

Building Accountability from Below: Civic Technology, Civil Society Networks, and Democratic Participation in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Democratic theory assigns the accountability function to formal institutions. In practice, across much of sub-Saharan Africa, these institutions are structurally compromised by executive dominance, resource capture, and chronic under-capacity. The existing civic technology literature responds to this deficit by positioning civil society tools as complementary to formal institutions: filling gaps, amplifying citizen voices, and supporting incremental reform. This paper challenges that framing. Drawing on a longitudinal interpretive case study of civic technology deployment in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (2009–2026), grounded in documented programme outcomes from the Clement Isong Foundation (CIF) and the Akwa Ibom Civil Society Organisations Coalition (AKGCODA, 120+ organisations), this paper introduces the concept of civic technology as governance infrastructure, defined as the condition in which civic technology tools and civil society networks assume, rather than merely augment, formal accountability functions in contexts of sustained institutional failure. The paper analyses two platforms, TaxTrace Nigeria (tracking public finance across all 36 Nigerian states) and MyLGAGovTrack (tracking all 31 local government areas in Akwa Ibom), as evidence of this infrastructure threshold in practice. The findings demonstrate three patterns: formal accountability institutions in Akwa Ibom have demonstrably failed their constitutional mandates; the civic technology infrastructure co-developed by CIF and Vestravion Governance Lab (VGLAB) has produced documented governance outcomes distinct from outreach activities, including three policy changes at duty-bearer level, the establishment of the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Youth Development through sustained advocacy, and an operational Disaster Risk Management Framework; and artificial intelligence integration into this accountability infrastructure introduces new governance risks requiring deliberate policy responses. Democratic ambiguity is central to the paper's argument: while civic technology as governance infrastructure makes institutional failure survivable for communities, it simultaneously reduces the political cost of that failure and risks normalising legislative and executive abdication of constitutional responsibility. Situating the Akwa Ibom case within Nigeria's broader civic technology ecosystem and comparative evidence from West Africa, the paper calls for a reframing of how civic technology is theorised, funded, and governed across the region.

Keywords: Civic technology, democratic participation, civil society, AI governance, West Africa

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1. Introduction

In 2024, civil society advocacy in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, contributed directly to the establishment of the state's Ministry of Youth Development. No legislative initiative produced it. A civil society organisation, operating through sustained policy briefs, budget tracking, and youth mobilisation, turned documented governance gaps into a new state institution. This outcome is not an anomaly. It is an illustration of a structural condition that the civic technology literature has not yet named with precision: the condition in which civic technology platforms and the civil society networks that deploy them have crossed from participation tools to governance infrastructure.

Across West Africa, civic technology has expanded rapidly over the past decade. Budget tracking platforms, governance accountability tools, open data portals, and citizen reporting applications now operate at scale in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and beyond. The dominant framing in the literature treats these tools as democratic participation enhancers: instruments that give citizens a louder voice in governance processes that remain, in principle, under formal institutional control (Peixoto & Fagan, 2020; Sifry, 2014). This framing is accurate as a description of intent. It is inadequate as a description of function in contexts where formal institutions have ceased to perform their core mandates.

This paper argues that in governance environments marked by sustained institutional failure, civic technology crosses a threshold from participation tool to governance infrastructure, and that this threshold shift has been systematically undertheorised. The paper makes three contributions. First, it introduces and defines the infrastructure threshold concept, distinguishing civic technology as a participation supplement from civic technology as a governance substitute. Second, it provides empirical evidence from an understudied sub-national context in Nigeria, with documented outcomes and a clearly positioned methodology. Third, it examines the implications of integrating artificial intelligence into infrastructure-level civic technology and develops the concept of democratic ambiguity as a normative framework for evaluating the threshold condition.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature, including gaps in infrastructure studies in Nigeria, and develops the theoretical framework. Section 3 describes the methodology. Section 4 presents the Akwa Ibom case. Section 5 applies the infrastructure threshold analysis. Section 6 discusses implications. Section 7 concludes.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Civic Technology and Democratic Participation

The civic technology literature positions technology as an instrument for enhancing citizen engagement with formal governance processes. Peixoto and Fagan (2020) document that well-designed digital civic engagement tools can increase participation, improve feedback on service delivery, and strengthen accountability mechanisms. Code for Africa has produced applied cases of open data and citizen journalism tools functioning effectively across West African contexts (Code for Africa, 2023). Sifry (2014) offers a useful typology of civic technology functions: tools that inform citizens, tools that connect citizens, and tools that connect citizens to institutions.

This typology is implicitly hierarchical: it assumes a functioning institutional layer at the top of the accountability chain into which citizen engagement feeds. The theory of change in most

civic technology deployments follows this logic. Citizens, better informed and better connected, exert pressure on formal institutions, which respond, reform, or improve. The technology is the input; institutional responsiveness is the output. This framing is productive where institutions retain basic functional responsiveness. It breaks down where they do not. In such contexts, the relationship between civic technology and formal institutions is not One of pressure and response, but of substitution and parallel operation.

2.2 Infrastructure Studies and Governance Gaps in Nigeria

Infrastructure studies in Nigeria have primarily focused on physical infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and water systems, as well as the persistent governance failures that produce and perpetuate infrastructure deficits (Adekunle & Onibokun, 2012; Nwosu, 2018). The extension of infrastructure theory to civic and digital domains is more recent and remains underdeveloped in the Nigerian context. Adebawale and Obadare (2010) examine the relationship between state infrastructure failure and civil society activism in Nigeria, arguing that the Nigerian state's chronic failure to deliver basic governance functions has produced a pattern of civil society substitution operating across multiple domains simultaneously. This work provides the theoretical antecedent for the argument developed in this paper but does not integrate civic technology as the structural medium through which this substitution becomes durable.

Within Nigeria's digital governance landscape, the past decade has seen the emergence of multiple civic technology platforms operating at different nodes of the accountability chain. BudgIT has developed a suite of tools, including GovSpend, which tracks federal government expenditure via the Open Treasury Portal, and Tracka, a citizen-driven platform that enables community-level monitoring of public project implementation (BudgIT, 2025; TechPoint Africa, 2025). The Policy Legal and Advocacy Centre (PLAC) has developed Bills Track, Legislative Agenda, and Legislative Repository, three platforms specifically designed to improve citizen access to legislative processes and parliamentary decision-making in Nigeria (Right for Education, 2025). Enough is Enough Nigeria (EiE) operates a civic Education and participation infrastructure oriented toward electoral accountability. The Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) operates UDEME, which monitors constituency projects and budget allocations at the federal and state levels (Vanguard, 2025).

Critically, the existing literature on these platforms treats them primarily as participation-enhancement tools, measuring their effectiveness by user engagement metrics, data accessibility improvements, and democratic participation indicators. No existing study in the Nigerian context has theorised the conditions under which these platforms collectively constitute a governance infrastructure layer that substitutes for, rather than supplements, formal accountability institutions. This is the gap this paper addresses. The Akwa Ibom case, with its sub-national dual-platform civic technology deployment embedded in a 120+ organisation civil society network, provides a focused empirical basis for developing this theoretical argument.

2.3 Social Accountability and Civil Society in Governance

Goetz and Jenkins (2005) developed the concept of diagonal accountability to describe how civil society organisations use informal channels to improve both vertical and horizontal accountability. Fox (2015) extended this analysis, identifying conditions under which social accountability initiatives produce durable governance change. Gaventa and McGee (2013) examined citizen engagement in fragile governance environments, finding that the theory of change linking citizen voice to state response is considerably more complex where formal institutional capacity is weak and legitimacy is contested.

Building on these foundations, Joshi and Houtzager (2012) introduced the concept of civic activism as institutional substitution in fragile-state contexts, noting that civil society organisations sometimes perform governance functions that the state has vacated. Bratton (2012) describes the civil society effect in African governance: the tendency for civil society organisations in states with weak formal institutions to accumulate governance functions by default over time. What existing theory does not account for is the role of civic technology as the structural medium through which this substitution becomes architecturally durable rather than episodic. When platforms are built and embedded in community practice, the accountability function does not disappear at the end of a campaign. It persists as infrastructure.

2.4 Democratic Ambiguity: The Normative Problem

The concept of democratic ambiguity is central to the normative argument of this paper and requires precise treatment. Democratic ambiguity, as used here, describes the condition in which a governance outcome that is immediately positive for communities, specifically the availability of an accountability mechanism, simultaneously produces a negative systemic effect by reducing the political cost of formal institutional failure.

When civil society organisations build civic technology infrastructure that performs oversight functions that formal institutions have abandoned, communities gain access to accountability mechanisms they would otherwise lack. This is an unambiguous short-term benefit. However, the existence of this infrastructure also means that the consequences of legislative or executive failure are less immediately visible and less immediately painful for ordinary citizens than they would be in its absence. Politicians and bureaucrats who face reduced community pressure due to civil society's absorptive capacity for governance failures have correspondingly reduced incentives to reform formal institutions. The civic technology infrastructure that protects communities today may, if sustained indefinitely, diminish the pressure for the institutional reform that would make that infrastructure unnecessary.

This dynamic is analogous to what Ostrom (1990) identified in common-pool resource governance: informal governance arrangements that solve immediate collective action problems can, under certain conditions, reduce the impetus for formal institutional development. Applying this logic to civic technology as governance infrastructure raises a normative challenge the field has yet to address: how should civic technology be designed, funded, and governed when its success in performing governance functions may, paradoxically, entrench the institutional conditions that made it necessary? This paper does not resolve this question. It names it precisely, grounds it in operational evidence, and argues that any serious engagement with civic technology governance in the Global South must grapple with it.

2.5 AI Governance and Civic Technology in Africa

Smuha (2021) identifies significant gaps between global AI governance frameworks and the governance realities of the Global South, where regulatory capacity is limited and civil society must often perform oversight functions that dedicated regulatory bodies handle elsewhere. Access Now's (2024) Digital Rights in Africa reports document persistent concerns about data sovereignty, surveillance risks, and the deployment of AI in governance processes without adequate community consultation. Nigeria's National AI Strategy acknowledges the need for inclusive governance frameworks. However, it does not address the role of civic technology deployed by civil society in the accountability ecosystem (Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, 2024). The literature on AI and democratic participation in West Africa remains thin, focusing primarily on AI risks in electoral processes

rather than on governance implications of AI entering the civic technology accountability infrastructure (Abebe et al., 2021).

2.6 The Infrastructure Threshold: Theoretical Synthesis

Drawing on the five strands reviewed above, this paper introduces the infrastructure threshold as a theoretical concept: the point at which civic technology shifts from functioning as a supplement to democratic participation to functioning as a substitute for governance. The threshold is defined by three conditions operating simultaneously. First, institutional absence: the formal accountability institution is functionally absent from its core mandate in the relevant governance domain. Second, network density: the deploying civil society network has sufficient organisational depth and operational continuity to sustain the accountability function independently. Third, documented outcome production: the technology and network together are generating governance outcomes that formal institutions are not.

This concept differs from existing frameworks in three ways. Unlike diagonal accountability, it does not assume formal institutions as the ultimate targets of accountability. Unlike institutional substitution theory, it integrates technology as the structural medium rather than an ancillary tool. Unlike most civic technology literature, it identifies the threshold condition as democratically ambiguous rather than unambiguously positive, as defined and elaborated in Section 2.4 above.

3. Methodology

This paper employs a longitudinal interpretive case study design, a methodology well-suited to studying complex social phenomena in their real-world contexts over extended periods (Yin, 2018). The case is Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, selected because it presents a sub-national governance environment in which the conditions for the infrastructure threshold, as defined in Section 2.6, are simultaneously and documentably present: formal institutional failure, civil society network density, and documented outcome production across a sustained study period.

3.1 Research Design

The longitudinal case study spans 2009 to 2026, covering 16 years of continuous civil society-led civic technology deployment and governance advocacy in Akwa Ibom State. The design incorporates three methodological layers: documentary analysis of programme records and institutional outputs; platform analysis of the two civic technology tools (TaxTrace Nigeria and MyLGAGovTrack); and secondary analysis of externally published evidence including media reports, government fiscal transparency records, and donor programme evaluations.

The interpretive approach is appropriate here because the research question concerns the meaning and function of a set of civic technology deployments within a specific governance context rather than the statistical relationship between variables. Following Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012), interpretive case study methodology is particularly well-suited to generating theoretical concepts from empirical practice, which is the primary methodological contribution this paper makes through the infrastructure threshold concept.

3.2 Platform Design, Development, and Deployment

TaxTrace Nigeria (<https://taxtraceng.lovable.app>) was designed and built by VGLAB and CIF to address the specific gap in national public finance transparency. The platform aggregates publicly available budget and expenditure data from federal and state government sources, including the Open Treasury Portal and state budget documents, and renders it in a searchable, citizen-accessible format covering all 36 Nigerian states. The platform was designed with deliberate political non-affiliation as a core architectural principle. Data is updated periodically as government sources publish new information. The platform is web-based and accessible

without login, lowering barriers to civic access. TaxTrace functions at the national fiscal transparency layer of the accountability infrastructure.

MyLGAGovTrack (<https://mylgagovtrack.clementisongfoundation.org>) was developed by CIF specifically for the Akwa Ibom sub-national governance context. The platform profiles all 31 LGA chairpersons in Akwa Ibom State, including constituency data, contact information, governance accountability indicators, and term information. It was built as a tool for AKGCODA's member organisations to access structured information on LGA governance performance and use it in community-level advocacy and engagement. Together, the two platforms constitute a dual-layer accountability infrastructure: TaxTrace at the national fiscal transparency level and MyLGAGovTrack at the sub-national governance accountability level.

Both platforms were deployed iteratively, with community feedback from AKGCODA member organisations informing feature development and data prioritisation. Deployment was not a one-time event but an ongoing process of platform use, community engagement, data update, and advocacy integration. The platforms serve as tools for trained community advocates within the AKGCODA network, not as standalone information portals. Their governance function depends on the organisational infrastructure that surrounds their use.

3.3 Data Sources and Evidence Categories

The empirical evidence in this paper draws from four categories of sources, distinguished here to meet the methodological requirement of separating outreach participation metrics from governance outcomes.

Category A: Programme Documentation. CIF's published achievements data (Clement Isong Foundation, 2026) record outputs and outcomes across the study period, distinguishing between programme outputs (activities conducted, participants reached) and governance outcomes (policy changes, institutional Creation, service delivery improvements). Where this paper cites outcomes, it draws from the outcomes category, not the outputs category.

Category B: External Media Documentation. Independently published media reports (The Mail Newspaper, 2023) provide externally verified accounts of specific CIF programme activities and their community reception, serving as corroborating evidence that the activities described are not self-reported only.

Category C: Government Fiscal Transparency Records. BudgIT's (2025) State of States report provides independently produced evidence of the Akwa Ibom State government's regression in fiscal transparency between 2023 and 2025, including the reduction of budget implementation reports from comprehensive documents to three-page summaries. This external evidence establishes the institutional absence condition.

Category D: Donor Programme Evaluation Frameworks. The SPAII programme, funded by ActionAid Denmark and DANIDA, applies an independent results framework to CIF's programme outputs and outcomes, providing externally validated outcome categories that underpin the governance outcome claims made in Section 4.

3.4 Distinguishing Outreach Metrics from Governance Outcomes

This distinction is methodologically critical. This paper defines outreach participation metrics as counts of programme reach: the number of people trained, the number of community

sessions conducted, and the number of platform users. These are outputs, not outcomes. They indicate programme reach but do not, in themselves, constitute evidence of governance change.

Governance outcomes, as used in this paper, are defined as changes in the formal or informal governance environment that persist beyond the programme activity that produced them. Three types of governance outcomes are distinguished. First, policy adoption outcomes: the formal adoption or enactment of a policy position advocated by the civil society network. Second, institutional Creation outcomes: the Creation of a new governance institution or framework that did not previously exist. Third, service accountability outcomes: documented improvements in the delivery or quality of formal public services following civil society accountability action.

Figures cited in this paper, such as 3,000+ youth empowered and 350 farmers trained, are treated as programme reach indicators in CIF's documentation rather than as governance outcome claims. They are cited in this paper as evidence of the network density condition, demonstrating that the civil society network deploying the civic technology has sufficient organisational reach to sustain the accountability function at scale. The governance outcome claims in this paper are limited to the three categories defined above.

3.5 Limitations

Three methodological limitations are acknowledged. First, the case study design limits direct generalisability: findings cannot be directly extrapolated to other Nigerian states or West African contexts without further comparative research. The paper's theoretical contribution, the infrastructure threshold concept, is generalisable as an analytical tool; the specific outcomes described are generalisable only with appropriate contextual qualification. Second, the evidence base includes significant self-reported programme data from CIF, which, while corroborated by external sources, carries the inherent limitation of practitioner-as-researcher positioning, fully disclosed in the author note. Third, the longitudinal design does not permit controlled attribution: it cannot be demonstrated with certainty that the documented governance outcomes are caused exclusively by the civic technology deployment and civil society advocacy, rather than by other concurrent factors. The claims made are associative and evidential rather than causal.

4. Context and Case Study: Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

4.1 The Governance Context

Akwa Ibom State, located in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone, is One of the country's most oil-revenue-dependent states. Its governance environment is characterised by persistent executive dominance at both state and local government levels, significant fiscal opacity, and chronic under-accountability in public spending. The state's 31 local government areas are administered under a system in which LGA chairpersons exercise considerable discretionary authority over community-level resource allocation, with minimal effective oversight by state legislative bodies.

Fiscal transparency has deteriorated measurably in recent years. Budget implementation reports were reduced between 2023 and 2025 from comprehensive documents to three-page summaries, which are insufficient for meaningful public accountability (BudgIT, 2025). The Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly mounted no documented public challenge to this regression. This reflects the broader Nigerian sub-national dynamic described by Fashagba (2015), in which state legislatures function as appendages of the executive rather than as

independent oversight bodies, a pattern reinforced by candidate selection processes controlled by incumbent governors.

Against this backdrop, the burden of governance accountability has shifted progressively onto civil society networks. AKGCODA, with over 120 member organisations, has emerged as the primary organised accountability infrastructure in the state. CIF, a youth-led NGO established in 2006, operates as One of AKGCODA's anchor implementing organisations, coordinating civic technology deployment and structured advocacy across multiple LGAs. CIF's governance work is partly funded through the ActionAid Denmark/Nigeria Strategic Partnership Agreement II (SPAII), supported by DANIDA, which provides international legitimacy and monitored accountability for the claimed outcomes.

4.2 Civic Technology Deployment: TaxTrace Nigeria and MyLGAGovTrack

The design, development, and deployment architecture of both platforms is described in Section 3.2. In operational terms, TaxTrace Nigeria enables community advocates within the AKGCODA network to access verified fiscal data about their state's budget allocations and expenditures without depending on government-controlled information channels. MyLGAGovTrack provides the sub-national governance layer, giving communities and advocacy organisations structured, comparable information about their LGA chairpersons' governance performance. Both platforms operate within a broader civic engagement architecture, including town hall engagements, grassroots mobilisations, public hearings, and social audits coordinated through VGLAB and CIF's Civic Engagement programme (Clement Isong Foundation, 2026).

4.3 Documented Governance Outcomes

The following governance outcomes are documented for the study period. Consistent with the methodological distinctions established in Section 3.4, only policy adoption, institutional Creation, and service accountability outcomes are presented here as evidence of the infrastructure threshold. Programme reach figures are cited separately where relevant to the network density argument.

Policy Adoption Outcome: The Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Youth Development was established following sustained civil society advocacy, policy brief production, and budget tracking work by CIF and AKGCODA. This is documented as a policy-to-institution outcome in CIF's programme records (Clement Isong Foundation, 2026) and represents the clearest case of formal institutional Creation produced by civil society action rather than legislative initiative.

Institutional Creation Outcomes: CIF led a multi-stakeholder process involving the state government, security agencies, and over 15 community groups to co-produce Akwa Ibom's Disaster Risk Management and Emergency Response Framework, which is now operational during climate emergencies (Clement Isong Foundation, 2026). CIF also co-conceived and co-executed Akwa Ibom State's inaugural Governorship Debate, establishing the first direct, issue-based accountability platform for gubernatorial candidates in the state's history.

Service Accountability Outcomes: Five health facilities received documented resources and infrastructure improvements following civil society advocacy that identified and escalated service-delivery failures through CIF's accountability-monitoring function. Three additional

policy or practice outcomes at the duty-bearer level are documented in CIF's programme records (Clement Isong Foundation, 2026).

Network Density Evidence: Programme reach figures, including 3,000+ youth empowered, 350 farmers trained, and 230+ gender-based violence cases supported, are treated in this paper as evidence of the organisational depth and community penetration that constitute the network density condition, not as governance outcome claims.

4.4 The Artificial Intelligence Dimension

CIF's AI, Tech for Good and Digital Social Innovation programme documents institutional competencies including ethical AI design, participatory policy development for AI governance, and grassroots digital literacy on AI rights and data privacy (Clement Isong Foundation, 2026). VGLAB and CIF's contribution to Nigeria's National AI Strategy review included policy recommendations submitted directly to the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy in 2024 (Oluyori, 2024). As AI tools enter civic technology platforms already performing infrastructure-level governance functions, three specific governance risks emerge: data sovereignty at the community governance layer, digital exclusion as a governance access problem rather than merely a participation equity problem, and institutional dependency risk arising from community reliance on civil society-built and maintained platforms.

5. Analysis: Applying the Infrastructure Threshold

5.1 Condition One: Institutional Absence

The evidence from Akwa Ibom robustly satisfies the first condition. The state government's documented regression from comprehensive budget implementation reports to three-page summaries occurred without recorded legislative challenge (BudgIT, 2025). The Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly took no documented public accountability action in response. At the LGA level, 31 local government areas operate with minimal formal oversight from state-level bodies, creating accountability vacuums that MyLGAGovTrack was built to address. The governance gaps documented in the outcomes evidence, the absence of a youth development institutional framework, the lack of a disaster risk management structure, and health facility deterioration each represent domains where formal institutions were persistently absent from their mandates long enough for civil society substitution to occur.

5.2 Condition Two: Network Density

AKGCODA's 120+ member organisations across Akwa Ibom's LGAs provide the network density the second condition requires. TaxTrace and MyLGAGovTrack are not self-executing accountability tools. Their governance function depends on a network of trained community advocates who understand how to use the data they generate, engage duty-bearers with it, and translate platform outputs into community action. The SPAII programme provides the thematic framework within which this network operates, with ActionAid Denmark and DANIDA providing external accountability for outcomes. Network density is also the condition most commonly absent in failed civic technology deployments across Africa, where platforms are built without the organisational infrastructure to give them governance function (Twinomurinzi et al., 2012).

5.3 Condition Three: Documented Outcome Production

The governance outcomes documented in Section 4.3 satisfy the third condition at multiple levels. The establishment of the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Youth Development is the clearest case: a formal state institution was created as a direct result of civil society advocacy, not through any legislative initiative. The Disaster Risk Management Framework is a second case: a governance document that is now used operationally during climate emergencies was

produced through a civil society-led process rather than by formal state planning institutions. The Governorship Debate is a third: the first direct accountability mechanism for gubernatorial candidates in Akwa Ibom's history was co-conceived and co-executed by civil society. All three threshold conditions are simultaneously satisfied. The civic technology platforms and the civil society network deploying them are the primary accountability infrastructure in operation.

5.4 Comparative Positioning within Nigeria's Civic Technology Ecosystem

Situating the Akwa Ibom case within Nigeria's broader civic technology landscape reinforces the theoretical argument. At the national level, BudgIT's GovSpend and Tracka platforms, PLAC's legislative tracking tools, and CJID's UDEME platform collectively constitute a national civic-technology accountability layer operating in the institutional space left by weak formal oversight (BudgIT, 2025; Right for Education, 2025; Vanguard, 2025). A 2026 analysis argues that what Nigeria's democracy requires is not more individual civic technology applications but an integrated civic technology stack in which data, participation, and accountability tools operate as a coherent system (Guardian Nigeria, 2026). The Akwa Ibom case represents a sub-national instance of this integration, operating at the intersection of fiscal transparency (TaxTrace) and LGA governance accountability (MyLGAGovTrack) within a structured civil society network.

The critical distinction between the Akwa Ibom case and the national civic technology platforms is embeddedness. National platforms such as BudgIT's tools are primarily information-provision tools; their accountability function depends on users' secondary actions. The Akwa Ibom deployment embeds the platforms within an organisational network that directly performs the advocacy function, converting information into community action and community action into governance outcomes. This embeddedness distinguishes the infrastructure threshold condition from the complementarity condition under which most national platforms operate.

6. Discussion and Implications

6.1 Implications for Civic Technology Practitioners

Tools built as participation supplements are optimised for ease of use, viral spread, and engagement metrics. Tools that function as governance infrastructure require a different design philosophy: continuity planning, offline functionality, data sovereignty protocols, network integration capacity, and succession systems ensuring the accountability function persists if the deploying organisation changes or loses funding. Practitioners in West Africa building civic technology for contexts of institutional failure need to design as if their tool will become the primary accountability mechanism, because in many cases it will. This means treating communities as owners of governance infrastructure rather than users, and building network density requirements into the deployment strategy rather than leaving them to emerge organically.

6.2 Implications for Funders and Ecosystem Builders

The existing funding landscape for civic technology in West Africa is largely organised around project cycles and participation metrics. This funding logic is appropriate for tools operating below the infrastructure threshold. It is inadequate for tools that have crossed it. The democratic ambiguity problem identified in Section 2.4 adds a further dimension: funders who support civic technology as governance infrastructure without also investing in formal institutional reform may be contributing to the normalisation of institutional failure. A responsible funding architecture for infrastructure-level civic technology must include both continuity investment in the infrastructure itself and advocacy investment in the formal institutional reform that would, over time, make the infrastructure unnecessary.

6.3 Implications for AI Governance Policy

Nigeria's National AI Strategy does not address civil society-deployed civic technology as a category of governance infrastructure. Three specific policy responses are needed. First, AI governance frameworks in West Africa need to develop a civic infrastructure category, triggering higher accountability requirements for AI tools embedded in civil society-operated governance systems. Second, data sovereignty protections need to extend explicitly to community governance data held by civic technology platforms. Third, digital inclusion requirements need to be built into civic technology funding and deployment standards, ensuring that AI-enhanced accountability tools remain accessible to communities with limited connectivity. These recommendations build directly on CIF's submission to Nigeria's National AI Strategy review process (Oluyori, 2024).

7. Conclusion

The Akwa Ibom evidence does not describe a civic technology success story in the conventional sense. It describes a governance gap so persistent and structurally entrenched that civil society organisations, equipped with digital tools and organisational depth, became the accountability institutions of last resort. That transformation produced measurable governance outcomes: a new state Ministry, an operational disaster risk framework, a first-ever gubernatorial debate, and multiple improvements in service accountability. These are policy adoption, institutional Creation, and service accountability outcomes, methodologically distinguished in this paper from programme reach indicators.

The infrastructure threshold concept names the structural condition that produced these outcomes. When formal accountability institutions persistently fail to meet their mandates, and when civil society networks have sufficient density and technological capability to respond, civic technology shifts from a participation supplement to a governance substitute. Democratic ambiguity is the central normative problem this crossing produces: it makes institutional failure survivable while reducing the political cost of that failure, creating a structural tension between short-term community benefit and long-term democratic health.

Nigeria's civic technology ecosystem, from BudgIT's national fiscal transparency tools to PLAC's legislative tracking platforms to CIF's sub-national dual-layer infrastructure in Akwa Ibom, represents One of the most developed accountability technology environments in sub-Saharan Africa. The theoretical framework developed in this paper provides a tool for analysing that ecosystem with appropriate normative precision: not simply celebrating what civil society has built, but asking what the existence of that infrastructure reveals about the formal institutions it has had to replace, and what responsibilities follow for those who design, fund, and govern it.

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