

Engaging Civil Society

In brief

SAVI state teams provide support to civil society groups to become more effective agents of citizens' voice and public accountability, through a variety of mutually reinforcing interventions. These include:

- Hands-on support to demonstration civil society Advocacy Partnerships.
- Facilitating working partnerships between civil society Advocacy Partnerships, State Houses of Assembly and the media.
- Brokering working relationships between all of these non government actors and the state government.
- Facilitation at a more strategic level of a better enabling environment for citizen engagement in responsive state governance.

These initiatives demonstrate to local actors, through experience, ways of working that help citizens to influence state government action, and help state governments to be more responsive, inclusive and accountable to their citizens. The overall aim is to promote working relationships and processes of reform that are home-grown, self-sustaining and, not dependent on external support.

We use the term 'civil society' very broadly to refer to the many types of formal and informal groups and organisations outside government that represent citizens' interests.

Civil Society in Nigeria

Indigenous self-help community and religious organisations supporting local development have been widespread across Nigeria in rural and urban areas from time immemorial. However, in recent years, payment to community groups by politicians particularly during campaigns and elections, and by donors to assist in the achievement of their targets, has distorted incentives for engagement. Where these practices are widespread, this kind of community initiative and volunteerism is being substantially undermined if not eliminated.

The advent of civilian rule in Nigeria in 1999 ushered in an influx of international donors, and comparatively large funding became available for more formally constituted Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to play their part in promoting good governance. All Nigerian states have experienced a burgeoning of CSOs in the last 15 years and CSOs benefitting from donor funding constitute a diverse and vibrant new professional elite.

There are some highly knowledgeable and well-respected CSOs. However, public and government perceptions are generally fairly negative. CSOs are commonly seen as chasing donor money, and serious questions are asked about their legitimacy, credibility and accountability. Articulate urban-based individuals and groups, often with weak or no links to a grassroots constituency or membership base, have come to dominate the CSO landscape as self-appointed representatives of citizen voice. They are well able to adapt themselves to the latest donor trend, and meet complex donor planning and reporting requirements. Less well-connected civil society (CS) groups – even those with a large membership base, clear community links and significant potential to genuinely represent citizens' interests to government – tend to be left in the shade.

The impact of CSOs on governance at state level is variable but generally fairly limited. This reflects serious constraints in the political economy of individual states, but also limitations in the capacity and constitution of many CSOs themselves. 16 years into democracy, there is still limited experience of the kind of grounded, sophisticated and informed advocacy and influencing which is needed to make a targeted and useful contribution to policy debates and accountability processes.

Approach

Core principles

Our engagement with civil society is based on a number of key working principles:

- *Identifying and building on momentum for change:* SAVI state teams bring together and support civil society Advocacy Partnerships (APs) around issues or processes that are an existing priority both for the state government and for citizens. They take time to identify individuals and organisations from civil society to involve in these who have passion, credibility with citizens, and commitment to collective action.
- *Managing expectations from the outset:* From the initial point of engagement, SAVI state teams make clear that this is not the business as usual approach of providing grants to CSOs in support of donor-defined agendas. There is no call for proposals, no provision of accountable grants, and no pre-defined results or policy agenda.
- *Partners in the driving seat:* CS advocacy partners are themselves in the driving seat. They set their own agenda, and SAVI state teams assist them behind the scenes.
- *Citizen driven:* State teams continually reinforce CS advocacy partners' accountability to citizens, ensuring that their initiatives are grounded in and reflect citizens' views and priorities.
- *Supporting partners to be resourceful:* The strength and effectiveness of APs derives from the diverse skills, knowledge, networks and resources each partner brings to the table, and what they can achieve together.
- *Constructive approach to influencing government:* CS partners are supported to engage with their state government in practical, constructive ways, building up working relationships informally and behind the scenes. Many APs also include government staff willing to work together on reform.
- *Learning by doing:* CS partners are supported to develop achievable short-term plans, based on their capacity and entry points into influencing the state government. As their confidence, credibility, capacity and profile grows, so does their ambition. Over time, they take on greater challenges and achieve higher goals.

Core approach

In each state, SAVI state teams support civil society individuals and groups to become more effective agents of citizens' voice and public accountability, through a variety of mutually-reinforcing interventions. These include:

- Direct, hands-on support to demonstration APs formed by CS partners.
- Brokering working partnerships between State Houses of Assembly (SHoAs), media and CS APs, and between all of these groups and the state government.
- Strategic facilitation of an enabling environment for greater citizen engagement in state governance through, for example, engaging the support of local leaders, promoting gender and social inclusion, and supporting civic education initiatives.

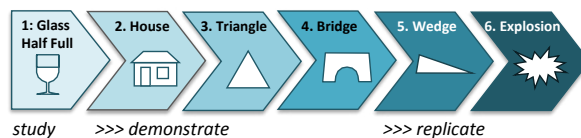
These demonstrate to local actors, through practical experience, ways of working that help citizens to influence state government action, and help the state government be more responsive, inclusive and accountable to their citizens. The overall aim is to facilitate and support working relationships and processes of reform that are home-grown, self-sustaining and, not dependent on external support.

In all cases, our engagement is planned, implemented and monitored in accordance with SAVI's core approach.

- SAVI Approach Paper 1: Core Values
- SAVI Approach Paper 2: Programme Design
- SAVI Approach Paper 3: Theory of Change
- SAVI Approach Paper 4: Thinking and Working Politically
- SAVI Approach Paper 5: Defining and Measuring Results

Engaging civil society through the stages of the SAVI theory of change

inception >>> implementation



Stage 1: Glass half full

The starting point for engagement with civil society is SAVI state teams' political economy analysis at the macro-level of the state government, extending to analysis of specific sectors and actors. Through these processes, state teams begin to identify: issues or processes to work on that are a priority for the state government; power dynamics, entry points and constraints to change; and credible civil society actors. (See SAVI Approach Paper 4: Thinking and Working Politically.)

Media-based public debates are used to directly engage with citizens at this early stage. SAVI

state teams play a behind the scenes role supporting CS and media groups to reach out to the public often through phone-in programmes to identify issues that are a public priority, and find concerned and active citizens at all levels who might form the core of an AP. We specifically look to work with individuals, groups and organisations in civil society that have strong links with citizens. Our aim is to draw together individuals and representatives of CS groups who are demonstrably credible and passionate about the issue or process in question, and are committed to work together with others to bring about change.

Building on the above, state teams encourage the formation of APs around issues or processes that are a stated priority both for the state government and for citizens. State teams either play a hands-on role in selecting partners to bring together, or work at a more strategic level supporting an enabling environment for such partnerships to form organically. APs have been established around issues such as maternal and child health, urban water supply, disability rights, and universal basic education. When there is some degree of political will in the state to be more responsive to citizens, partnerships have also been formed around processes such as participatory budgeting, constituency engagement and project monitoring.

State teams' support to APs starts with encouraging their own joint planning and activities. We have learned through experience not to jump in with support too quickly. State teams respond to evidence of initiative with hands-on support to help advocacy partners achieve their own objectives more effectively.

Some state teams support CS partners to establish broader CS platforms and networks at this early stage, to facilitate wider inclusion. Those directly involved in the APs can routinely draw upon and feed back to the wider group, facilitating rapid and diffuse replication of the lessons learnt and enabling the APs to draw on the expertise and resources of the wider group.

Stage 2: House

This next stage of SAVI's engagement with CS partners is helping them collectively to 'get their own house in order'. This starts with clarifying how SAVI works. There are no accountable grants in support of donor-defined agendas. Partners are themselves expected to be in the driving seat. They determine their own priorities and activities and SAVI supports them behind the scenes.

A critical tool used by state teams to manage CS partners' expectations to this end is Partnership Capacity Self-Assessment (PCA)¹. This helps partners analyse and reflect on their collective strengths, challenges and gaps. (See SAVI Approach Paper 2: Programme Design.) This 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. PCAs provide a basis for partners to determine their capacity building priorities, and to formulate strategic and operational work plans. Partners periodically repeat PCA exercises and revisit their work plans to reflect on their progress, identify new and emerging challenges, and help in framing ways forward.

This is a point at which CS partners would normally turn to a programme to grant fund their planned activities. In SAVI, partners are pointed in a different direction. Support is focused on helping partners to generate and harness their own resources from locally sustainable sources and reduce their dependence on unsustainable external forms of support like donor programmes. They are encouraged to look internally, to themselves, to their local setting, and to the possible partners all around them. Where needed, SAVI provides seed funding. This is used to support the take-off of partners' demonstration initiatives and to broker relations with the SHoA, media houses and other CS partnerships. It is also used at a more strategic level to promote a more enabling environment for citizen engagement in governance – fostering leadership and public understanding. This seed funding is carefully managed by SAVI state teams so as not to raise expectations, create dependency, or distort the incentives for CS partners' involvement. (See SAVI Approach Paper 12: Managing Programme Funds.)

Mentoring and capacity building support from state teams builds on PCA priorities and focuses on strengthening the collective professional competency of CS partners as agents of citizen voice. This includes encouraging partners to recognise the resource in themselves in terms of their existing knowledge, skills, and networks, and expand their partnerships to bring in new partners with the knowledge and skills they may need. Partners are supported to enhance their own inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability to citizens. They are also supported to think and work politically and introduced to stakeholder analysis and smarter planning tools to help them analyse and engage effectively with their political context and power dynamics at play. (See SAVI Approach Paper 4: Thinking and Working Politically.)

There are no training manuals or set training modules. Mentoring and training from SAVI state teams is context specific, behind the scenes, hands-on, practical, applied and participatory. Partners are encouraged to learn by doing and regular reflection. (See SAVI Approach Paper 2: Programme Design.)

Stage 3: Triangle

The next stage is to support CS partners to strengthen their external relations. SAVI state teams help them to break down existing barriers and build bridges, developing working relationships with other CS partnerships, with media houses, and with their SHoA. State teams support triangular platforms bringing these different players together.

Monitoring and evaluation

The advocacy partnerships formed by CS partners are supported either under SAVI's Output 1 – *issue-based policy advocacy and monitoring*, or under Output 2 –

public involvement in government budget and planning processes. Effectiveness is measured through a set of qualitative output indicators, with progress measured through moderated PCA reflection and planning processes.

<p>Output 1</p> <p>Civil society demonstrates a replicable and sustainable approach to issue-based policy advocacy and monitoring.</p>	<p>1.1 Level of strength of civil society partnerships in terms of their internal capacity, external relations and skills in policy advocacy and monitoring. (1=not strong, 5=very strong) <i>Source: Partnership Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI)</i></p> <p>1.2 Level of independence / dependence of these civil society partnerships on SAVI support. (1=very dependent, 5=very independent) <i>Source: Partnership Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI)</i></p> <p>1.3 Cumulative number of civil society partnerships emerging in other sub-sectors, sectors and states which have based key aspects of their approach on that of SAVI-supported partnerships. <i>Source: Partnership Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI) and results/replication diaries (kept by SAVI)</i></p>
<p>Output 2</p> <p>Civil society demonstrates a replicable and sustainable approach to facilitating public involvement in government budget and planning processes.</p>	<p>2.1 Level of strength of civil society partnerships in terms of their internal capacity, external relations and skills in facilitating public involvement in government budget and planning processes. (1=not strong, 5=very strong) <i>Source: Partnership Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI)</i></p> <p>2.2 Level of independence/dependence of these civil society partnerships on SAVI support. (1=very dependent, 5=very independent) <i>Source: Partnership Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI)</i></p> <p>2.3 Cumulative number of issue-based civil society partnerships supported by these budget and planning process partnerships through replication of key aspects of their approaches to facilitating public involvement. <i>Source: Partnership Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI) and results/replication diaries (kept by SAVI)</i></p>

Outcome and impact level indicators measure cumulative results deriving from all five programme outputs and all programme partners on the functionality of demand-side players and government responsiveness

(See SAVI Approach Paper 5: Defining and Measuring Results). SAVI's support to CS partners is designed to influence improvements in the functionality of civil society as a whole in the states where SAVI operates.

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 alike. As an example, in 2012, the Babura Patriotic Movement 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 was stimulated and supported by the SAVI-supported Project Monitoring Partnership (PMP). When the SAVI programme started, the state team identified the Governor of Jigawa'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. They encouraged partners to follow due process in channelling their requests to government and to engage constructively with media organisations. 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.

Disabled people successfully champion disability rights in Lagos State

In 2012, the SAVI-supported Lagos Civil Society Disability Policy Partnership (LCS DPP) succeeded in influencing the Lagos State House of Assembly to pass the Special Peoples' Law on disability rights, as its first ever private member's bill – through robust evidence, skilful lobbying, behind the scenes informal influencing, and engagement with the media. Since then, LCS DPP have worked as technical partner to LASODA (the Lagos State Office of Disability Affairs), which is the government office set up to implement the law, funded by the Lagos State Government. At the request of disability lobbying groups in neighbouring states, LCS DPP is also providing mentoring and practical support to help them achieve similar objectives. This activity

stems from identification by the SAVI Lagos State team of the Lagos State Governor's ambition for Lagos to recognise international standards on inclusion as an entry point for constructive citizen engagement. The SAVI team brought together LCS DPP, made up of individuals and groups who had previously been working separately and with limited impact. SAVI assisted partners to work together effectively, strategise in a politically intelligent way, frame realistic demands, work with the media and elected representatives, and engage constructively with the Lagos State Government.

Citizens and CS groups are influencing progress towards free maternal and child health services in Kaduna State

The Kaduna State Government is committed to providing free treatment for pregnant women and children under five. The Free Maternal and Child Health civil society advocacy partnership (FMCH) is making an active, valued and key contribution towards effective implementation – alongside government staff, development partners and citizens. Over time, the ability of the FMCH group to demonstrate high credibility and competence, and a non-confrontational approach, has neutralised the government's previous impression of CSOs as radical and unproductive.

When SAVI started in Kaduna State in 2008, the Kaduna State team identified the Kaduna State Governor's public commitment to free maternal and child health services as an entry point for constructive citizen engagement in governance. They brought together the FMCH partnership, made up of experienced CS organisations and individuals motivated to work together on a collective approach to action, and facilitated constructive working relations between the FMCH group and the media. SAVI's sister programmes supporting Kaduna State Government on health and governance – PATHS2 and SPARC – facilitated entry points for the FMCH group to work with government, and assisted FMCH partners to understand and engage in government policy, budgeting and planning processes. From the outset, FMCH partners sought to develop a strong evidence base and strong links with citizens. Their use of evidence and data to highlight gaps in government interventions and processes has increased their value to government and their influence on government thinking.

Practical tips and conclusions

- One of the biggest challenges in working with CS groups is reach out to groups that are genuinely grounded in citizens' interests and committed to collective action and reform. Taking the money off the table, managing expectations from the outset, and providing incentives that attract the right kind of CS actors are all part of this.
- The PCA is a very powerful tool – opening partners' eyes to their capacity strengths and gaps, building their confidence, and raising their aspirations towards becoming who they have the potential to be.
- Support to thinking and working politically transforms the way CS partners understand their state, their role and their potential to influence change, providing a critical basis for effective decision-making and collective action.
- Planning incrementally, learning by doing and self-discovery, and allowing CS partners flexibility to respond to context, momentum and opportunity are critical to progress.
- If the initial 'demonstration' process is well facilitated, with diminishing dependency on external support, the process of 'replication' occurs naturally through the momentum created by CS partners' own achievements, with little or no need of further external support.

Endnote

¹ savi-nigeria.org/resources

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.

Email connect@savi-nigeria.org **Web** www.savi-nigeria.org **Twitter** @savi_nigeria **Tel** 00 + (234) 803 575 7955

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The issues and processes around which SAVI-supported APs are formed often provide an ideal context for fostering working relationships between these various categories of demand-side player, as each has a critical and complementary role to play in voicing citizens' concerns and influencing government action. It is also common for media houses to initiate relationships with CS groups as they seek to build their own role in giving voice to citizens on issues of the day. Credible CS groups assist media programmes with technical knowledge and direct links to citizens. SHoA members and staff also reach out to credible CS groups to assist with initiating processes of constituency engagement and facilitating public hearings.

As each of these players begins to see greater value in the other, and benefits from these mutually supportive working relations, the confidence and credibility of CS partners grows. With this, their dependency on SAVI state teams – for encouragement and technical support – also begins to diminish.

Stage 4: Bridge

This next stage focuses on *relations with the executive arm of state government*. The aim is again to break down existing barriers and build constructive, appreciative engagement between credible demand-side players and the State Government Executive Council, ministries, departments and agencies, and frontline services. The issues and processes pursued by SAVI-supported advocacy partnerships and triangular platforms serve as credible entry points for constructive dialogue and collective action with the executive.

SAVI state teams work closely with their counterparts in SPARC – a DFID-funded sister programme working on supply-side governance reform. SPARC staff seek to open doors and create spaces within state government policymaking, planning and budgeting processes for demand-side players to engage more closely with the executive. SPARC state teams also play a direct role in supporting SAVI-supported CS partners to operate in more politically savvy ways in influencing government action. This means helping them to:

- Appreciate the complexity of actors and processes involved in bridging demand- and supply-sides of governance and breaking this unhelpful dichotomy.
- Understand the policy, planning and budget processes they are seeking to influence, and identify practical entry points.
- Forge alliances and working relations with key actors within state government.
- Build their case, frame their arguments and marshal their evidence to influence change.
- Plan 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.

- Channel citizen demands at all levels of government – from the governor and his executive council, through ministries and local governments, down to frontline facilities and services – simultaneously and strategically, in a well co-ordinated manner, through partnership.

Some APs include government actors from their outset. This helps to facilitate CS partners' engagement with and influence on government. In many cases, APs are expanded at this stage to include (more) government staff who are involved in the same processes of reform and see the value in collective action with CS partners.

These first four stages of the theory of change collectively form a model for CS partners to become more accountable, credible and effective agents of citizen voice. Many are now achieving notable results through these initial 'demonstration' partnerships, influencing governance reforms with direct benefits to citizens. The remaining two stages of the theory of change concern consolidation, replication and scaling-up.

Stage 5: Wedge

SAVI state teams encourage CS partners to strengthen their relationships with each other, and to extend and adapt the new approaches they have found to be effective to their lobbying work on other issues, in other sectors, in other regions of their state and in neighbouring states. They are encouraged to tell others, to share their story and their learning. The effectiveness of these CS partners in achieving results attracts the attention of other civil society and government actors wanting to know how the business of governance can be done differently, more effectively and in a self-sustaining way. By this stage, SAVI's provision of support to CS partners is limited to essential backstopping technical advice, mentoring on adapting and sharing their learning and other forms of encouragement where required, with little or no funding support. Activities are being driven almost entirely through the resourcefulness of the partners. Replication takes place naturally, through the momentum created by CS partners' own achievements, with minimal support from SAVI.

Stage 6: Explosion

In the final stage of the theory of change, CS partners are encouraged to push forward to a critical mass of citizens, civil society groups, media houses, SHoA members and staff and government officials actively engaged in participatory, responsive and inclusive governance. This is about further spreading the word, reinforcing the key message, demonstrating to others the benefits of better ways of working, and engaging the interest of civil society and government coordinating agencies to showcase demonstrations and champion change. The ultimate aim here is for these better ways of working to become the norm: the new 'business as usual'.