

## Informal Institutions and Public Goods in Ghanaian Bureaucracies

**WINIFRED PANKANI**

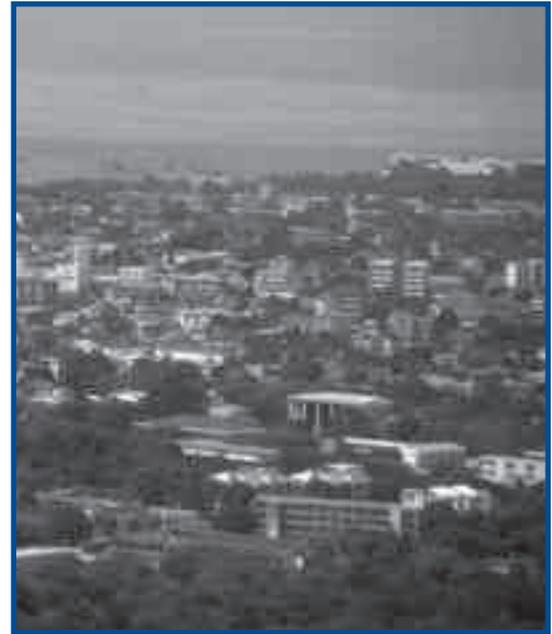
Why do some government ministries, department and agencies perform better than others? Some scholars contend robust and responsive governmental performance is driven in part by increasing levels of wealth. Others posit formal institutions like bureaucratic performance reviews are positively correlated with increased governmental performance, due to increased supervision and monitoring by high-level officials of their lower-level colleagues. Yet an increasing number of scholars, however, argue for the inclusion of informal institutions in our analysis of bureaucratic performance because informal institutions, though not officially authorized or intended to enable citizens to hold government officials accountable, may do so nonetheless by providing a set of standards for awarding moral standing.

Nevertheless, the consensus in the literature on governance in a clientelistic context, especially within public institutions, is that informal institutions undermine governance systems, which in turn impedes economic growth. Clientelistic behavior is theorized to be more prevalent in societies with great social and status inequalities, and where there are incongruities between formal and informal rules. During a six week pre-dissertation research trip in summer 2008, I tested these hypotheses in Ghana by collecting data in four government bureaucracies: The ministries of Agriculture and Water Resources, and of Works and Housing,

the Accra Metropolitan Authority, and the Parliamentary Services Corps.

I used a multipronged approach combining qualitative data with quantitative data. First, I focused on developing an understanding of everyday office politics and governance issues and norm use by collecting information through extensive observation and interviews with both lower and upper-level bureaucrats. My selection of interviewees in each ministry where it was possible was randomized, including as many departments as I could.

The most often quoted informal norm during my interviews was: “do no



harm to those who help you,” a belief that included not shaming the person(s) who helped you get your job or the boss who has been sticking up for you. The belief that one had to help one’s own/group (though this did not necessarily mean ethnic group) was also widely shared, as was the norm of “chopping” from one’s work or place of work. Finally, the belief that wealth can often be fleeting was a broadly shared norm that undergirded many people’s behavior and choices.

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