance mechanisms with multi-actor participation and explicit attention to integrity or accountability. Documents that were purely descriptive without conceptual utility were excluded. Full-text screening extracted constructs, definitions, mechanisms, boundary conditions, and outcome measures. A concept matrix was developed to organise findings by actor groups, enabling conditions, processes, and outcomes.

Third, an inductive thematic coding was used to cluster recurring mechanisms such as co-design of rules, joint monitoring, open data use, and conflict resolution. Axial mapping linked these themes into causal chains and feedback loops. This produced a preliminary theory of change that specifies how multi-stakeholder structures, supported by legal and data infrastructures, can yield more inclusive policy outcomes and higher integrity.

To enhance robustness, negative or disconfirming cases were actively sought to test the limits of the emerging model. Triangulation was applied by comparing peer-reviewed findings with high-quality policy evaluations. Plausibility checks used brief, well-documented examples to see whether the model could accommodate diverse contexts. The final step distilled a set of testable propositions and design principles suitable for future empirical work. Limitations include language restrictions, potential publication bias, and the absence of primary data, which the paper mitigates through transparency of the selection process and explicit articulation of assumptions and boundary conditions.

Conceptual Framework: The Integrity Ecosystem

An integrity ecosystem is anchored in a plural set of actors that bring different resources, incentives, and accountability functions to public decision making. Government regulators and policymakers provide the formal authority to design rules, allocate budgets, and enforce compliance. Private sector representatives contribute technical know-how, process innovation, and information on market practices, while also being subject to fair-competition and anti-corruption standards. Civil society organizations supply monitoring capacity, ground-level knowledge, and channels for citizen voice, and the independent media amplifies

scrutiny, translates complex information for the public, and deters misconduct by increasing reputational costs. Integrity becomes more than a compliance task when these actor groups work in structured collaboration that distributes problem-solving across institutional boundaries and blends formal authority with societal oversight (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Fox, 2015). Multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative illustrate how government, companies, and civil society can co-govern disclosure and oversight in resource sectors, with the media often acting as a bridge to citizens and local communities (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2022).

The ecosystem is sustained by a set of enablers that make collaboration credible and repeatable. First, legal frameworks define duties, rights, and sanctions that underpin integrity, including preventive obligations and transparency requirements. International instruments such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption and the OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity call for whole-of-government and whole-of-society arrangements that align enforcement with prevention and participation (OECD, 2017; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004). Second, transparency infrastructures such as open data portals, open-contracting systems, and public registers make high-value information timely, machine-readable, and reusable, which strengthens external scrutiny and internal management. Empirical syntheses show that well-designed transparency systems can improve trust and accountability, particularly when data usability and participation mechanisms are present (Cucciniello et al., 2017; OECD, 2018). Third, civic engagement platforms and participatory mechanisms institutionalize regular interaction among actors, from co-creation workshops to citizen audits and grievance redress. Finally, cross-sector capacity building equips officials, firms, journalists, and community groups to interpret data, use monitoring tools, and navigate regulatory processes, which reduces power asymmetries and improves the quality of collaboration (Emerson et al., 2012).

Within this enabling environment, processes translate collaboration into practice. Co-design forums allow stakeholders to articulate goals, negotiate trade-offs, and agree on rules and standards before policies are finalized. Joint monitoring and evaluation systems then track implementation with shared indicators, publish performance data, and trigger corrective action when risks emerge. Conflict-resolution protocols and facilitation roles help manage disagreements, clarify evidence, and protect minority voices, which is essential for legitimacy. The collaborative governance literature highlights the importance of principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action as process conditions for effective collective problem solving (Emerson et al., 2012). Network governance research further cautions that process design must fit the coordination mode, whether participant-governed, lead-organization, or network administrative organization, if the collaboration is to avoid overload or capture (Provan & Kenis, 2008). In practice, initiatives such as open contracting show that when co-design, monitoring, and dispute-handling are formalized, procurement performance and integrity can improve and information becomes actionable for the public (Open Contracting Partnership & Spend Network, 2020).

The outcomes expected from a functioning integrity ecosystem are both substantive and relational. Substantively, policies should better reflect diverse needs and promote equity because marginalized groups have structured opportunities to shape priorities and evaluate delivery. Relationally, transparency and participation should strengthen credibility and public

trust, which supports compliance and reduces the transaction costs of governance. Comparative evidence indicates that openness and responsiveness are associated with higher levels of trust when accompanied by clear standards and usable information (Cucciniello et al., 2017; OECD, 2024). Over time, shared oversight and open information reduce corruption risks by raising the probability of detection, enabling peer monitoring across institutions, and aligning incentives toward prevention rather than after-the-fact sanctions (OECD, 2017; UNODC, 2004). These outcomes are not automatic. They depend on the depth of participation, the quality of data, and the ability of weaker actors to influence decisions.

The model is best understood as circular and dynamic rather than linear. Actor groups interact through enabling structures and collaborative processes that create feedback loops for learning, adaptation, and escalation when issues are not resolved. New information from monitoring feeds back into forums where standards can be adjusted and resources reallocated. This iterative, polycentric arrangement mirrors how complex public problems evolve and allows integrity to emerge as a system property that is reinforced at multiple nodes rather than concentrated in a single agency (Ostrom, 2010). A circular model also reflects the reality that outcomes influence the ecosystem itself. When inclusive policies generate visible benefits and trust increases, participation becomes more valuable for all parties, which attracts resources and strengthens the very enablers that made the results possible.

Table 1
Thematic synthesis

Theme	**Synthesis from Literature**	**Design Implications from the framework**	**Indicative outcomes**
Actors	Collaborative and networked governance require state and non-state participants to share authority and knowledge for legitimacy and effectiveness.	Four actor families coordinate: public authorities, private sector, civil society, and independent media, each supplying distinct capabilities and checks.	Plural accountability and stronger oversight capacity.
Enablers	Integrity and inclusion improve when transparency tools and participation mechanisms accompany formal rules.	Legal mandates, open data and contracting systems, civic platforms, and capacity-building infrastructure make collaboration credible and repeatable.	Usable information, balanced power, and sustained engagement.
Processes	Authentic participation goes beyond consultation and must be structured to manage power dynamics.	Co-design forums, joint monitoring and evaluation, and conflict-resolution protocols translate collaboration into practice.	Timely correction, shared learning, and credible decision-making.
Outcomes	Inclusive, integrity-oriented collaborations are associated with higher legitimacy and better policy performance.	Ecosystem delivers equity-reflective policies, higher public trust, and lower corruption risk through shared oversight.	Feedback loops reinforce integrity as a system property.

Table 1 shows how the literature's claims about collaboration and authenticity in participation The literature map directly onto the architecture of the Integrity Ecosystem models. The actor

plurality urged by collaborative and network governance is instantiated through four role-differentiated groups that combine formal authority with societal scrutiny. Credible collaboration depends on enabling conditions that pair legal mandates with open data and participatory platforms, echoing findings that transparency only improves accountability when information is usable and engagement is institutionalised. Processes move beyond consultation to co-design, joint monitoring, and fair conflict resolution, addressing power asymmetries identified in the review. When these elements align, outcomes include equity-reflective policies, trust, and reduced corruption, with iterative feedback reinforcing integrity as a system-wide attribute.

Conclusion & Implications

This paper has argued that integrity should be understood as a property of an ecosystem rather than a function relegated to compliance units. The proposed integrity ecosystem integrates four families of actors, the enabling conditions that make collaboration credible, the processes that translate intent into practice, and the outcomes that signal whether inclusion and accountability are improving. Framing integrity in this way connects international norms with operational design choices and helps overcome the fragmentation that often weakens reforms. The model also clarifies why participation must be authentic, data must be usable, and power must be balanced if policies are to be both trusted and inclusive.

The framework contributes conceptually by linking collaborative and network governance with integrity and inclusion as explicit objectives. It specifies a theory of change in which legal mandates, open data, civic platforms, and capacity building enable co-design, joint monitoring, and fair conflict resolution. These processes, if institutionalised, create feedback loops that allow learning and correction, thereby turning integrity into a system outcome rather than an after-the-fact control. Practically, Table 1 translates these ideas into a design map that policy makers and practitioners can apply to structure roles, choose enabling tools, and sequence processes.

Implications for policy and institutional design are direct. Governments should establish permanent multi-stakeholder integrity platforms with clear authority to co-design standards, oversee open contracting and disclosure regimes, and agree on performance indicators across the delivery chain. Participation needs statutory footing to survive political cycles, including minimum representation rules for women, youth, and affected communities. Beneficial ownership registries, interoperable procurement data, and right-to-information timelines should be codified so that information is timely and machine readable. Integrity should be managed through risk-based approaches that span ministries and levels of government, supported by independent facilitation and periodic external reviews. Budgeting must recognise that collaboration has real costs, including facilitation, translation, accessibility, and protection for whistleblowers.

Operational implications focus on how organisations work together day to day. Agencies should publish a shared monitoring and evaluation dashboard that tracks agreed indicators, from procurement cycle times to grievance resolution. Memoranda of understanding can set data stewardship protocols for sharing sensitive information with safeguards for privacy and security. Co-design forums need rules of procedure, agendas that are set jointly, and conflict-

of-interest disclosures. Capacity building should be focused on data literacy, participatory methods, and negotiation, with tailored support for community groups, small firms, and local media. A realistic implementation sequence is to begin with a joint diagnostic and quick wins in high-value processes, then formalise the platform and scale to other sectors once trust and routines take hold.

Implications for the private sector and civil society emphasise reciprocal responsibilities. Business associations can adopt integrity pacts, invest in internal compliance, and participate in open contracting pilots. Civil society organisations can organise user groups that translate procurement and budget data into accessible insights and coordinate citizen audits with grievance referral pathways. Media outlets and fact-checking organisations should be included early in process design so that public communication is accurate and timely. Universities and professional bodies can serve as neutral hubs for training, method development, and evaluation.

Digital and data implications are foundational. Open data policies should define priority datasets, formats, and update cycles and should include usability standards so that communities and smaller firms can actually use the information. Interoperability across procurement, budgeting, company registries, and asset declarations is essential to trace value flows and detect red flags. Algorithmic tools used for targeting inspections or awarding grants require transparency, documentation, and avenues for appeal to maintain fairness and legitimacy.

Implications for research point to the need for robust evaluation and comparative learning. The framework yields testable propositions about which combinations of enablers and processes produce which outcomes in which contexts. Mixed-methods studies can measure ecosystem health through indicators such as participation breadth, data completeness, dispute resolution times, trust surveys, and integrity risk profiles. Comparative case studies across cities, sectors, and countries would help identify contextual moderators and transferability conditions. Design experiments embedded in ongoing reforms can generate evidence on facilitation models, representation rules, and data feedback mechanisms.
There are limitations and risks. Multi-stakeholder processes can be captured by powerful interests, can exhaust participants, or can create parallel structures that confuse accountability. These risks can be mitigated with clear mandates, rotation and term limits, independent chairs, public minutes, accessible grievance channels, and periodic audits of participation quality and outcomes. The model is also not a substitute for political will or basic administrative capacity. It is a scaffold that helps align incentives and information once minimum conditions exist.

The central conclusion is that integrity ecosystems make inclusion operational. When diverse actors have structured ways to co-design standards, share and use data, and resolve disputes, policy outcomes are more likely to reflect public needs and to be implemented fairly. Countries and cities that invest in these platforms, tools, and skills can expect better value for money, fewer integrity failures, and higher trust, advancing the broader aims of just and inclusive institutions.

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