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INSTITUTIONAL FRICTIONS IN WORLD BANK-FINANCED PUBLIC INVESTMENT OPERATIONS: EVIDENCE FROM IPF AND PFORR IMPLEMENTATION IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: This study examines why governance arrangements do not always translate into timely decisions and development results in the World Bank-financed public investment operations. Using comparative qualitative case analysis, documentary analysis, and process tracing, it investigates two Investment Project Financing operations and one Program-for-Results operation in Uzbekistan; five additional operations provide triangulation. The unit of analysis is the management process rather than the project. Evidence identifies an agreement-to-implementation gap: legal agreements, appraisal documents, operational manuals, and national acts establish legitimate requirements, yet their combination can create duplicated controls, responsibility without decision rights, fragmented data ownership, and delayed escalation. IPF and PforR require different management architectures. IPF depends on integration across scope, procurement, contracts, expenditure, and outputs, whereas PforR depends on a result-delivery chain linking program ownership, administrative data, evidence, and independent verification. The article proposes a differentiated Institutional Risk Governance Framework comprising an alignment gate, decision-rights mapping, a control-value test, interface-risk management, an Individual Comments Map, and a Process and Risk Ledger. The contribution lies not in inventing these generic tools, but in integrating them around documented institutionalization gaps in World Bank operations in Uzbekistan. The framework is a design proposition requiring prospective pilot validation.

Keywords: public investment management; World Bank; Investment Project Financing; Program-for-Results; institutional frictions; project governance; transaction costs; risk management; Uzbekistan

Introduction

Public investment converts fiscal resources and external finance into infrastructure, services, institutional capability, and human development. Its economic return therefore depends not only on project selection or financing terms but also on the administrative capacity to transform an approved operation into coordinated decisions, contracts, verified outputs, and sustained outcomes. In externally financed operations, this conversion is governed by two institutional orders at once: the legal and operational architecture agreed with the financier and the national administrative system through which public authority is exercised. When these orders are aligned, international finance can reinforce national capability. When they are layered without a coherent decision architecture, each additional approval can be individually lawful yet collectively costly.

Uzbekistan offers a particularly relevant setting for examining this problem. The country is implementing a growing portfolio of World Bank operations while reforming the national architecture

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for projects financed by international financial institutions. The reform direction is to integrate project functions into permanent government structures and to reduce reliance on separate project implementation units. At the same time, the portfolio now includes both Investment Project Financing (IPF) and Program-for-Results Financing (PforR). These instruments differ in their object of management. IPF finances defined project activities and typically structures implementation around eligible expenditures, procurement packages, contracts, safeguards, and project results. PforR supports a government program and links disbursement to verified results while relying more extensively on national systems (World Bank 2019b, 2023a). Treating the two as variations of the same administrative template risks weakening both.

The management problem investigated here is not a lack of formal rules. Legal agreements, Project Appraisal Documents (PADs), Project or Program Operations Manuals (POMs), procurement plans, Program Action Plans (PAPs), verification protocols, national regulations, and internal orders usually contain detailed requirements. The problem arises when these requirements are translated into the actual route of a decision. A project team may be responsible for timeliness without being authorized to approve the decision. A technical document may be reviewed sequentially by bodies whose mandates overlap. A national control may repeat the same subject and criterion already reviewed under the applicable procurement framework. A PforR result may have an accountable policy owner, a separate data custodian, multiple reporting entities, and an independent verification agent, yet lack a single evidence-readiness process. These are interface failures: the individual institutions remain formally legitimate, but the connections between them create delay, ambiguity, or defensive decision making.

The article defines this phenomenon as the agreement-to-implementation gap: an observable discrepancy between the allocation of roles, procedures, evidence, and control logic specified in the legal agreement and associated operational documents, and the practices embedded in national or agency-level decision processes. The concept does not assume that national control is redundant or that World Bank procedures are sufficient in every case. A control is complementary when it addresses a distinct material risk, applies a distinct criterion, or creates independent evidence. It is duplicative when it repeats the same object and criterion without adding decision-relevant information while introducing an additional mandatory queue or return point.

The research asks four questions. First, how are the governance arrangements agreed for World Bank operations translated into national and organizational procedures in Uzbekistan? Second, which interfaces generate risks of delay, duplicated control, or accountability dilution? Third, why can the project-oriented management routines developed under IPF not be transferred mechanically to PforR? Fourth, what differentiated institutional design can improve traceability and risk ownership without creating another supervisory layer?

The article contributes to development economics and public management in three ways. Empirically, it provides process-level evidence from World Bank operations in Uzbekistan, a setting that remains underrepresented in the project-governance literature. Prior research demonstrates that project-management quality, supervisory experience, and fragmentation among financing actors can influence World Bank project performance (Denizer et al. 2013; Heinzel and Liese 2021; Winters 2019), but it rarely reconstructs the national route of an individual decision. Conceptually, this article connects transaction-cost economics, institutional theory, and project governance through the agreement-to-implementation gap. Practically, it proposes a differentiated Institutional Risk

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Governance Framework for IPF and PforR. The novelty is not the isolated existence of RACI matrices, risk registers, comment-resolution forms, or decision logs, all of which have international analogues. It lies in diagnosing the degree to which such functions are institutionalized in selected Uzbek operations, linking each proposed tool to a documented functional gap, and combining them in an instrument-specific architecture.

The article does not seek to prove that PforR is superior to IPF. The PforR case is at an early stage, and a single verification cycle cannot establish comparative effectiveness. The research instead examines management fit: whether the architecture of authority, data, control, and verification corresponds to the technical logic of the financing instrument.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Institutions, transaction costs, and the implementation of public investment

Institutional economics explains why formally complete project designs can perform differently once implemented. Institutions structure incentives and reduce uncertainty, but they also generate compliance and coordination costs (North 1990; Williamson 1985). In multi-principal public operations, agency problems arise because citizens, ministries, implementing agencies, financiers, project teams, technical units, procurement commissions, and control bodies possess different information and decision rights (Jensen and Meckling 1976). Additional monitoring can reduce information asymmetry, but overlapping monitors may also diffuse accountability: each actor can assume that another retains final responsibility.

The empirical literature supports a conditional, rather than ideological, view of control. Dávid-Barrett et al. (2020) find that donor oversight combined with wider market access can reduce corruption-risk indicators in aid-financed procurement. Conversely, Calvo et al. (2019), using a regression-discontinuity design across United States federal projects, show that intensive operational oversight can increase delays and cost overruns under particular contractual and capability conditions. These results are not contradictory. They indicate that control has a value and a cost, and that its effect depends on the risk addressed, the information added, the contract, and implementer experience. Petersen et al. (2019) similarly distinguish transaction attributes from the resources governments choose to spend in response to them. Rasheli (2016) shows that weak capacity, institutional problems, and fragmented guidance raise information, negotiation, and monitoring costs throughout public procurement.

For public investment, the relevant economic loss is broader than an administrative delay. A late procurement can defer service delivery, extend staff and supervision costs, expose budgets to price changes, and compress the period available for implementation. A late program result can postpone disbursement and delay the social benefit associated with the result. The cost of control should therefore be assessed against the expected loss it prevents. This is the foundation of the control-value test proposed below.

Project implementation units, country systems, and institutionalization

Donor-financed projects have frequently used dedicated project implementation units (PIUs) to concentrate fiduciary skills, protect implementation from weak administrative routines, and meet reporting requirements. Yet parallel structures can bypass permanent institutions, fragment incentives, and weaken long-term capability (El Baradei 2011; Knack 2013). Aris and Hubbard (2015) argue that the contribution of PIUs depends on whether they support or substitute for country systems. The

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relevant distinction is therefore not simply "separate" versus "integrated", but whether critical functions, knowledge, authority, and accountability become institutionalized.

Institutionalization is more demanding than formal adoption. Pritchett et al. (2012) describe how organizations can reproduce the appearance of modern administrative systems without acquiring functional implementation capability. Scott's (2014) framework likewise suggests that a written rule becomes effective only when it is embedded in normative expectations and recurring organizational practice. Recent evidence from Kazakhstan indicates that the economic effect associated with government project offices is moderated by administrative capacity, and that digitalization alone does not substitute for such capacity (Yessengeldina et al. 2026). Project-management maturity must therefore be assessed through repeated use, decision consequences, learning, and measurable effects—not by the presence of a manual or office name alone.

The study operationalizes institutionalization on a six-level scale. Level 0 means that the function was not identified. Level 1 means that it is mentioned in a legal or methodological document. Level 2 requires an approved procedure or form, a designated owner, and a deadline. Level 3 requires recurring documentary evidence of use and updating. Level 4 requires evidence that outputs are used for decisions, escalation, or corrective action. Level 5 requires a measured effect or a credible before-and-after comparison. Where the corpus does not contain operational records, the appropriate code is "not confirmed by available evidence", not "not applied".

IPF and PforR as different management technologies

The distinction between financial windows and financing instruments is essential. The International Development Association (IDA) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) provide different financing terms and use different legal agreement titles. IDA credits and grants are generally governed by a Financing Agreement, whereas an IBRD loan is governed by a Loan Agreement. Both are binding legal agreements between the borrower or recipient and the World Bank entity. The title does not determine whether an operation is IPF or PforR; the financing instrument and its policy logic do.

Under IPF, the management object is a bounded project: scope, components, procurement packages, contracts, eligible expenditure, environmental and social commitments, and a results framework. The central integration task is to maintain traceability from the approved scope and budget to procurement, contract performance, payment, outputs, and indicators. World Bank procurement prior review and a No Objection are control points within the Bank's mandate; they do not transfer the implementing agency's responsibility for procurement and do not constitute immunity from lawful national investigation (World Bank 2023b).

PforR is organized around a government program. Disbursement-linked indicators (DLIs) and disbursement-linked results (DLRs) link financing to verified achievement. The management chain therefore runs from policy and program ownership through implementation, administrative data, evidence preparation, independent verification, and disbursement. PforR is intended to strengthen and use country systems, but this promise is conditional. Gelb and Hashmi (2014) describe the instrument's results-based architecture, while Malli (2014) identifies a tension between relying on country systems and maintaining acceptable baseline standards. Cormier (2016), Clist (2016, 2019), and O'Brien and Kanbur (2014) show that results-based financing changes incentives but can also produce measurement, ownership, and implementation risks. Evidence from Ethiopia suggests that a

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PforR can shift attention from inputs to results while still being constrained by context, indicator selection, and missing preconditions (Yorke et al. 2022). The Independent Evaluation Group's early assessment accordingly cautioned against premature conclusions about instrument-level superiority (Independent Evaluation Group 2016).

This study treats IPF and PforR as different management technologies. IPF requires a project integration function even when it is embedded in a permanent department. PforR requires a program owner and a reliable result-delivery and evidence chain. The independent verifier is not the program manager: verification determines whether evidence supports achievement of a predefined result; it does not direct the process by which the result is produced.

Interface risk and the agreement-to-implementation gap

Project-management standards emphasize tailoring, integrated planning, stakeholder engagement, and risk ownership (ISO 2018, 2020; Project Management Institute 2025). These principles become difficult to apply when a decision crosses multiple organizations. Interface risk is the risk arising not from a single actor's task but from a transfer between actors, documents, systems, or decision regimes. Examples include the transfer from a technical specification to procurement, from award to contract management, from a territorial implementer to central financial reporting, and from administrative data to independent DLR verification.

The agreement-to-implementation gap is modeled as a set of process-level discrepancies across five dimensions: (1) authority—who may make the decision; (2) accountability—who owns the complete decision cycle; (3) control—what risk and criterion each review addresses; (4) configuration—which document and data version is authoritative; and (5) evidence—how an output or result can be traced to reliable records. The model predicts higher delay risk where responsibility is assigned without corresponding decision rights, mandatory controls repeat the same object and criterion, no actor owns the complete interface, or authoritative versions and evidence requirements are unclear.

Materials and Methods

Research design and case selection

The study uses a comparative qualitative case-study design and theory-guided process tracing (Eisenhardt 1989; George and Bennett 2005; Yin 2018; Beach and Pedersen 2019). The purpose is analytical explanation rather than statistical estimation of the entire World Bank portfolio. The unit of analysis is a management process within an operation—for example, approval of a technical specification, evaluation of bids, updating of a procurement plan, contract modification, preparation of a DLR evidence package, or verification of administrative data.

Three cases form the empirical core:

1. Uzbekistan Strengthening Social Protection System Project (Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan), a completed IDA-financed IPF operation with an available completion report, restructuring history, procurement records, and national implementation acts.

2. Uzbekistan Resilient Landscapes Restoration Project under the RESILAND CA+ Program (Forestry Agency under the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate

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Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan), an ongoing IDA-financed IPF operation with territorially distributed activities, multiple implementation interfaces, and early implementation evidence.

3. EduImkon: Redesigning Opportunity, Delivering Education Equity Program (Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan), an early IBRD-financed PforR operation in which disbursement depends on results in the education-finance system and independent verification.

The cases were selected for variation in financing instrument, stage, sector, organizational structure, and evidence availability (World Bank 2019a, 2022, 2025a, 2025b, 2026; International Development Association 2019, 2022; International Bank for Reconstruction and Development 2025). They are not a representative sample. Five additional operations were used for triangulation of mechanisms and boundary conditions: Modernizing Uzbekistan National Innovation System Project (Ministry of Innovative Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan); Energy Efficiency Facility for Industrial Enterprises Project (Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Uzbekistan and participating commercial banks); Modernizing Uzbekistan National Geospatial Infrastructure Project (Cadastre Agency under the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan); Uzbekistan Education System Reform Project (Ministry of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan); and Syrdarya Efficient Power Generation Project (National Electric Grid of Uzbekistan Joint Stock Company) (World Bank 2010, 2024a, 2024b, 2025c, 2025d). The last is a guarantee-supported boundary case and was not treated as a standard borrower-procurement operation.

Documentary corpus and evidence hierarchy

The documentary corpus includes legal agreements, PADs, POMs, procurement plans, Implementation Status and Results Reports, restructuring papers, completion reports, audited financial statements, verification protocols, a DLR verification report, national presidential and cabinet decisions, agency orders, terms of reference, and operational working materials. The analysis distinguishes five evidence levels. Level A comprises binding legal agreements and officially adopted national acts. Level B comprises final World Bank and officially approved project documents. Level C comprises signed reports, audit outputs, procurement records, and formally issued operational documents. Level D comprises working matrices and practitioner records used to identify mechanisms requiring triangulation. Level E comprises contextual observation and was never used as the sole basis for a factual conclusion.

The legal agreement and the operational manual perform different functions. The legal agreement establishes binding obligations, financing terms, institutional arrangements, and applicable conditions. The POM translates those obligations into operating procedures and is binding to the extent specified by the agreement. A national or agency act allocates domestic authority but cannot be assumed to amend the legal agreement. The PAD explains design and appraisal logic, but it is not interchangeable with the legal agreement. This documentary hierarchy was used to resolve apparent inconsistencies.

Coding and process tracing

Each process was coded across the following fields: initiating event; required input; source of authority; Responsible actor; Accountable decision owner; Consulted and Informed actors; independent control; number and sequence of mandatory control points; review object; review criterion; official deadline; actual or reported delay; reason for return; authoritative document version; evidence produced; escalation route; and final outcome. Cross-case coding focused on five process

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classes: governance structure, planning and scope change, procurement and contract management, financial management, and result monitoring and escalation.

Three analytical tests were applied. The authority test asked whether the actor held the legal or delegated right to make the relevant decision. The control-value test asked whether each mandatory review addressed a material risk or criterion not already covered. The traceability test asked whether the decision or result could be reconstructed from the authoritative input, comments, approval, version, and evidence. Alternative explanations—external shocks, technical unreadiness, policy change, funding constraints, and individual error—were examined before attributing delay to institutional design.

Researcher positionality and analytical separation

Practitioner-informed research provides access to process detail but creates a risk of over-reliance on insider interpretation (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Labaree 2002). This risk was addressed through evidence hierarchy, documentary triangulation, explicit coding rules, separation of observation from conclusion, and non-use of private correspondence containing personal data.

In one PforR case, professional access covered both methodological documentation and later independent verification. These assignments concerned functionally separate objects and mandates. A POM specifies how program processes are organized; independent verification examines whether predefined results are supported by evidence. The verification mandate neither audits the implementation process nor assesses the quality of the POM. Accordingly, no verification output was used to validate the quality of methodological documentation, and no methodological authorship was treated as evidence that a result had been achieved. This separation avoids self-validation without constructing a hypothetical conflict between distinct functions.

Limitations and use of generative artificial intelligence

The evidence is asymmetric across cases. A completed IPF operation supports retrospective comparison of design, restructuring, and outcome, while ongoing IPF and early PforR operations support analysis of management architecture but not final effectiveness. The available records do not contain complete timestamp data for every decision, and no causal effect size is claimed. Practitioner materials identify mechanisms but require confirmation by formal records. The proposed framework is therefore a design proposition for prospective testing, not a validated impact model.

Generative artificial intelligence tools (OpenAI ChatGPT and Codex) were used to assist with manuscript organization, language refinement, consistency checking, and document formatting. They were not used to select cases, create empirical observations, code evidence autonomously, or determine the findings. All source interpretation, analytical claims, and final wording were reviewed and accepted by the author.

Institutional Context and Case Architecture

Uzbekistan's management system for internationally financed projects has combined operation-specific project structures with national oversight. Presidential Resolution No. PP-3857 of 16 July 2018 established a special framework for preparation and implementation of projects financed by international financial institutions (Government of Uzbekistan 2018). In the periods examined, project teams frequently acted as technical and operational working bodies. Their duties included organizing procurement, preparing documents, coordinating specialists, monitoring, and reporting. These

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functions did not necessarily confer final decision authority. In particular, being the working body for a tender process did not authorize a PIU to approve technical specifications, determine the acceptability of experts, adopt an evaluation report, or award a contract unilaterally.

Presidential Resolution No. PP-51 of 11 February 2025 introduced a policy of gradually integrating project functions into the relevant divisions of implementing agencies (Government of Uzbekistan 2025). This reform creates an opportunity to strengthen country systems, but organizational transfer does not by itself transfer capability or alter an existing legal agreement. Before changing an implementation structure, an agency must identify which functions are required by the agreement, which can be transferred through an internal act, which require a POM amendment, and which require prior agreement with the World Bank. The management challenge is therefore a controlled transition, not the administrative abolition or preservation of a PIU as an end in itself. This concern is consistent with the Uzbekistan Public Expenditure Review, which emphasizes clearer institutional roles, stronger capacity across the investment cycle, and closer integration of investment decisions with the budget (World Bank 2020).

Table 1 summarizes the analytical role of the three core cases.

Table 1. Core cases and analytical use.

Operation (implementing agency) Instrument and stage Primary analytical role Inference limit

Uzbekistan Strengthening Social Protection System Project (Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan) IDA IPF; completed Compares appraisal design, national implementation structure, procurement configuration, restructuring, and completion evidence Observed outcome reflects multiple policy, market, and implementation factors; no single-cause attribution

Uzbekistan Resilient Landscapes Restoration Project under the RESILAND CA+ Program (Forestry Agency under the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan) IDA IPF; ongoing Examines territorial interfaces, annual planning, procurement–contract handover, staffing, and transfer of project functions Final effectiveness is not observable; operational records are incomplete across territorial entities

EduImkon: Redesigning Opportunity, Delivering Education Equity Program (Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan) IBRD PforR; early implementation Examines result ownership, data lineage, evidence readiness, independent verification, and the limits of IPF-style management transfer One completed DLR verification cycle cannot characterize the whole program or prove comparative effectiveness

The completed social-protection operation provides the strongest evidence of a gap between project design and the actual decision cycle. The landscape-restoration operation reveals risks created by territorial delivery, vertical reporting, and transition of project functions. The education-finance PforR reveals a fundamentally different interface: the chain from result ownership through administrative data and independent verification.

Results

Formalization does not guarantee institutionalization

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Across the reviewed operations, formal project-management functions were generally present. POMs assigned roles; procurement plans and the World Bank's Systematic Tracking of Exchanges in Procurement (STEP) created a formal procurement record; risk sections identified major uncertainties; and reporting duties were defined. However, the institutionalization level differed by process. The presence of a risk register did not prove that it was regularly updated or used to trigger decisions. The existence of a procurement plan did not prove that actual status was synchronized with contracts and implementation. The existence of a steering body did not establish ownership of the complete decision cycle.

The evidence supports a distinction between document compliance and decision use. Document compliance asks whether a required instrument exists. Decision use asks whether its information changes a decision, activates escalation, or produces corrective action. In the completed social-protection operation, procurement architecture, PIU functions, and reporting were formally established, but completion evidence records restructuring delays, incomplete updating of procurement information, and cancellation of financing. These outcomes cannot be attributed to one organizational feature alone, yet the process trace shows that formal controls did not ensure timely configuration of the operation. In the landscape-restoration operation, the legal and operational design is detailed, but evidence of repeated application across territorial entities remains incomplete. In the PforR operation, a completed verification cycle provides evidence of use for the relevant DLR, but that evidence cannot be generalized to every result or to the program as a whole.

This finding is consistent with institutional theory: the administrative value of a tool is created by recurring use and consequences, not by its label. It also explains why importing additional international templates without analyzing the local decision route would be insufficient.

Responsibility without decision rights

The most persistent governance pattern is responsibility assigned to a project function without corresponding authority over the full decision. In the social-protection operation, the PIU organized procurement and acted as the working body, but major approvals remained with the ministry, a procurement or interagency commission, or another authorized body. The formal duties established under the applicable national framework were predominantly technical, organizational, and operational. The PIU could prepare and coordinate, but it could not independently decide the acceptability of a specialist, approve the technical content belonging to a line unit, or adopt an evaluation result.

This pattern invalidates a common counterfactual: that delays would necessarily have been prevented if the PIU had merely exercised "more formal authority". The evidence does not show that it possessed such authority. The management defect is more precisely described as a misalignment among responsibility, decision rights, and cycle ownership. A project coordinator may be held responsible for the schedule while several bodies control the critical path and no actor owns the time between them.

A conventional RACI matrix helps only if "Accountable" is tied to an actual source of authority. For a collegial body to be a usable accountable owner, the process also requires a secretariat, quorum rules, a calendar, a defined evidence package, and a procedure for recording individual comments. Otherwise, collective authority can become practical anonymity.

Parallel controls and the economics of waiting

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The reviewed decision chains demonstrate how individually legitimate controls can become collectively inefficient. A procurement package may move from technical preparation to PIU review, evaluation commission, agency leadership, World Bank prior review, contract clearance, and subsequent national oversight. Each stage may serve a legitimate purpose. The management question is whether the subject and criterion are unique.

Where one body assesses technical conformity, another checks procurement compliance, and an independent body examines conflict of interest, the controls are complementary. Where multiple bodies sequentially re-evaluate the same criterion without new information or a distinct legal mandate, the additional control produces a queue rather than assurance. The cost is not merely the duration of the final approval. It includes staff time, repeated document revision, loss of bid validity, delayed mobilization, exposure to price and exchange-rate changes, and deferred public benefit.

The evidence does not support abolishing national oversight. The corruption-control literature shows that oversight and market openness can produce real public value (Dávid-Barrett et al. 2020). The result instead supports control rationalization: every mandatory control should state its risk, object, criterion, evidence, decision right, time limit, and relationship to other controls. A control lacking a unique answer should be integrated into a joint review or converted into risk-based ex post sampling.

Procurement price review, No Objection, and a rebuttable presumption

Post-award price review requires particular care. In an open competitive procurement, the contract price emerges from the tender rules, qualification and evaluation criteria, submitted bids, and award decision. Under World Bank procurement, a bidder's evaluated offer cannot simply be replaced after competition by an administratively preferred price. For packages subject to prior review, the World Bank's No Objection confirms that the reviewed stage is acceptable within the Bank's mandate. It does not legalize fraud, exclude national jurisdiction under public-procurement legislation, or prevent investigation of evidence of collusion, falsification, conflict of interest, restricted competition, or manipulation of the evaluation (Government of Uzbekistan 2021; World Bank 2023b).

At the same time, retrospective comparison of a competitively awarded contract with a later "market price" estimate can disregard product specification, delivery terms, warranty, taxes, logistics, financing costs, exchange-rate timing, service obligations, and the market conditions at bid submission. If such comparison alone is treated as proof of loss, responsible officials may face personal exposure despite having followed the agreed competitive procedure. This creates defensive decision making and can discourage qualified procurement professionals from working in implementation structures.

The appropriate solution is neither blanket immunity nor unrestricted re-pricing. The study proposes a two-stage standard. First, the control body determines whether there are documented indications of a material violation of procurement rules capable of affecting competition or price formation. Relevant indications include collusion, manipulated specifications, unjustified restriction of competition, falsified evidence, conflict of interest, non-application of the stated evaluation method, or undisclosed material contract variation. Second, detailed price expertise is initiated when such an indication is established and its causal relevance is recorded. Where an open competitive process was conducted under the applicable rules and, where required, received a World Bank No Objection, the resulting price should benefit from a rebuttable presumption of proper competitive formation. The presumption can be rebutted by evidence of material procurement irregularity; it is not a prohibition on lawful investigation.

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This standard aligns accountability with procurement economics. It directs investigative resources toward compromised competition rather than treating every ex post price difference as equivalent to procurement misconduct.

Interface risk in IPF

The IPF cases reveal four recurrent interfaces. The first is between technical definition and procurement. A technical owner must define the functional requirement, while procurement specialists ensure that the document is competitively neutral and procedurally usable. If anti-corruption, legal, financial, or procurement reviewers comment beyond their mandate without identifying a corresponding risk, the technical specification can be rewritten sequentially by actors who do not own the technical result.

The second interface is between procurement award and contract management. Procurement records often close at award, while the technical manager still needs the baseline schedule, warranty, acceptance plan, risk allocation, reporting format, and escalation thresholds. Without a mandatory handover package and a named contract manager before signature, the organization discovers performance risk late and records contract changes retrospectively.

The third interface is vertical. In the landscape-restoration operation, central project functions interact with territorial forestry entities, communities, and local implementers. Annual planning, budget, force-account activities, procurement, and evidence of physical progress must be synchronized. If territorial evidence is not produced in a common format and cadence, the central unit cannot reliably connect expenditure to physical results.

The fourth interface is organizational transition. Integrating project functions into permanent departments can strengthen sustainability, but only if the transition maps competencies, records, systems, delegated authorities, staffing, and contractual obligations. A general administrative instruction cannot replace an operation-specific transition plan. The retained function is integration—not necessarily a separate PIU, but a clearly mandated capability that maintains the master schedule, consolidated plan and budget, procurement portfolio, contract register, risk log, and reporting configuration.

PforR: managing the result-delivery and evidence chain

The PforR case requires a different topology. The EduImkon program involves the Ministry of Economy and Finance, program-management functions, the education-finance fund, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, participating commercial banks, digital registries, and an independent verification agent. No single project manager can replace the legal mandates of these institutions.

For each DLR, at least four roles must be distinguished: the owner accountable for achieving the substantive result; the owner of the primary data; the coordinator responsible for assembling the evidence package; and the independent verifier. The first three may be combined where the system provides compensating controls, but the verifier cannot become responsible for producing or correcting the result it later verifies. Independence does not mean isolation. The verifier requires access to source evidence, while the program owner must facilitate access without directing the verification conclusion.

The completed verification cycle examined in the corpus illustrates the value of a defined protocol and scope. It also shows why data lineage, extraction date, version control, reconciliation

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across sources, and explicit limitations are management functions. A result can be substantively achieved but not verifiable if identifiers, definitions, or evidence chains are inconsistent. Conversely, a well-formatted report cannot compensate for a result definition that lies outside the accountable institution's control.

Mechanically importing the IPF model would create the wrong object of control. In IPF, traceability runs from plan and procurement to contract, payment, output, and indicator. In PforR, traceability runs from program action and administrative event to data, calculation, evidence, independent verification, and disbursement. PforR may include procurement, but the World Bank assesses procurement and fiduciary systems rather than routinely issuing a No Objection for each national transaction. Recreating an IPF-style prior-review chain without a legal or risk-based need would undermine reliance on country systems and duplicate program administration.

Cross-case synthesis

Table 2 presents the main cross-case mechanisms.

Table 2. Cross-case mechanisms and management implications.

Mechanism IPF manifestation PforR manifestation Management implication

Responsibility without decision rights PIU prepares and coordinates, while approval remains with a ministry or collegial body Evidence coordinator assembles the package but cannot own the policy result or alter primary data Tie accountability to a documented source of authority and define escalation for the full cycle

Duplicated or sequential control The same procurement object may be reviewed repeatedly without a new risk criterion IPF-style prior reviews may be recreated inside a national program without an instrument-specific need Apply the control-value test and consolidate reviews that do not add unique evidence

Configuration failure STEP, procurement plans, contract status, and actual implementation may diverge DLR definitions, data extracts, and evidence versions may diverge Maintain one authoritative version, owner, effective date, and change history

Interface risk Transfer failures occur between technical design, procurement, contract management, territorial delivery, and reporting Transfer failures occur between result owners, data custodians, evidence coordinators, and verifier Use an interface-risk register with acceptance criteria, deadlines, and escalation

Instrument mismatch Removing the integration function fragments the project chain Importing transaction-level IPF routines creates a parallel program structure Preserve distinct IPF and PforR tracks within a common accountability framework

The common mechanism is not weak commitment or the absence of formal rules. Risk accumulates at interfaces among formally valid elements. In the completed IPF case, the critical interface joined the project team, commission, ministry, national controls, and World Bank process. In the ongoing IPF case, it joins the central team, permanent departments, territorial organizations, technical disciplines, and financial reporting. In the PforR case, it joins result owners, banks, registries, data custodians, evidence coordinators, and the independent verifier.

The cross-case evidence supports three propositions. First, delay risk rises when responsibility for the complete cycle is assigned to an actor that lacks decision rights over the critical path. Second, the number of controls matters less than their functional uniqueness, sequencing, and time limits.

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Third, instrument mismatch is itself a risk: the transfer of transaction-oriented IPF routines to PforR can create a parallel program structure, while removal of the IPF integration function can fragment the project's contract and expenditure chain.

A Differentiated Institutional Risk Governance Framework

The proposed framework has a common institutional core and two instrument-specific management tracks. It is not an additional project office. It is a set of decision rules and data relationships that can be embedded in existing systems and internal acts.

Common institutional core

The Alignment Gate is applied before effectiveness and whenever the implementation structure changes. It compares the legal agreement, PAD, POM, national act, agency order, and actual process. Each requirement is assigned a source, owner, deadline, evidence, and amendment route. An inconsistency is resolved before it becomes a recurring operational exception.

The Decision-Rights and Interface Map extends RACI. It records the source of authority for the Accountable actor, the Responsible preparer, Consulted and Informed participants, independent controls, the handover point, and the escalation threshold. One decision must have one accountable owner. A collegial body can perform this role only when its procedure makes ownership operational.

The Control-Value Test classifies every mandatory review by risk, object, criterion, evidence, right of decision, frequency, and cost of delay. Controls addressing the same object and criterion are consolidated unless independence requires separation. Low-risk ex ante approvals can be replaced by risk-based ex post review when legally permissible.

The Interface Risk Register records risks at organizational and system boundaries. Each entry identifies the sending actor, receiving actor, required input, acceptance criterion, deadline, evidence, and escalation route. This differs from a conventional risk register that may list "coordination risk" without locating the failed transfer.

Individual Comments Map

The Individual Comments Map is an adapted comment-resolution matrix for collegial bodies. It does not invent individual evaluator forms, which are well established internationally. Its contribution in this context is to connect each comment to the reviewer's legal or professional competence, the exact clause or criterion, the risk addressed, the proposed resolution, the decision, and the time effect.

For procurement, separate maps are produced for each material stage: technical requirements, tender document, and evaluation report. A technical expert may comment on functionality and performance; a procurement specialist on competition and procedural compliance; a lawyer on legal enforceability; a financial specialist on budget and payment structure; and an integrity function on conflict of interest, prohibited practices, or integrity risk. An integrity reviewer should not substitute a technical judgment unless the comment identifies a concrete integrity risk arising from the technical requirement.

Table 3 provides a compact template.

Table 3. Abbreviated Individual Comments Map for a collegial approval stage.

Stage and document Clause or criterion Reviewer and mandate Comment Risk addressed Resolution and decision Status / date

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Technical requirements	Exact section	Technical owner—functionality	Specific, actionable comment	Performance or fitness-for-purpose risk	Accepted / rejected with reason; revised text reference
Open / closed; date					
Tender document	Exact clause	Procurement specialist—competition and procedure	Specific, actionable comment	Restriction of competition or procedural non-compliance	Accepted / rejected with reason; revised clause
Open / closed; date					
Evaluation report	Stated evaluation criterion	Commission member—within assigned competence	Individual assessment or reservation	Incorrect application of published criteria	Commission decision; dissent or condition recorded
Open / closed; date					
Any stage	Integrity-related fact	Integrity function—conflict/prohibited practice	Fact-linked integrity observation	Conflict of interest, collusion, falsification, or prohibited practice	Referral, mitigation, or reasoned closure
Open / escalated / closed					

The map makes collective decision making auditable without removing collegial judgment. It also creates data for future research on repeat comments, out-of-mandate review, and decision-cycle time.

Process and Risk Ledger

Traditional reporting explains what happened by the reporting date. Proactive management must also show where a decision is now, how long it has waited, which risk blocks it, and who must act. The proposed Process and Risk Ledger is a controlled decision register that connects process status and interface risk. It may initially be implemented as an access-controlled electronic register and later as a module of an existing information system. The scientific product is the data model and management logic, not a claim that a complete software product has been developed.

The minimum record contains: unique identifier; operation and financing instrument; process type; legal or operational requirement; initiating date; current owner; accountable decision-maker; control point; deadline; status; structured return reason; related risk; Individual Comments Map reference; authoritative document version; evidence link; decision date; and follow-up action. For IPF, it links—without duplicating—the relevant STEP package, contract, payment, output, and indicator. For PforR, it links the DLR definition, result and data owners, control date, evidence index, verification cycle, limitations, and disbursement status.

The ledger should generate prospective indicators: decision-cycle time; waiting time by control point; repeated-return ratio; share of controls with a unique risk rationale; unresolved interface risks; age of overdue decisions; authoritative-version exceptions; and escalation response time. PforR adds data-reconciliation exceptions, evidence-completeness status, elapsed time from data freeze to verification, and a pilot DLR readiness indicator. None of these indicators demonstrates impact until a baseline and pilot comparison are conducted.

Instrument-specific tracks

The IPF track preserves a project integration function. It links scope, annual work plan, budget, procurement plan, contracts, physical progress, expenditure, safeguards, and results. It requires a decision dossier for each major procurement, a contract-management plan before signature, a handover package from procurement to implementation, synchronized STEP and contract status, and a transition plan if PIU functions are integrated into permanent units.

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The PforR track organizes a Result Delivery Chain for each DLR. The DLR passport records the legal definition, formula, baseline and target, accountable result owner, data owner, primary source, extraction and reconciliation rules, verification protocol, disbursement amount, PAP dependencies, risks, and limitations. This passport complements rather than replaces the World Bank verification protocol. It is an internal readiness instrument; the independent verifier must not calculate or own the program's readiness score.

Table 4 summarizes the framework and validation logic.

Table 4. Institutional Risk Governance Framework and prospective validation.

Component Management function Primary output Pilot indicator

Alignment Gate Reconciles legal agreement, POM, national act, agency order, and actual route Requirement-to-process matrix and amendment actions Unresolved inconsistencies; time to close

Decision-Rights and Interface Map Connects accountability to actual authority and handovers Stage-level authority and escalation map Decisions without one accountable owner; overdue escalations

Control-Value Test Tests the unique risk and information value of each mandatory review Control catalogue and rationalization decision Share of controls with unique risk rationale; duplicated-return ratio

Individual Comments Map Makes collegial comments attributable, scoped, and resolvable Stage-specific comment and resolution record Repeat comments; out-of-mandate comments; closure time

Process and Risk Ledger Shows current status, waiting time, blocker, owner, version, and evidence Controlled electronic decision record and dashboard Decision-cycle time; waiting time; version exceptions; risk age

IPF track Integrates scope, procurement, contracts, expenditure, outputs, and safeguards Decision dossier, contract handover, synchronized portfolio STEP accuracy; contract-change time; schedule and budget variance

PforR track Integrates DLR ownership, data, evidence, PAP dependencies, and verification DLR passport and evidence-readiness record Data exceptions; evidence completeness; data-freeze-to-verification time

Implementation and validation

Implementation should begin with a bounded pilot, not immediate national roll-out. The first phase maps two high-volume IPF processes and one PforR DLR cycle. Baseline data are collected on decision time, number of mandatory controls, repeat returns, unresolved risks, and evidence exceptions. The second phase adopts the Alignment Gate, decision-rights map, Individual Comments Map, and controlled ledger through an internal act consistent with the legal agreement and POM. The third phase measures user burden and outcomes for at least two complete cycles.

The framework should be scaled only if it reduces avoidable waiting or improves traceability without weakening unique controls. A reduction in steps alone is not success. The pilot must confirm that integrity, technical quality, procurement compliance, and verification independence remain

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protected. Separate conclusions must be drawn for IPF and PforR because the relevant unit of performance differs.

Discussion

Theoretical implications

The findings refine transaction-cost reasoning in public investment. Controls are governance responses to uncertainty and opportunism, but they also consume time and attention. Their marginal value depends on functional uniqueness. This suggests that public investment governance should be analyzed as a portfolio of controls, not as a binary choice between oversight and autonomy. The result reconciles evidence that donor oversight can reduce procurement risk (Dávid-Barrett et al. 2020) with evidence that intensive operational scrutiny can increase delay and overrun under some conditions (Calvo et al. 2019).

The agreement-to-implementation gap also extends the literature on parallel structures. The central problem is not the organizational label "PIU". A separate PIU may lack decision authority; an integrated department may retain strong integration capability. What matters is whether the architecture aligns authority, accountability, competence, information, and evidence. This functional interpretation supports Aris and Hubbard's (2015) focus on country-system contribution and explains why administrative integration without capability transfer may simply relocate the gap.

For PforR, the findings reinforce concerns about context and preconditions. Results-based financing does not eliminate management; it relocates management from individual transactions toward systems, results, data, and verification. The distinction is important because transaction controls can be visible and familiar, while data-lineage and evidence-readiness risks remain hidden until a disbursement is due. The research therefore rejects both the assumption that PforR automatically improves effectiveness and the assumption that IPF routines provide a safe default.

Practical and policy implications

For implementing agencies, the immediate priority is to identify the real owner of each critical decision and the source of that authority. Project teams should not be held accountable for deadlines they cannot control without an escalation mechanism. Steering committees and procurement commissions require operational calendars, stage-specific evidence packages, and individual comment traceability.

For central ministries, portfolio oversight should focus on interface risks, transition readiness, and aging decisions rather than requesting parallel narrative reports. A common minimum data model can support cross-project comparison while preserving instrument-specific logic. Capacity building should be role-based: technical ownership, procurement, contract management, result ownership, data stewardship, evidence coordination, and independent verification require different competencies.

For control and law-enforcement bodies, the proposed two-stage price-review standard protects both accountability and competitive procurement. No Objection should not be mischaracterized as immunity, but a properly conducted competitive process should not be displaced by an ex post price estimate without evidence that a material procurement irregularity affected competition or price formation. Publishing typologies of violations and evidentiary thresholds would reduce defensive behavior and improve learning.

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For the World Bank, implementation support can encourage explicit mapping between legal-agreement obligations and national decision rights, particularly during implementation-structure reforms. In PforR, attention should extend beyond DLR wording to the institutional ownership of the result and the operational feasibility of the data chain. In IPF, project readiness should include the national approval route and contract-management handover, not only procurement launch.

Originality and relationship to existing tools

The proposed instruments have international antecedents. RACI, decision logs, risk registers, requirements traceability, comment-resolution matrices, assurance maps, and DLI verification protocols are not inventions of this study. Claiming novelty for their isolated form would be misleading. The contribution is threefold: a process-level diagnostic of how these functions are institutionalized in selected World Bank operations in Uzbekistan; an instrument-specific configuration that separates IPF integration from PforR result-delivery management; and a unified data relationship connecting authority, decision, control, risk, comment, version, and evidence.

This formulation makes the proposal falsifiable. If operational records show that the functions are already institutionalized at Levels 4 or 5, the case for an additional template disappears. If a pilot does not reduce avoidable waiting or improve traceability, the framework should be revised or rejected. The practical tools are vehicles for testing and institutionalizing the model, not proof of novelty by themselves.

Limitations and research agenda

The study's principal limitation is its documentary and qualitative design. It identifies mechanisms but does not estimate their prevalence across the national portfolio or their causal effect on disbursement, cost, or development outcomes. Case evidence is uneven, and ongoing operations cannot be evaluated as completed projects. The professional proximity of the researcher improves process understanding but requires continued transparency and independent replication.

Future research should build a timestamped dataset of comparable procurement and decision cycles across World Bank operations in Uzbekistan. A prospective pilot could estimate changes in decision-cycle time, repeated returns, staffing burden, bid-validity extensions, contract-modification time, and result-verification exceptions. For PforR, longitudinal work should examine whether reliance on national systems produces capability gains beyond the financed program. For IPF, research should test which implementation functions can be integrated into permanent structures without loss of fiduciary and contract-management performance.

Conclusions

The management effectiveness of World Bank-financed public investment depends on more than the formal quality of project documents. In the selected operations in Uzbekistan, risk emerges where legal agreements, World Bank procedures, national controls, agency routines, and information systems meet. The resulting agreement-to-implementation gap is expressed as responsibility without decision rights, controls without unique risk rationales, unclear ownership of interfaces, and fragmented evidence chains.

IPF and PforR cannot be governed through a single transplanted template. IPF requires integration across scope, procurement, contracts, expenditure, and outputs. PforR requires a result-delivery chain grounded in program ownership, administrative data, evidence readiness, and

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independent verification. The common principle is traceable accountability; the operational architecture must remain instrument-specific.

The proposed Institutional Risk Governance Framework combines an Alignment Gate, decision-rights mapping, a control-value test, interface-risk management, an Individual Comments Map, and a Process and Risk Ledger. It does not advocate fewer controls as a general rule. It advocates controls that are unique, risk-based, timely, and connected to an accountable decision. It also proposes a rebuttable presumption of proper competitive price formation, activated only after confirming procurement integrity and rebuttable by evidence of material violation.

The framework is ready for prospective pilot testing, not for a claim of proven impact. Its economic promise is measurable: reduced avoidable waiting, lower administrative transaction costs, better contract and result traceability, and earlier delivery of public benefits. Whether that promise is realized must be tested against baselines and complete decision cycles in both IPF and PforR.

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