

Programme Design: a facilitated partnership approach to supporting citizen engagement in governance

In brief

SAVI supports citizen engagement in governance through a facilitated partnership approach, in contrast to the usual approach of grants to civil society organisations. The overall aim is to facilitate and support working relationships and processes of reform that are home-grown, self-sustaining and, after initial engagement, not dependent on external support. Our way of working resonates well with current influential debates¹ on 'thinking and working politically' and 'doing development differently'.

In-house teams of SAVI staff in each state, drawn from a mixture of government, civil society, media and State Houses of Assembly backgrounds, play a hands-on, behind the scenes role facilitating locally-driven change. They help to foster improved understanding and better working relationships between citizens, civil society groups, media organisations, State Houses of Assembly and government actors around issues of mutual concern and key democratic processes. SAVI staff support local partners through brokering relationships, mentoring on thinking and working politically, technical support and complementary seed funding. They work closely with sister DFID-funded programmes and other development partners working on governance and sector reform in the same states.

SAVI partners have complete flexibility to determine their own priorities and activities, as well as the kind of tailor-made assistance and mentoring they require.

SAVI's way of working has evolved during the course of the programme, and builds on learning from previous experience in Nigeria. Core members of SAVI's central technical team worked together on previous DFID-funded programmes in Nigeria evolving locally led, issue-based approaches to natural resource management. These programmes in turn drew on personal experiences of successful home-grown development in Nigeria – of communities successfully learning to solve their own problems in their own way – not driven by or supported by external funding.

Common to all of these initiatives has been a central concern with *citizen empowerment*. This is not in the sense of equipping citizens with external knowledge and skills, but helping local actors to appreciate, build and draw on their own potential. Team members have also drawn on stakeholder analysis and the value of multi-stakeholder partnerships – bringing diverse interest groups together around a common cause. More recently they have also looked to development entrepreneurship – championing and supporting local leadership, initiative and problem-solving.

SAVI's approach resonates well with current thinking on 'thinking and working politically' and 'doing development differently'. It also sidesteps some of the challenges associated with the usual ways of funding demand-side governance.

Thinking and working politically and doing development differently

There is a growing and influential body of development academics, policymakers and practitioners urging donor agencies and programmes to think and work more politically² and do development differently³. Development programmes focused on complex institutional reform processes all too easily produce best practice reforms and solutions that look good to an external funder, but don't really change anything on the ground. Too much focus on this type of result in turn leads those seeking donor support to focus on the types of reform that leverage funding, rather than the types of reform that make a real difference in their own context⁴ – and thus the problem becomes self-perpetuating.

There is a convergence of current thinking on the need for programmes to accommodate the messy and unplannable nature of change. Many influential analysts are now calling on donors to support local solutions to local problems; to broker constructive relations among key players to enable them to build on shared and complementary interests; to support learning by

doing, experimentation, reflection and adaptation; and to assist local actors to grapple with the messy realities of local power and politics in intelligent ways.

Challenges associated with demand-side governance

The usual Civil Society Organisation (CSO) grant funding approach to supporting demand-side governance presents some inherent challenges to grant recipients' willingness and ability to think and work politically as outlined above:

- Donor requirements for agreed planning frameworks, tight financial forecasting and delivery of pre-planned results often inadvertently encourages delivery of best practice blueprint results.
- Dependence on external funding tends to result in competitive rather than collaborative relationships between potential recipients, and in plans and activities shaped according to funding opportunities.
- Dependence on external funding also has the effect of undermining the credibility of grant recipients as local advocates, making them vulnerable to accusations of being 'donor driven' and unaccountable to local constituencies – and sustainability beyond the period of donor funding is always a challenge.

SAVI as a programme is actively participating in international debates on thinking and working politically, doing development differently, and empowerment and accountability/social accountability programming – sharing experiences and learning from others.

A facilitated partnership approach to programme design and delivery

Introduction

SAVI works with citizens, Civil Society (CS) groups, media organisations and State Houses of Assembly (SHoA) in ten Nigerian states⁵, helping them to play their part in supporting more responsive and accountable state governance. The aim is to enable local partners to experience processes and working relationships that both achieve results in terms of government responsiveness to their citizens, and that can be replicated and sustained without external donor support.

Programme design

The SAVI programme in each state is shaped by the SAVI state team (see below). These teams work within a set of broad guidelines provided by the programme's results framework and theory of change.

Results framework outline

Impact: The efficiency and effectiveness of selected state level governments' use of public resources is enhanced.

Outcome: SHoAs, civil society⁶, media and citizens demonstrate more effectiveness in demanding better performance from government and holding government to account.

Output 1: Civil society⁷ demonstrates a replicable and sustainable approach to issue-based policy advocacy and monitoring.

Output 2: Civil society⁸ demonstrates a replicable and sustainable approach to facilitating public involvement in government budget and planning processes.

Output 3: More open and inclusive systems of communication and improved understanding between citizens, civil society, media, SHoAs and government.

Output 4: Improved systems for transparency, public engagement and financial oversight in SHoAs.

Output 5: Other development partners take a more sustainable and replicable approach to strengthening voice and accountability.

Sister programmes

SAVI was established as part of a suite of DFID-funded State Level Programmes (SLPs) working on governance and sector reform. Other SLP programmes are SPARC (supporting supply-side governance reform), ESSPIN (education sector reform), PATHS2 (health sector reform) and GEMs (economic growth). The SLPs are designed to impact collectively on selected state governments' capacity to spend their own resources more efficiently and effectively. The impact statement is common across all the programmes.

Coordination and strategic alignment with the other SLP programmes has provided both important opportunities and significant challenges for SAVI and SAVI partners (see SAVI Approach Paper 10: Engaging State Governments). SAVI works particularly closely with the SPARC programme which supports supply-side governance reform in all of the same states. SPARC staff seek to open doors and create spaces within state government policy making, planning and budget processes for SAVI's demand-side partners to break down barriers and build bridges between citizens and government.

Programme delivery

State teams

In each state we establish a SAVI state team to facilitate locally-driven change. SAVI core values (see SAVI Approach Paper 1: Core Values) are used as the primary selection criteria to identify staff, usually from the state, who demonstrate aptitude to facilitate and mentor processes of citizen engagement in governance. We

deliberately select staff from a wide range of backgrounds, including staff who have previously worked for CSOs, government, donor-funded programmes, SHoAs and the media. State teams are the operational arm of SAVI – the equivalent of grantees in more conventional grant-funded programmes.

Training and supporting state teams

We invest heavily in building and supporting the capacity of state teams to undertake their role effectively, as well as to ensure consistency in approach and quality control across states. SAVI has a national team made up of resident technical advisers (TA) supported by a small team of international TA with specific expertise in amongst other things, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and value for money. National TA continually visit the states providing hands-on support to state teams. These visits provide a regular chance for state teams to stand back to reflect on their approach, major achievements and challenges, and to discuss next steps.

From the start of the SAVI programme, technical staff from all states have come together with national and international TA on a quarterly basis for technical group meetings (TGMs) where all the core elements of SAVI's way of working are – and continue to be – shaped, debated, and agreed. This participatory approach means that frontline staff own and understand processes put in place by the management, providing a critical grounding for on-going support. TGMs promote partnership and valuable shared learning between the different state teams and the national team.

Roles of state teams

State teams take responsibility for:

1. Facilitating participatory political economy processes
2. Brokering and supporting collective action and alliances
3. Nurturing the capacity and resourcefulness of local partners
4. Monitoring and reporting progress, results and learning

1. Facilitating participatory political economy processes

State teams facilitate participatory political economy processes from the beginning to the end of the programme. This includes:

- Analysing, understanding and continually reviewing the political economy of their state – and supporting partners to do likewise
- Identifying issues and partners to engage with and supporting partners to think and work politically (see SAVI Approach Paper 4: Thinking and Working Politically.)

2. Brokering and supporting collective action and alliances

State teams broker and facilitate alliances and partnerships on three levels in accordance with SAVI's theory of change

Issue-based Advocacy Partnerships

In each state, drawing on their participatory political economy analyses, state teams support the emergence of Advocacy Partnerships (APs) on issues (such as maternal and child health) or processes (such as citizen participation in state budget formulation) that are a priority both for the state government and for citizens. These APs are made up of individuals and organisations already engaged in and passionate about the identified issue, with knowledge and motivation to contribute to a collective approach to action. Membership is deliberately diverse. It can include professional CSOs, community level activists, retired civil servants, members of trade unions, representatives of faith-based organisations, academics and media personnel. Increasingly, government staff motivated to work collectively are also playing an active part. (See SAVI Approach Paper 6: Engaging Civil Society.)

Partnership between APs, media organisations and State Houses of Assembly

In all states, state teams form direct working relationships with SHoAs and select media organisations, as well as working with APs. They actively bring together these different partners through 'triangular platforms'. The norm in Nigeria is for CS groups, media personnel and SHoA politicians to work independently and regard

each other with mutual suspicion. SAVI's triangular platforms build bridges and working relationships between these demand-side players, foster partners' awareness of the complementarity of their roles as agents of citizen voice, and facilitate joint initiatives. Partners begin to realise through experience that they accomplish more by working together than they can separately.

Partnership between demand-side players and the state government

SAVI supports APs, media organisations and SHoA members to collaborate in engaging constructively with their state government on issues or processes of concern to citizens. State teams involve staff from sister DFID-funded programmes working with the state government to build demand-side partners' understanding of government policymaking, planning and budgeting processes, and to broker working relationships with government staff and departments.

3. Nurturing the capacity and resourcefulness of local partners

SAVI's primary objective is not to build partners' capacity through provision of external expertise and resources, but to bring out their own latent capabilities. State teams help partners to recognise and appreciate the resource in themselves – their knowledge, skills, networks and experience; to build on this basis; and to interconnect with, and become a resource to others. This involves:

Self-assessment processes

SAVI support to all partners – APs, SHoA and select media organisations – starts with facilitated Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) or Partnership Capacity Assessment (PCA) processes.

Partners score themselves on a range of aspects of their internal, programmatic and external functioning on the basis of descriptive benchmarks corresponding to the stages of SAVI's theory of change (see SAVI Approach Paper 3: Theory of Change). This exercise in itself builds partners' capacity. It reveals their strengths, opens their eyes to aspects of their functioning that could be improved, and raises their aspirations. It reveals the gap between who they are and who they have the potential to be.

Partners are then supported to generate their own organisational/partnership development plans based on the findings of the OCA or PCA – and from this, decide the areas in which they need support from SAVI. State teams provide mentoring and capacity building support either personally, or by identifying local, regional or sometimes national training providers for specific inputs. Partners periodically repeat OCAs and PCAs for their own reflection purposes as well as for monitoring progress against their development plans.

Mentoring and motivation

The content of SAVI training and mentoring support to partners is discussed in SAVI Approach Paper 4: Thinking and Working Politically. The approach to training and mentoring is also critical. In our own internal training and support to state teams, we aim to model an

empowering, hands-on, applied approach which state teams in turn apply to the support they provide to partners. Our aim is always to build staff and partners' confidence and conviction, as well as their knowledge and skills. In all cases and at all levels, capacity building support is provided in the following ways:

Characteristics of SAVI's empowerment approach to mentoring and capacity building

Behind the scenes

International and national TA provide support to state teams behind the scenes, and state teams in turn support partners behind the scenes. This is designed to empower state teams and partners to define, lead, and take credit for their own initiatives in their respective roles. An analogy often used in SAVI to explain the relationship of the national technical team to state teams, and state teams to partners, is 'you are the ones driving the bus, we are just the mechanics at the side of the road helping you on your way.' Staff and partners' confidence, credibility, legitimacy and sense of social responsibility are all gradually built through a process of learning by doing and self-discovery.

Hands-on and applied

TA support to state teams, and state teams' support to partners is provided in as practical, hands-on and applied a way as possible. Whilst a lot of support is provided through one-to-one mentoring relationships, classroom-based sessions are also important for new learning and for learning from each other. These always use participatory techniques where staff and partners' own experiences, responsibilities and challenges form the principle materials for discussion.

Everyone has something to contribute: everyone has something to learn

One of SAVI's core values, which is particularly important for the approach to learning, is sometimes expressed as 'everyone knows something and learns something'. The emphasis is on shared learning and discovery, as opposed to top-down communication of expertise. This is echoed throughout the partnership approach, where everyone's perspective, experience and contribution is valued.

Learning and reflection

We place great emphasis on learning through reflection. Staff and partners alike are encouraged continually to reflect on, analyse and learn from their decisions and actions, recognising the value of admitting to and learning from mistakes and from things that haven't worked as well as from successes. Others in turn benefit greatly from this, if they can then avoid making the same mistakes.

Seed funding

We provide our APs, our SHoA and media organisation partners with small amounts of funding to support their activities where needed, but on a cost-share and diminishing basis.

Self-reliance and sustainability are encouraged from the outset. The starting point is for partners to make best use of their existing resources. We support partners to be resourceful, to look inward rather than outward. AP members pool what they have between them to support activities they have collectively agreed. We encourage partners to draw on their credibility and value as a resource to others to generate pro-bono and in-kind support, as well as investment from locally dependable sources, including the state government.

SAVI seed funding is used for piloting new ideas and new working relationships. Once partners are able to demonstrate the value of their approach, this can be all they need to convince others to invest in it, even within their own parent organisations.

4. Monitoring and reporting progress, results and learning

State teams take full responsibility for monitoring and reporting partners' progress and results. Through these processes they also generate new learning for SAVI and partners. This involves:

- Monitoring and reporting partners' progress in partnership processes and political engagement.
- Monitoring and reporting the results that partners are achieving.
- Generating and reporting key learning – what works well, what not so well, and why.

Because SAVI does not provide partners with accountable grants, partners have no SAVI results frameworks, targets or reporting requirements. This gives them complete autonomy to decide their own priorities and activities. They also have complete flexibility to learn by doing as well as to adapt and change their strategy in response to opportunity, and as the situation they are seeking to influence shifts and changes. (See SAVI Approach Paper 5: Defining and Monitoring Results.)

Practical tips and conclusions

- One of the strengths of SAVI state teams is that they are made up of local staff from a wide variety of backgrounds, including government. They consequently have credibility with all their key stakeholders and are in a good position to broker relationships between these different players.
- Facilitated OCA and PCA processes have proved to be extremely effective in opening partners' eyes to their capacity strengths and gaps, and raising their aspirations towards becoming who they have the potential to be.
- Strength and effectiveness in partnerships derives from the complementary knowledge, skills and networks members bring to the table, and from what they achieve together, not from the resources they get from the table. As partners' confidence, effectiveness, credibility and visibility all gradually develop, they in turn become a valuable resource to others.
- Membership of all partnerships is fluid and flexible with complete ease of entry and exit. If someone feels they are no longer benefitting they can leave, and others can join at any time.
- Capacity is best built through practical, hands-on support, and learning by doing and reflection.
- Partners need maximum flexibility to apply their learning to their strategies and activities – enabling them to 'work with the grain' and adapt to constant changes in their situation.

Endnotes

¹ savinigeria.tumblr.com

² ibid

³ doingdevelopmentdifferently.com

⁴ ibid

⁵ Five from 2008: Enugu, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, and Lagos; three from 2011: Katsina, Yobe and Zamfara; and two from 2013: Anambra and Niger – all with national support provided from Abuja

⁶ Broadly interpreted to mean any non-government group or organisation representing citizens

⁷ Referring to the civil society partnerships supported by SAVI

⁸ Ditto

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



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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