

## Engaging State Governments

### In brief

SAVI as a programme does not directly work with state governments – but we work in close conjunction with sister programmes who are supporting state governments on governance and sector reforms. SAVI supports non-government and State House of Assembly partners to play their part in promoting more responsive, inclusive and accountable state governance delivering better services for citizens.

Our focus is on constructive engagement. Through demonstration initiatives, we support non government and SHoA partners to represent citizens in the state; build on existing commitment to reform in the state government; develop good working relationships with government staff; make informed and practical contributions to state government policy, planning and budgeting processes; and serve as a valuable and valued partner to the government. These initiatives demonstrate, through experience, ways of working that help help the state government be more responsive, inclusive and accountable to state citizens. The overall aim is to facilitate and support working relationships and processes of reform that are home-grown, self-sustaining and, after initial demonstration, self-replicating without need of external support.

Nigeria has a federal system of government with significant powers devolved to state level. In 1999, the country returned to democratic rule after years of military dictatorship. The civilian political system inaugurated at that time remains immature even at the federal level. In Nigerian states, although the situation varies, the level of political development is generally lower than at federal level.

There is very limited space for public policymaking which is responsive to the needs and priorities of citizens. Political parties are patronage machines and political campaigns centre on the personal qualities of their current leaders. An overwhelming proportion of state government spending, funded by federal allocations, is earmarked for purposes other than providing public goods and services. The public sector wage bill, inflated by the patronage of previous regimes, absorbs a large proportion. A further share pays off the political debts of previous and incumbent governors – and the modest remaining percentage is what pays for public goods and services. Responsive, inclusive and accountable state level governance is in its infancy<sup>1</sup>.

Under the constitution, state governments are answerable to State Houses of Assembly (SHoA), but in most states these are weak institutions facing a plethora of challenges. The SHoA is generally funded directly by the

State Government Executive and regarded by many as a rubber stamp for the governor and Executive Council. Media houses, both print and radio, are considered vibrant in comparison to those in many African countries – but the majority tend to represent the voice of government rather than the voice of citizens. In the minority of states where independent media houses are more established, the media often have some engagement with citizens on pertinent issues of the day. This is generally on a fairly superficial basis, and investigative journalism is also in its infancy.

Since transition to democracy there has been a burgeoning of formal civil society groups, funded by donors, seeking to promote better governance by influencing federal and state governments and holding them to account. However, many are dominated by urban-based elites, have weak links to citizens, and shape themselves to donor priorities. Relations between state governments and these civil society (CS) groups are often poor, with governments typically regarding such groups as ill-informed and untrustworthy opposition forces or easily co-opted individuals. Relations between SHoA, CS groups and the media are generally characterised by mutual suspicion. Long-term observers agree that the impact of donor-funded CS advocacy has had no observable impact on what state governments do with their public resources<sup>2</sup>.

## Core principles

SAVI supports non government and SHoA partners to engage with state governments based on a number of key working principles:

- *Governments and citizens (the supply- and demand-side) working together to bring about reform.* Experience in Nigeria, as well as extensive research into governance reform in many countries, demonstrates that change is not brought about by citizens and their representatives pressurising an otherwise reluctant government to reform. It derives from harnessing motivation and momentum for reform from both government and citizens.
- *Identifying and building on existing momentum for change.* SAVI state teams take time to understand the local political economy to help to identify issues and processes to work on that have traction with the state government as well as with citizens, and to identify key government staff to engage with as well as credible demand-side players.
- *Local stakeholders in the driving seat.* Local actors – government and non-government – are in the driving seat. They set the agenda for reform, while SAVI state teams assist behind the scenes. SAVI assists partners to harness their collective potential, build their knowledge and skills, and broker their working relationships, providing complementary seed funding for pilot initiatives where required.
- *Informed, constructive and practical engagement.* SAVI state teams support partners to engage with their state government in a constructive and practical manner, rather than taking an oppositional, critical or confrontational stance. This requires understanding government priorities and constraints, and understanding how to add value in this context.
- *Formal and informal engagement.* We encourage partners to develop relationships with state government staff both formally and informally. Great emphasis is placed on behind the scenes relationship building and influencing, working with the grain of local culture, and taking time to understand and respect different perspectives.
- *Sharing credit.* Results for partners are when their state government listens to and responds to citizens. We encourage partners to celebrate together with state governments, rather than in any sense imply they forced the government into action. The incentive is for the government

to be motivated to do more of the same, and to maintain a good working relationship with their non-government and SHoA partners to continue acting together on further reforms.

## Core approach

### Partnering with other programmes

SAVI was established in 2008 as part of a suite of DFID-funded state level programmes (SLPs) working on governance and sector reforms in five Nigerian states. The SLPs were designed to impact collectively on state governments' capacity to spend their own resources efficiently and effectively. The other programmes in the SLP suite are ESSPIN, supporting sector reform in education; PATHS2, supporting sector reform in health; and GEMs, promoting growth and employment. The SPARC programme provides direct support to supply-side governance reform.

SAVI works particularly closely with SPARC which works in all of the same states as SAVI. In 2011, SAVI and SPARC expanded to three additional states, joining an existing DFID-funded sectoral programme, PRRINN-MNCH, supporting maternal and child health. In 2013, the SAVI and SPARC programmes were extended to two further states, with no specific link to any other DFID-funded programme. In their work with state governments, SPARC staff seek to 'open doors and create spaces' for civil society, media and SHoAs to break down barriers and build bridges between citizens and government.

SAVI state teams form alliances with staff from PATHS2, ESSPIN, PRRINN-MNCH and other DFID-funded programmes – as well as with development programmes not funded by DFID – where these relationships help to facilitate local partners' work and priorities. The aim is to encourage synergy, collaboration, and partnership to achieve shared reform objectives.

### Opportunities

SAVI's relationships with the above programmes assist in:

- Brokering working relationships between SAVI partners – advocacy partnerships, media houses and SHoAs – and state government staff in relevant ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs).
- Raising partners' awareness and understanding of the state government policymaking, planning and budgeting processes they are seeking to influence.
- Developing SAVI partners' skills in state government budget and policy analysis.
- Helping SAVI partners to think and work

politically in understanding where, when and how to make constructive inputs into state government policy, planning, budgeting and implementation processes.

At the same time, the programmes working directly with the state government facilitate government understanding of the value of listening to and responding to citizens; of working with credible CS groups, media houses and SHoA staff and members who reflect citizens' interests; and of developing processes to enable this to happen in a systematic way.

These synergies work particularly well when the different programmes appreciate the value of working together and actively seek to do so. A good example is in the three additional states where the SAVI and SPARC programmes set up in 2011. The PRRINN-MNCH programme had already been on the ground for some time, and were experiencing challenges relating to governance in each state. They recognised the need for SAVI and SPARC inputs, actively sought to bring them into these states and worked closely together from the outset.

### Challenges

There are inherent challenges in working together with other development programmes – even those programmes funded by the same donor – and we continue to grapple with finding solutions to these.

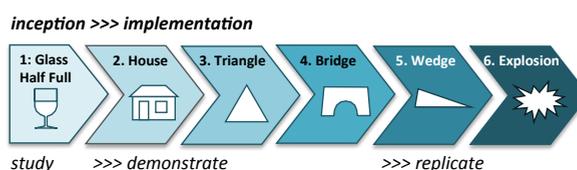
Researchers at Harvard University<sup>3</sup> have drawn attention to the widespread problem of donor funded programmes delivering best practice reforms that look good to an external donor but fail to bring about significant change on the ground. Common examples include government policies and procedures that are debated and approved but never implemented.

In our situation, with donor-funded programmes working closely together to promote governance and sector reforms from inside and outside the state government, there is a serious danger of our local partners operating too much within a donor-brokered environment. They can all too easily be sucked into working on reforms to policies and processes which are neither fully owned by the state government, nor driven by the demands of state citizens, and which are therefore unlikely to be sustainable beyond the period of donor support. This situation is stimulated by the perceived need for the suite of programmes to work together on common areas of interest. We are moving in the direction of supporting government and non-government partners to develop working relationships that focus on commonalities between the priorities of state citizens and the state government, and that foster on-going processes of public engagement that do not depend on a continuing donor presence.

A further significant challenge relates to incompatible approaches to supporting demand-side partners. SAVI is centrally concerned with promoting working relationships and processes of reform that are home-

grown, self-sustaining and scalable without need of external support. To this end, SAVI supports partners to take the lead, supports them from behind the scenes, and consciously mitigates against the risk of them becoming dependent on donor funding and technical support. On the other hand, with service delivery targets to meet, some of SAVI's sister sector reform programmes provide considerable funding to CS groups and media houses to deliver their own branded products and messages. Some go as far as direct lobbying and sponsorship of SHoAs to legislate on their own policy objectives. This approach undermines state government incentives to reform, undermines CS, media and SHoA incentives to lead their own development agenda, and is unsustainable. As SAVI's approach has started to prove more effective in producing longer-lasting and self-replicating results, such programmes are beginning to take an interest in our alternative way of working.

### Support to constructive engagement at each stage of the theory of change



#### Stage 1: Glass half full

The starting point for the SAVI programme in any state is for the state team to recognise that citizens, groups representing citizens, and government actors are already involved in campaigning and reform processes of various kinds. SAVI's aim is to understand the political economy of the state, and identify and build on existing momentum for change both in the state government and the wider society. This involves, amongst other things: understanding where the state government is spending money; which sectors are favoured and why; what and who are influencing decision-making and who is benefitting. SAVI state teams drill down from the macro level of the state to the level at which most of SAVI's potential non-government partners operate. This means looking into the political economy of sectors and sub-sectors, specific service delivery issues and the governance processes affecting them. (See SAVI Approach Paper 4: Thinking and Working Politically.)

Building on this analysis and other processes, SAVI state teams begin to engage with reform minded individuals in state-based media houses and among the staff and members of the SHoA, to identify in-roads into these organisations to offer programme support. They also begin to engage with passionate, committed and active individuals in civil society to encourage the formation of advocacy partnerships around issues or processes that are a stated priority both for the state government and for citizens. Advocacy partnerships have been formed around issues such as maternal and child health, urban water supply and sanitation, disability rights, and basic

education. When there is some degree of political will in the state government to be more responsive to citizens, partnerships are also formed around processes such as participatory budgeting, constituency engagement and project monitoring.

In the course of filtering which issues and processes to support, SAVI state teams take into account the extent to which other development programmes may be able to play a complementary or direct supporting role through their engagement with state government. As much as possible, SAVI state teams attempt to engage their counterparts in SPARC and the sector reform programmes in these initial non-government partner engagement processes, to appreciate them, endorse them and identify points of potential complementarity.

### **Stage 2: House**

Having established points of entry, the next stage of SAVI's engagement with civil society, media and SHoA partners is helping them to 'get their own house in order'. Organisational and Partnership Capacity Self-Assessments (OCAs and PCAs) are used to help partners analyse and reflect on their strengths, challenges and gaps. These include those concerning their relationship with various arms of government – providing a basis for partners to determine their capacity building priorities, and formulate strategic and operational work plans. (See SAVI Approach Paper 2: Programme Design.)

Mentoring and capacity building from SAVI state teams builds on OCA and PCA priorities and focuses on strengthening partners' professional competency as agents of citizen voice, enhancing their public credibility – in the eyes of citizens and the government. Having themselves learned to think and act politically through their participation in political economy analyses, SAVI state teams in turn help partners to see their policy issues and governance processes in their wider political context through processes we refer to as 'smarter planning'. Partners are supported to consider the formal and informal, visible and invisible ways that power operates in the immediate context – and to use this information to inform their planning on a continuous basis. (See SAVI Approach Paper 4: Thinking and Working Politically.)

Meanwhile, SAVI expects similar processes of mentoring and capacity building to be taking place in state government, with SPARC and the sector reform programmes helping selected MDAs to get their own house in order regarding the same issues and processes.

SAVI draws on the skills and contacts of sister programmes, particularly SPARC, to begin to educate non-government partners and SHoA members on relevant internal state government processes. These include budget and planning processes, the budget cycle, auditing and performance assessment, and the roles CS groups, media houses and SHoAs can and should play within these. This also benefits from the participation of acting and retired government officials in some advocacy partnerships, and from the civil service backgrounds of some of the SAVI state staff.

### **Stage 3: Triangle**

The next stage is to support partners to strengthen their external relations with other demand-side players in their State. This further strengthens their professional competence and public credibility, but also their collective bargaining power when it comes to engaging with state government. SAVI state teams help to break down barriers, build bridges, and strengthen or develop new working relationships between civil society partners, media personnel, and the SHoA. State teams support partners to establish triangular platforms bringing these different players together. The issues and processes around which SAVI-supported advocacy partnerships are formed often provide an ideal context for triggering these platforms and fostering working relationships through them, as each of the different players have a critical and complementary role to play in voicing citizens' concerns and influencing government action in relation to them.

Whilst SAVI is building the credibility, strength and understanding of diverse demand-side actors, sister programmes are helping the Executive Council, selected MDAs and frontline services to improve governance and service delivery. This involves reforms to state government policy and strategy, public financial management, public sector reform, and monitoring and evaluation. As part of these processes, sister programmes, particularly SPARC, are also helping state government staff consider the prospect and recognise the value of working with credible CS groups, media houses and the SHoA. This, more often than not, also entails helping government staff overcome their demand-side stereotypes, negative past experiences and fears of opening the floodgates to a sea of public criticism and political opposition. All programmes play their part in encouraging all players to be more receptive to working together constructively for the common good.

### **Stage 4: Bridge**

This stage represents the culmination of what we call the 'demonstration' process, and focuses on strengthening demand-side actors' relations with the State Government Executive Council. The aim is again to break down barriers and build constructive, appreciative engagement between non-government actors and the State Government Executive Council, MDAs and frontline services. Again, SAVI state teams work closely with their counterparts in SPARC. SPARC staff seek to open doors and create spaces within state government policymaking, planning and budgeting processes for citizen engagement. With assistance from SPARC, SAVI state teams support CS partners to engage with government in a politically savvy ways to influence responsive government action. This means:

- Appreciating the complexity of actors and processes involved in bridging demand- and supply-sides of governance.
- Understanding the policy, planning and budget processes they are seeking to influence, and identifying entry points.

- Forging alliances and working relations with key actors within the government.
- Building their case, framing their arguments and marshalling their evidence to influence change.
- Planning in incremental stages through learning by doing and reflection, focusing on short-term achievable targets and building their confidence and credibility to take on bigger challenges.
- Channelling citizen demands at all levels of government – from the governor and the Executive Council, through to ministries and local governments, down to frontline facilities and services – simultaneously and strategically, in a well co-ordinated manner, through various forms of demand- and supply-side partnership.

In many cases, advocacy partnerships expand at this stage to include government staff who are involved in the same processes of reform and see the value in collective action. Some include government staff with such qualities from the outset, which usually makes this stage easier.

These first four stages of the theory of change collectively form a model. They provide a simple road-map for non-government actors to become more effective agents of citizen voice through constructive engagement with state governments on issues and processes of mutual concern. Those that SAVI has supported in this way are achieving notable results influencing and assisting their state governments to be more responsive to citizens. The following two stages of the theory of change focus on replicating and scaling this up.

### **Stages 5 and 6: Wedge and Explosion**

Non-government, SHoA and government partners alike are encouraged to replicate and scale-up those processes of citizen engagement in governance that they have found to be effective. Building on these newfound working relationships, existing and new demand- and supply-side partnerships are inspired to proliferate, to address other policy issues and other governance processes greatly in need of reform. The ultimate aim is for state government responsiveness and accountability to citizens to become normal and embedded in the institutions of governance in each state, and infect the surrounding region.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

At *impact level*, we monitor the collective impact of all the DFID-funded State Level Programmes on state governance and service delivery. SAVI and SPARC both measure *incremental change over time in the overall responsiveness of state governments to their citizens* – with SAVI looking at this from a citizens' perspective, and SPARC more from an internal government perspective. SAVI additionally measures tangible progress in the passage and implementation in *key legislation* that underpins good governance at state level.

At outcome level, we monitor *tangible examples of state government action in response to citizen demand*. This includes changes in government policy, practice, budgets and implementation, with evidence of contribution by SAVI-supported partners – and the processes of citizen and partner engagement that contributed to and derived from these examples.

## **Citizen action is helping the government to tackle corruption in Jigawa State**

In Jigawa State, there are now many examples of citizen engagement resulting in better quality Government projects – a win-win for community members and the government. As an example, in 2012, the Babura Patriotic Movement (BPM) tracked and reported a deviation from the bill of quantities by contractors handling a roads project in their township. BPM's watchfulness saved the government over 47 million Naira (£188,000), and led to disciplinary action against responsible government officials. The community was rewarded with a 2.5 kilometre extension to the planned road and payment of compensation, and were invited by the government to assist in monitoring other infrastructure projects in their area. This activity has been stimulated and supported by the SAVI-supported Project Monitoring Partnership (PMP). When the SAVI programme started, the state team identified the Kaduna State Governor's commitment to quality projects as an entry point for constructive citizen engagement. They encouraged the PMP to involve community level partners and pursue issues affecting their own communities. They built partners' skills in simplified practical budget tracking, project monitoring, and evidence-based advocacy; encouraged partners to follow due process in channelling their requests to government; and to engage constructively with media organizations. In five years, the coalition has evolved into an effective and credible mentor to other CS groups and organisations, helping citizens and the state government to work together.

## **The Kaduna State Government is taking significant steps towards institutionalising citizen participation in planning processes**

The Kaduna State Government is becoming more accessible, transparent and accountable to citizens in the ways they deal with issues in the state. Encouraged by positive experiences of working with credible and constructive CS advocacy partnerships, the government has taken a number of significant steps towards institutionalising CS participation in government planning and budget monitoring processes. When the SAVI programme started in Kaduna State in 2008, citizens, CS groups and the media were not perceived by the state government as development partners and their involvement in state government policymaking, planning and monitoring processes was

minimal. In 2009, with support from SPARC, the state government introduced the Medium Term Sector Strategy (MTSS) planning processes across all sectors. Brokered by SAVI and SPARC, CS participation in MTSS processes began in 2009 with the education sector. In 2010, it extended to the health sector and in 2011 two more sectors were added. In 2012, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Bureau for Public Service Reform established a transparency and accountability platform, comprising government, media, CS and SHoA members, to look into ways of promoting greater transparency and accountability in the state. In 2013, ten CS organisations worked with Kaduna State Government shaping the State Development Plan for 2014-18. The ability of SAVI-supported CS groups to demonstrate high credibility and competence, and a non-confrontational approach, is neutralising the government's previous impression of CS as radical and unproductive. Their use of evidence and data to highlight gaps in government interventions and processes has gone a long way towards increasing the credibility of CS groups, and their influence on government thinking.

## **Joint action succeeds in getting health training institutions back on track in Katsina State**

In 2013, the Katsina State Government released 148 million Naira (£592,000) for equipping an independent School of Health and Midwifery, and recruited 20 new lecturers – in response to joint demand from CS groups, media and the SHoA. When the SAVI programme started in Katsina State in 2011, a group of CSOs supported by the PRRINN-MNCH programme, had been advocating for three years for improvements to the School of Midwifery to meet national standards and ensure the availability of professional health workers in the state. SAVI improved the effectiveness of this partnership by brokering working relationships with media houses, and the SHoA, to facilitate collective and complementary action. SAVI supported five episodes of a live phone-in radio programme enabling citizens to discuss the inadequate health workforce as a priority issue requiring government action. The SHoA also threw their weight behind this issue, advocating to the Katsina State Governor on the need to follow the recommendations of the National Council of Nurses and Midwives. Consensus from the public, media organizations, civil society groups and the SHoA led to a positive response by the state government.

## Practical tips and conclusions

- *Work with government not against it:* harnessing momentum for reform from inside the government as well as from outside.

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- *Draw on donor-funded programmes working within government* to assist in building bridges and mutual understanding – but avoid relying too heavily on donor-brokered policy, planning and budgeted processes.

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- *Involve government staff* in joint decision making and problem solving – and as early as possible to foster understanding and facilitate relations.

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- *Give credit where credit is due:* praise government for those things it does well, and encourage it to do better – publicly praise future commitments as well as past achievements.

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- *Recognise that this will be a long term process of change:* value incremental change in attitudes and behaviour towards more responsive and accountable governance.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Booth, D, and Chambers, V. (2014), The SAVI programme in Nigeria: Towards politically smart, locally led development, ODI Discussion Paper, London: Overseas Development Institute

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Andrews, M. (2013) *The Limits of Institutional Reform in Development: Changing Rules for Realistic Solutions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

# SAVI's 'knowledge tree'

The State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI) is a DFID-funded programme working in ten Nigerian states promoting a culture of constructive citizen engagement in responsive state level governance. Decision-making in SAVI is largely decentralised to state level, and state staff are supported and trained to be facilitators and mentors of locally driven change. Through providing behind the scenes support, SAVI is equipping groups of citizens, the media and state legislatures with the confidence and credibility to play their part in governance in politically smart and effective ways.

SAVI's Knowledge Tree depicts how the programme works. The roots are the core values that inform everything that SAVI does. The trunk is made up of four inter-related processes that give structure to all aspects of the programme. Left hand branches describe SAVI's working relationships with partners. Right hand branches concern internal functioning and relations with DFID.

This paper is one of a series explaining these different processes and relationships.

For more information, visit our website: [www.savi-nigeria.org/approach](http://www.savi-nigeria.org/approach)



SAVI supports groups of citizens, their elected state-level representatives and the media to be informed, credible and effective agents of citizen voice and accountability, able to play their part in promoting responsive, accountable and inclusive governance.

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