

# A Conceptual Study on How Transparency, Accountability and Responsibility Enhance The Service Delivery Performance of Federal Land Management in Malaysia

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i4/21424>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i4/21424

**Published Date:** 30 April 2024

## Abstract

The shift of land-related issues from security of tenure to governance in land management has created a gap in discussing the relationship of good governance indicators within regulatory institutions of public land that contribute towards service delivery. The need for this research is to understand how good governance indicators, which are (i) transparency, (ii) accountability, and (iii) responsibility, influence the performance of the Federal Lands Commissioner's Office of Malaysia (FLC) in optimising idle land and revenue generation. This research is anchored on network theory and stakeholder theory. A quantitative causality paradigm using a questionnaire will be distributed to 300 officers from the FLC's office to obtain the data for this research. The data will be analysed using PLS-SEM through path analysis. The findings of this research will assist the stakeholders in formulating strategies to address human resource development and implementing accountable, transparent, and responsible decision-making processes on federal land procurement, management and revenue generation, further developing the land management paradigm. Future research could evaluate different indicators, and this framework could be implemented in other industries or services.

**Keywords:** Federal Land Management, Transparency, Accountability, Responsibility, Performance

## Introduction

Adopting good governance principles in land management is an opportunity for nations Meyfroidt et al (2022) to balance socioeconomic needs and sustainable development goals (SDGs) Hinz et al (2020); Zhou et al (2022) amidst the increasing scarcity of land resources

(Cobbinah et al., 2020; Leffers & Wekerle, 2020). Land-related concerns have shifted from land accessibility, security of tenure and gender inequality towards good governance in land management (Barry, 2022; Dagneu, 2022; Moreda, 2022). Good governance in land management could propagate land policies, institutional development, and systems that would support conceiving accountable, transparent, and responsible land management for society's economic and social benefits (Fligg et al., 2022; Kelm et al., 2021; Kolapo et al., 2022; Wang & Aenis, 2019).

In Malaysia, studies on good governance of land have focused or leaned towards conservation issues Charters et al (2019); Chee et al (2017); Rani et al (2018); Reza et al (2022); Waqf issues Ghazali et al (2021); Han & Go (2019); Hapsari et al (2020); Kamaruddin & Hanefah (2021), Malay Reserve Land Hanif et al (2015); Rosman et al (2021), Orang Asli land issues (Abu et al. et al (2022); Dong et al (2022); Khorri (2022); Subramaniam & Endicott (2020) and development issues (Avery & Moser, 2023; Rahim et al., 2023; Razak et al., 2018). These researches focused on the interaction of state land institutions with environmental aspects, communities, and developers in Malaysia, leaving a vast vacuum of knowledge on good governance in federal land management from the perspective of the regulators' institutions. There is a need to address accountability, transparency, and responsibility within the context of efficiency and effectiveness of the service delivery of federal land management by managing the large land bank that the Federal Government of Malaysia has amassed since 1957. Spending more on land procurement limits the option for the Federal Government to use its funds for more people-centric social and economic programs. The inability of the Federal Government to develop these lands due to lack of funds or change of policies precipitates negative development pressure on the State Land Administration in unlocking these lands for localised social and economic spillovers. Unutilised federal land is also an easy target for land encroachment, leading to revenue leakages and liability for the future development of public infrastructures. The continuous trend of procurement of new federal lands and the need for more strategic decisions on managing the existing large federal land portfolios pushes this research to be carried out.

This research will try to understand the good governance indicators, which are (i) transparency, (ii) accountability, and (iii) responsibility, influence the performance of the Federal Lands Commissioner's (FLC) office in Malaysia in providing (iv) effective and (v) efficient services about federal land management in the context of federal land policies and procedures on (i) federal land procurement, (ii) revenue generation through lease and tenancy and (iii) reducing the holding cost of idle federal land. Hence, it contributes to the growing knowledge of good governance of the Malaysian Land Administration system.

## **Literature Review**

### **Good Governance in Land Management**

The discussion of good land governance has focused on land management to support sustainable land development (Sampedro, 2021; Sousa & Meireles, 2023). The acceptance of sustainable development goals (SDGs) Arora-Jonsson (2023); Zhou et al (2022) in various development and land use policies has pushed many institutions to reflect on improving and reinventing their service delivery based on sound governance principles (Andreeva et al., 2021; Hussain et al., 2023; Meyfroidt et al., 2022). Venturing further into the realm of good land governance, suggestive narratives diverge between land governance frameworks Azadi et al (2023); Burns & Dalrymple (2007); Dagneu (2022); Daulay et al (2023); Enemark (2010);

Krawchenko & Tomaney (2023); Wael Zakat et al (2007) and land governance assessment frameworks (Azadi, 2020; Burns et al., 2010; Casiano et al., 2021; Deininger et al., 2012; Mansberger et al., 2012; McDonald & Figueiredo, 2022; Mulatu, 2022). This plethora of studies emphasises that better service delivery could be facilitated through good governance in land management.

Most literature provides the perspective of good governance from an external point of view (i.e., world aid organisations, communities, industry players, public perception, and global needs) (Candel, 2022; Dagneu, 2022; FAO, 2007; Ha et al., 2023; Kanashiro, 2020; Kuusaana, 2022; Montalván-Burbano et al., 2021; Oladehinde et al., 2023; Poncian, 2020; Shaffer, 2015; Stern & Holder, 1999; Vos et al., 2017; Wilkin et al., 2018). The lack of introduction of localised attributes or endemic social structure characteristics, institutional aspirations, or even communal legislation on good governance attributes could provide somewhat biased results of good governance in the land of a particular jurisdiction. (Bhatta, 2016; Pienaar, 2017; Zimmermann, 2007). Andriamihaja et al (2021) suggest that governance in land management should also look into the participation of actors as agents of change in the institutional framework to achieve sustainable land development. Congleton (2020) emphasises that the ethics behind cultivating good governance depends on the jurisdiction's cultural, heritage, and social background. Prno and Slocombe (2012) added that with sustainable development, the shift of governance policing has moved from government agencies to non-state actors such as industry players, local communities, and pressure groups.

Adopting information technology within land management can be an essential tool to facilitate good governance (Acharya et al., 2018; Anand et al., 2016). Wilkin et al (2018) suggested that through information technology, land institutions could create online communities that could influence transparency and accountability in formulating policies, legislations, and implementation procedures. The emergence of the blockchain (Abu et al. et al., 2022; Beznosov et al., 2021; S. et al., 2020; Shuaib et al., 2020) and other artificial intelligence technologies to provide accurate and immediate data on land administration (Aborujilah et al., 2021) makes implementation processes much more accessible (Gupta et al., 2019) and decision-making process much more transparent (Alam et al., 2022; Ameyaw & de Vries, 2020).

Corruption within institutional frameworks has been linked to weak governance in land management (Wehrmann, 2007). Grover et al (2007) support Wehrmann's (2007) concerns that the weakness in the institutional framework would jeopardise the governance of land administration and result in the society suffering from social-economic depredation, which could lead to unsustainable land usage. Burns and Dalrymple (2008) further illustrated that overlapping laws and regulations, coupled with land agencies working in silos, could lead to a prospect of transparency lack that could vane governance. Land management agencies that succumb to fraud and mismanagement are symptoms of a weak governance framework within the ecosystem that would discourage various actors from contributing or supporting governance improvement efforts (Noor et al., 2014). Mhretay (2015) argues that the factors inhibiting good governance performance are the need for greater awareness of corruption and malpractices, the lack of adequate monitoring and evaluation systems to gauge regulators' performance, and, finally, the incapability of regulators to implement and coordinate their efforts. Bastos et al (2019); Meyfroidt et al (2020) suggested that by reducing leakages (unintended displacement of impacts caused by a policy intervention), land management institutions can propel good governance. Bastos et al (2019) Further elaborates that these leakages could be reduced if governments understood their institutional needs,

interactions, and political aspirations and provided sufficient information, motivations, and channels to disseminate these data to the public.

### **Organisational Performance in Land Management**

The effectiveness and efficiency of any service delivery are seen as indicators of organisational performance (Ajibola et al., 2022; Akter, 2023; Burns et al., 2023; Chekole et al., 2020; Efendi & Utama, 2021; Gasela, 2021; Gebrihet & Pillay, 2021a; Hsieh & Liou, 2020; Imran et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2019; Kiptoo & Jeptoo, 2022; Kundo, 2018; Lee et al., 2019; Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022; Mikalef et al., 2023; Nezhevelo, 2023; Norris &, 2023; Quaye et al., 2022; Van Thuan & Hai, 2024). Asghar based on Jahanshahi (2012) describes organisational performance can be measured based on (i) operational performance, (ii) financial or accounting performance, and (iii) market-based performance, suggesting that organisational performance can be described as how the organisation is managed, and the services delivered create added value for clients and stakeholders. The myriad definitions and the enormous scope of activities that can be translated as indicators make organisational performance very subjective, and the organisation could determine which indicators to include to measure organisational performance.

The fundamentals of service delivery in land management can be seen as providing land transactions that assist in the planning of land use, infrastructure development, and land economics through improved land tax and sales. Norris and Ramdass (2023) go on to suggest that deficiency in delivering public services can be construed as contravening the fundamental rights of citizens. The efficiency and effectiveness of land transactions are pinned on indicators such as (i) number of procedures, (ii) duration of processing, (iii) cost of processing, (iv) quality of land administration, (v) reliability of land administration infrastructure, (vi) transparency of land information, (vii) coverage of services; (viii) land dispute resolution and (ix) equal access to property rights (Chakravorti et al., 2019; "WORLD BANK: Doing Business 2020," 2019). To provide an effective and efficient service, land institutions have to facilitate legal frameworks that are locally relevant and sensitive to the needs of their citizens (Quaye, 2020). Heavily borrowed practices from different jurisdictions and forced implementation could create ruptures in the systemic process of service delivery (Bennett & Alemie, 2016; Hull et al., 2019; Samsudin, 2020; Samsudin et al., 2012) when the clients are frustrated or dissatisfied when land transactions become cumbersome, time-consuming, and expensive (Norris & Ramdass, 2023; Quaye, 2020).

Burns et al (2023) portray the concern that land management generally lacks transformative changes in service delivery processes, critical mass, and continuous client participation that affect organisational performance. Sakib et al (2022) argue that the lack of skilled staffing within the establishment of land institutions is seen as a cancer for efficiency and effectiveness. Oduli and Wambiri (2023) agree that knowledge management and organisational culture must be practised to implement proper and structured knowledge-building strategies. Jiang et al (2019) believe organisations prioritising human resource development have a better chance of improving performance. Kiptoo and Jeptoo (2022) suggested that strategic leadership can be implored within the organisation to establish the organisational culture that could address the narrative within land management on inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Organisational culture would determine the upskilling required, knowledge bank development and reward mechanism to support staff performance enhancement, and creation of organisation governance values such as accountability, transparency, and responsiveness that are needed to emulate land management services that

are people-centric with lower cost and less frustrating (Gebrihet & Pillay, 2021a; Hsieh & Liou, 2020; Imran et al., 2022).

Land management institutions are included in pursuing digitalisation to improve service delivery. The shift from a manual-based transaction to a more digital environment has been considered a service improvement that reduces processing time and cost (Ajibola et al., 2022; Ganason, 2021; Gebrihet & Pillay, 2021a; Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022; Mikalef et al., 2023). Focusing on data management and employing skilled staff to analyse these vast land databases are competitive advantages for land management institutions to provide cheaper and faster services (Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022). Hsieh and Liou (2020) suggest that sharing information between regulating agencies could add value to the service provided to clients. The availability of accurate and transparent information creates less discomfort for clients when engaging with the land administration and develops trust within the institution (Ajibola et al., 2022; Burns et al., 2023; Mikalef et al., 2023). Access to land management information could also assist stakeholders and political masters in making the right decision on strategic strategies for service deliveries with reduced risk (Haniff et al., 2023; Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022; Norris & Ramdass, 2023; Rohman et al., 2023).

### Theories and Principles of Good Governance

Various management theories have proposed a holistic approach to understanding good governance (Asaduzzaman, 2020; Asaduzzaman & Virtanen, 2016; Hull et al., 2019; Lagopoulos, 2018). Good governance can be seen as a branding of modern government management to entice the private sector to form brilliant partnerships in societal development. Ansell and Torfing (2022) point out that governance theories have looked at a broader spectrum from the relationships of public, private, and civil society actors in the role of decision-making processes; some captured the impact of governance attributes towards the societal building, some addressed the assessment and measuring of the level of governance and some support on the consequences of failed governance.

Table 1

*Literature review of theories on Good Governance in Land Management.*

Theories of Governance	References
<b>Network Theory</b> Emphasises the relationship and the roles played by the state, private sector, and society in creating an equilibrium of governance	Gebrihet and Pillay (2021b); Hu (2022); Prasatya et al. (2023); Wang et al. (2022); Wang et al. (2023); Bayuma and Abebe (2023); Bitterman and Koliba (2020); Gebrihet and Pillay (2021a)
<b>Hierarchical Theory</b> Global governance is based on the hierarchy of the actors or institutions in a particular network.	Gebrihet and Pillay (2021a); Leffel and Acuto (2018); Pinfeld and Mokhele (2023); Kim, (2020); Song et al., (2019); Pytlas, (2021);



	Singh et al., (2020)
<b>Cultural Theory</b> Emphasises practices and beliefs of the area's culture as an essential cornerstone in decision-making processes.	Eke et al. (2019); Córdoba et al., (2021); Diriye et al., (2022); and Jin et al. (2023)
<b>Stakeholder Theory</b> Stakeholders play an integral part in adapting, implementing, and monitoring good governance attributes.	Bennett et al. (2012); Chams and García-Blandón (2019); Doni et al. (2021). Kariuki et al. (2018); Leffers and Wekerle (2020); Obianuju et al. (2022); Queen (2015); Doni et al., (2021); and Kariuki et al., (2018).
<b>Structuration Theory</b> The interaction of these actors and the aid of the systems or structure in place determines society's outcomes.	Ameyaw and de Vries (2021). (2023); Jones and Karsten (2008); Lee et al. (2019); and Mani et al. (2021)
<b>Neo-institution Theory</b> Emphasises how social, political, and economic systems in an institution's environment create legitimacy for that institution	Cobbinah et al., (2020); Fischer et al., (2021); Gosnell et al., (2020); Healey & Barrett, (1990), (2018); Ho et al., (2023); Osman & Kueh, (2010); and Zulkifli & Rahman, (2013)
<b>Land Administration Theory</b> It encompasses the elements of (i) improvement of land tenure security, (ii) land markets that are regulated, (iii) implementation of urban and rural land use planning, (iv) structured land taxation, and (v) management of environmental resources based on a world review of land jurisdictions.	Van Der Molen (2002); Enemark, (2009), (2010); Williamson, (2010); Samsudin et al. (2013), (2014), (2012), and (2011); and Bennett et al. (2012)
<b>Land Administration System</b> Toolbox approach to facilitate implementation action plans in various jurisdictions for each principle	Williamson et al. (2008); and Enemark (2009)
<b>Framework of Governance in Land Administration</b> Tie together various stakeholders from the private, state, and pressure groups to devise governance in land administration.	Burns & Dalrymple (2008). Andrews (2008); Arko-Adjei et al. (2009); Mansberger et al. (2012); Samsudin et al. (2013) and (2014)
<b>Smart Land Governance Assessment Framework</b> Addressing the governance aspect through (a) technology, (b) people and (c) institution	Azadi et al. (2023); Silva-Castañeda (2015); Azadi (2020);

simultaneously by incorporating intellectual and flexible thinking

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The United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE) suggested in the Land Administration Guidelines (1996) came out with the earliest narrative for what construes as good land administration: (i) Guarantee ownership and security of tenure; (ii) Support land and property taxation; (iii) Provide security for credit; (iv) Develop and monitor land markets; (v) Protect State lands; (vi) Reduce land disputes; (vii) Facilitate land reform; (viii) Improve urban planning and infrastructure development; (ix) Support environmental management; and (x) Produce statistical data. This narrative has evolved towards (i) governance, institution, and accountability; (ii) legal and policy; (iii) data; (iv) financial; (v) standards; (vi) innovations; (vii) partnership; (viii) capacity and education; and (ix) advocacy and awareness (FELA, 2019). The idea of governance has shifted from a top-down approach and satisfying fundamental land rights to the public towards sustaining and incorporating more engagements with stakeholders and public consultation to achieve the world's sustainable development goals. Basing the principles of good governance with the network theory of good governance and stakeholders' theory provides a better understanding of how accountability, transparency and responsibilities interact between the actors and stakeholders within the public institution of the Federal Land Commissioner's Office in creating value for a more effective and efficient federal land management service delivery. The combination of the network theory and stakeholders' theory will provide the foundation of how these good governance attributes would create value that would address the interests and needs of the stakeholders for the institution to maintain its good governance practices for a much more efficient and effective service delivery (Arnaboldi & Spiller, 2011; Fares et al., 2021; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Marcon Nora et al., 2023).

### **Hypothesis Development**

Sun (2023) suggests that transparency is seen as an ethical obligation by an institution that portrays integrity and reliability. The inclusion of diverse stakeholders within ethical obligations will promote accountability for the actions taken by the stakeholders that form an institution. Yadav et al. (2020) and Yadav and Bagga (2020) addressed institutions that display transparency, increase trust, and provide legitimacy in governance processes, reflecting the public's sense of ownership towards that decision-making process. Papageorgiou et al. (2020) offer concerns that the sharing of information based on transparency needs to have its boundaries. Rosilawati et al. (2022) suggest that stakeholder involvement is crucial in ensuring the public obtains substantial benefits. These benefits could be obstructive if political influence is mismanaged in the context of transparency and subsequently relates to the accountability of decision-making processes. Based on the arguments above, the first hypothesis was developed:

**H1:** Transparency directly affects accountability in managing federal land in Malaysia.

Ball (2009) suggested that transparency encourages openness, facilitating effective decision-making. Karson argues that responsibility is the ability of an institution or stakeholders to understand what is right from wrong and what should be intended or unintended. Magnan et al (2023); Naaman et al (2023) propose that transparency elevates the quality and quantity of an organisation's duties. They argue that organisations with high information asymmetry

have weak governance and must portray high confidence or project trustworthiness in the market. Fu et al (2023); Lee and Chung (2023) suggest that organisations should be transparent with its information and share it with the public as Rosilawati et al (2022); Sharma et al (2023) highlight, the information shared must be accurate, reliable, and trustworthy to be acknowledged as transparent. With the improvement of technology and artificial intelligence, the euphoria of abundant information concerns transparency and responsibilities. Based on the arguments above, the second hypothesis was developed:

**H2:** Transparency positively influences responsibilities for managing federal land in Malaysia.

The fundamental equation in the relationship between transparency and performance is trust between the state and the public or stakeholders (Bwachele et al., 2023; Hauschild & Coll, 2023; Schmidhuber et al., 2023). Herghiligi et al (2023) suggests that the basis for developing this trust is for an organisation to provide accurate, complete, and neutral information and reporting. Absolute transparency is seen as reducing organisations' innovation performance. Wang et al (2023) agrees that total transparency will initially reduce organisations' performance due to the stakeholders' exponential awareness of all public organisation information and openness to multiple critiques. Hauschild and Coll (2023) believe transparency should be practised in the whole ecosystem network, not selective. When the level of trust increases within the ecosystem, the stakeholders will perceive that each of their contributions improves each other's performance. The third hypothesis was developed based on the arguments above:

**H3:** Transparency directly influences the performance (efficiency and effectiveness) of the services provided for managing federal land in Malaysia.

Parianti et al (2023) I agree with Benveniste and Mizrahi that in a structured or multitier organisation, action accountability becomes more evident when the responsibilities involve various levels of actors in specific roles. De Blok and Van der Brug (2022) go on to relate the performance of an organisation when it can be clear of its responsibilities. Chen et al (2023) belief that when an organisation professes a higher level of accountability, it pressures internal and external stakeholders to take on more responsibilities individually or collectively in their actions and implementation to support the notion of accountability. Romero et al (2023) suggest that organisations are pressured to increase their responsibilities toward optimising their resources and translating them into performance when stakeholders demand accountability. Olwol et al (2022) suggest that organisations establish control mechanisms to determine the boundaries of their internal and external actors' responsibilities to provide better performance appraisal mechanisms and task reorganisation to facilitate the level of accountability their stakeholders demand. This justifies the fourth hypothesis.

**H4:** Accountability positively influences responsibilities for managing federal land in Malaysia.

Sofyan (2023) suggests that for accountability to be prominent in an organisation, the management has to improve the internal environment by having good leadership, internal control mechanisms, public participation at supervisory levels, and financial transparency. Addressing these variables will eventually create an environment conducive to accountability and prosperity, and the organisation will ultimately portray better organisational



performance in the context of public perception. Implementing auditing processes requires organisational commitments through the influence of management, taking into account their responsibilities to their customers. Basak et al (2022) The fifth hypothesis is developed based on the arguments above. It suggests that the organisation's management must understand the performance perception and information relied on by customers, the public, and stakeholders within the accountability regime to assist them in making the right decisions that could influence their performances.

**H5:** Accountability directly influences the performance (efficiency and effectiveness) of the services provided in managing federal land in Malaysia.

Wahyu et al (2023) term responsibilities as the conduit of how actors implore the courage to make decisions or take actions, complete their duties or tasks that have been set, and, through these experiences, improve their skills and knowledge. Kipchumba and Kwasira (2023) suggest that responsibilities diverge into environmental, ethical, economic, or philanthropic. Hence, the performance perspective is based on the views and lens through which the stakeholders or public view these services. Huang et al (2024) suggest that the relationship between responsibilities and organisational performance is based on perceptions. When the consumer's perspective on performance is matched by the standpoint of responsibilities of the actors, then the consequences and benefits are collective. Hence, most of the battle of gauging organisational performance and responsibilities is to meet both perspectives. Forcadell et al (2023) suggest that an organisation's responsibilities must be sensitive to the interests and expectations of the stakeholders. The sixth hypothesis is

**H6:** Responsibilities directly affect the performance (efficiency and effectiveness) of the services provided in managing federal land in Malaysia.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The opportunity to investigate the excellent governance of federal land management in Malaysia provides this research with great benefits. Balancing the network theory and stakeholders' theory, this research's framework (shown in Figure 2) is developed in line with the discussions in this chapter. The influence of (i) transparency towards (ii) accountability and (iii) responsibilities would affect the performance of service delivery. The relationship between (ii) accountability and (iii) responsibilities on the effect towards performance, and finally, the relationship between (i) transparency and (iii) responsibilities on the effect towards performance. These relationships provide new knowledge on how each attribute influences the other and its consequences on performance, which departs from the plethora of research that has discussed each attribute's effect on organisational performance.

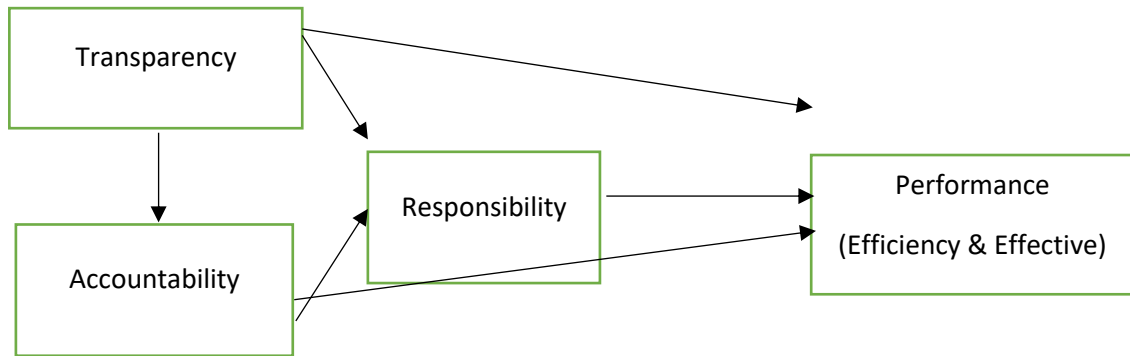


Figure 2: Research Framework.

### Methodology

This research will adopt a quantitative approach to address the hypotheses that have been conceived above (Udessa, 2021; Kariuki et al., 2018; Karunia et al., 2023; Manaf et al., 2023; Ming Liang et al., 2022; Palangda & Dame, 2020; Udessa et al., 2023a, 2023b). The data will be obtained through a questionnaire adopted to suit local settings Imam & Astini (2022); Karunia et al (2023); Mang'ana et al (2023); Tiep et al (2020) that will be distributed to respondents from the federal land management environment. The data will be analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) using SMART-PLS to obtain the results to address the hypothesis conceived to investigate the variables of this research which are (i) transparency, (ii) accountability, (iii) responsibility, and (iv) performance (effective and efficient) service delivery of federal land management (Astrachan et al., 2014; Edeh et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2014; Hair Jr. et al., 2017).

### Conclusion

The context of the study addressed the relationship of good governance attributes within the Federal Lands Commissioner's office to identify enhancement of service delivery in the Federal Land Management. Linking the indicators of transparency, accountability, and responsibility and how they influence performance would provide new knowledge about good governance in federal land management. This study is anchored on network theory and stakeholder theory based on the context of federal land management, which deals with actors that strive with various networks and stakeholders within the environment of good governance. The in-depth discussion on organisational performance from the land management perspective highlights the relationship between good governance attributes and organisational performance for ensuring an efficient land management system.

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