

# Engaging the Media

## In brief

The overall aim of SAVI engagement with the media is for media representation of citizens' interests to become normal, and play its part in helping state governments to be more responsive, inclusive and accountable to their citizens. Media partners – individual media personnel and selected media houses – are supported to be more effective agents of citizens' voice and public accountability, through a variety of mutually reinforcing interventions. These include hands-on support to selected media partners; involvement of media personnel in advocacy partnerships; and strategic facilitation of improved working relations between government and non-government actors, involving the media as a critical and central player.

These interventions illustrate to the media, through practical experience, ways in which they can step up to their constitutional role to give voice to citizens and hold government to account. They also demonstrate ways of doing this that are locally led, politically smart and can be sustained without the need for external funding.

# Context

The role of the media – press, radio, television and other mass media agencies – in upholding responsive and accountable government in Nigeria is specified in the Nigerian constitution. However, whilst the situation in different states varies greatly, in the majority, media houses tend to represent the voice of government rather than the voice of citizens. They also tend to view engagement with civil society activists, who are often highly critical of government, as compromising. In a minority of states, where independent media houses are more established, the media often have some coverage and engagement with citizens on pertinent issues of the day but generally on a fairly superficial basis. Investigative journalism is in its infancy.

Donor-funded programmes tend to engage with media houses as a tool to communicate their own messages to the public, rather than seeking to develop the role of the media as an agent in its own right. Large donor-funded programmes tend to engage with media

houses as a tool to communicate their own messages to the public, rather than seeking to develop the role of the media as an agent in its own right. Thus 'media and communications' budgets are widely used to pay media stations to deliver information messages and promote the development programme and sometimes equipment is provided to facilitate this.

Civil society organisations (CSOs), who also benefit from donor funding, are widely seen by the media as being paid to implement donor agendas and consequently charged high rates for media exposure.

Donor money contributes to a situation where media stations are dominated by 'pay to play'. Media houses, in common with CSOs, are widely seen by the Nigerian public as chasing money – and there is little media-initiated constructive engagement or investigative reporting involving citizens, CS groups or state governments.

# Approach

## Core principles

Our engagement with the media is based on a number of key working principles.

- *Identifying and building on existing momentum for change.* SAVI state teams take time to identify media houses and media personnel who are already on board with at least some aspects of promoting citizen voice and responsive government, and build their skills and networks to do this more effectively.
- *Helping the media to rise up to their constitutional role.* We encourage media players to look beyond what's in it for them. Instead they are encouraged to identify as and with citizens of their state, rise up to their powerful potential to provide voice to citizens, and play their part in promoting more responsive and accountable state governance for the benefit of all.
- *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 funding media houses to deliver donor agendas.
- *Partners in the driving seat.* SAVI media partners are themselves in the driving seat. They set their own agenda – sometimes in consultation with CS groups, SHoA or government representatives. SAVI state teams assist them behind the scenes through helping them to harness their own potential, build their knowledge and skills, broker their working relationships, and through providing seed funding for their pilot initiatives.
- *Formal and informal engagement.* SAVI state teams build relationships with media personnel and organisations 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. Partners are encouraged to adopt the same approach to their engagement with other players.
- *Constructive approach to influencing government.* Media partners are supported to engage with their state government in practical, constructive ways, building up working relationships informally and behind the scenes.

## Core approach

In each state, SAVI state teams provide support to the media 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 select government run and private media houses.
- Participation of media personnel in Advocacy Partnerships (APs).
- Brokering working partnerships between State Houses of Assembly (SHoA), media and CS groups, and between all of these groups and the state government.
- Strategic facilitation of an enabling environment for more effective working relationships between government and non-government actors, and effective citizen engagement in responsive state governance. Examples include engaging the support of local leaders, promoting gender and social inclusion, and supporting civic education initiatives.

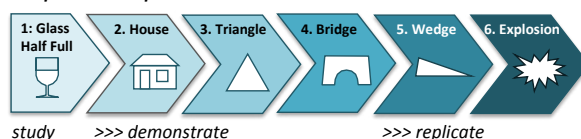
All these demonstrate to media players, through practical experience, how they can step up to their constitutional role to give voice to citizens and hold government to account, in ways which are locally led, politically smart and can be sustained without the need for external funding. The overall aim is for media representation of citizens' interests to become normal, and to play an on-going critical part in promoting a more responsive and accountable relationship between Nigerian state governments and their citizens.

Support to media partners is planned, implemented and monitored in accordance with SAVI's core approach and theory of change:

- 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

## Support to the media at each stage of the theory of change

*inception >>> implementation*



### Stage 1: Glass half full

The starting point for engagement with the media is SAVI state teams' political economy analysis (PEA) at the macro-level of the state,

extending to analysis of specific sectors and actors. This includes analysis of the current functioning of media houses and personnel in each state. State teams map key media houses and individuals, and find out who is out there, doing what and how in relation to citizen voice. State teams reach out to the public through interactive media to find out directly from citizens the issues that concern them, and who in the media is already active on these issues and credible in their eyes.

These analyses and discussions help state teams identify potential media partners who are reform-minded, committed to giving voice to citizens, and possibly already working with citizens, civil society groups or the SHoA. State teams establish partnership arrangements with select media houses, and encourage individual media personnel to get involved in SAVI-supported APs. In some states media personnel have also been supported to come together to establish their own informal media (voice and accountability) platforms to facilitate sharing of ideas, collective action and learning.

### **Stage 2: House**

This next stage of SAVI's direct engagement with media partners is helping them to get their own house in order. This starts with clarifying that this is not the business as usual approach of funding media houses to deliver donor agendas. Partners are themselves expected to be in the driving seat. They are expected to determine their own priorities and activities and SAVI supports them from behind the scenes.

A critical tool used by state teams to manage media partners' expectations to this end is the media Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA)<sup>1</sup>. This helps partners in selected media houses to analyse and reflect on their strengths, challenges and gaps. Partnership Capacity Assessments (PCAs) are used in the same way with APs, many of which include media personnel. (See SAVI Approach Paper 6: Engaging with Civil Society.)

These self-assessment exercises in themselves build capacity. They reveal to partners their strengths, open their eyes to aspects of their functioning that could be improved, and raise their aspirations. They reveal the gap between who they are and who they have the potential to be. OCAs and PCAs provide a basis for partners to determine their capacity building priorities, and to formulate strategic and operational work plans. Partners periodically repeat these exercises and revisit their work plans to reflect on their progress, identify new and emerging challenges, and help in framing ways forward.

This is the point at which some media partners might look to a donor programme to fund or even define their planned activities, since this is the relationship they have become accustomed to. In SAVI, partners are pointed in a different direction. They are encouraged to

look internally, to themselves, to their local setting, to the possible partners all around them for the resources they need to achieve their planned objectives. SAVI state teams manage media partners expectations of the support they can get from SAVI, which is geared towards helping them to generate and harness their own resources from locally sustainable sources and reduce their dependence on unsustainable external forms of support (like donor programmes).

Where needed, SAVI provides seed funding to support the take-off of demonstration initiatives. This might include brokering relations with SHoAs, CS groups and other media houses; and activities that create a better enabling environment for government and non-government actors to work together, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation. These seed funds are carefully managed by SAVI state teams so as not to raise expectations, create dependency, or distort the incentives for partners' involvement in these reform processes. (See SAVI Approach Paper 12: Managing Funds.)

Mentoring and capacity building support from SAVI state teams builds on OCA/PCA priorities and focuses on strengthening the professional competency of media partners as agents of citizen voice. This includes clarifying and underpinning the constitutional role of the media in relation to state governance, and the importance and power of the media as a channel for the voice of citizens. SAVI supports media partners to:

- Enlighten the public on the roles and responsibilities of different arms of government – especially the SHoA and those of citizens themselves.
- Recognise the meaning and importance of gender and social inclusion.
- Open up their space to public participation.
- Build their skills in evidence-based and in-depth reportage.

A critical part of support to media houses is helping them to secure their own autonomy and independence. Lack of control over their own budgets often leaves media houses with no option but 'pay to play' or dependence on government and external donors. Establishing control over their own financing is a first for many partners (particularly those which are government funded) and critical in enabling them to shape their own role in citizen engagement and responsive governance. Where they need it, SAVI state teams help media partners source local expertise to assist them with developing their own long term strategic plans and annual budgeted operational plans. They are encouraged to shape their own organisational development agenda, include in their plans and budget the training and equipment they need, and submit these plans as part of annual government budget processes, or in the case of

private media houses to their management for annual approval. With their own planned and approved budget, the potential for government interference becomes less, and media houses can begin to shape and implement their own agenda.

**Stage 3: Triangle**

The next stage is to support those media partners making good progress to strengthen their external relations. SAVI state teams help them to break down barriers, build bridges, and develop working relationships with civil society APs and the SHoA. State teams support the set up of triangular platforms bringing these different front line staff together. Some states have also set up high level triangular platforms making links at senior managerial/strategic level.

The issues and processes around which SAVI-supported APs are formed often provide an ideal context for fostering these working relationships, as each player 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.

Media partners typically investigate, publicise and engage citizens in debate on issues supported by APs. They very often provide free or highly concessionary air time to SAVI-supported CS groups known to be speaking on behalf of citizens in the state. As this becomes the norm, these same media partners start to reach out to others in civil society to provide a similar mutually beneficial non-commercial public service.

**Stage 4: Bridge**

This stage focuses on *external relations with the executive arm of state government*. The aim is again to break down barriers that exist and build constructive, appreciative engagement – in this case between credible demand-side players and the State Government Executive Council, ministries, departments and agencies, and frontline services. Media partners play a critical role in providing space on television, radio and through social media to bring government staff together with citizens, building mutual understanding and trust, enabling citizens directly to influence government action.

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

The above four stages form the focus of SAVI’s direct and gradually diminishing support to media partners to realise their own potential. Stage five is about other media houses and personnel being inspired by, learning from, and replicating effective approaches to providing a voice for citizens and influencing the response of state government. In many states this is facilitated through the media (voice and accountability) platforms established by individual media personnel. The public nature of media activity, together with healthy rivalry and collaboration

that exists in many states, and their ‘trending’ or ‘band-wagon’ effect, all make for fertile ground for replication of media partners successful demonstration initiatives. Stage six is about institutionalising the role of the media as an effective agent of citizen voice in each state, through their partnerships with CS groups, the SHoA and reform-minded actors in government, all contributing to a critical mass for change ushering in a new era of more responsive and accountable state governance.

**Monitoring and evaluation**

The effectiveness of SAVI support to media partners is measured directly through two media-related output indicators (see below), as well as through the indicators relating to APs, the vast majority of which include media personnel.

<p><b>Output 3</b></p> <p>More open and inclusive systems of communication and improved understanding between citizens, CS, media, SHoA and government</p>	<p><b>3.3</b> Improvements in public understanding of the expected roles and responsibilities of civil society, the media, SHoA, government and citizens in improving voice and accountability.</p> <p><i>Source: Self-administered monitoring of the effectiveness of their own civic education programmes (audience surveys) by SAVI’s civil society/media partners</i></p>
	<p><b>3.4</b> Level of strength of SAVI supported media partners in terms of their internal capacity, external relations and programming skills in support of local partners achievement of their objectives under all five Outputs.</p> <p><i>Source: Media Organisational Capacity Self-Assessment and SAVI media watch</i></p>

SAVI’s outcome and impact level indicators measure cumulative results deriving from all five programme outputs, and the activities of all partners, on the functionality of demand-side players and government responsiveness. One of these indicators specifically measures media functionality – for the whole of the media in a given state – from a voice and accountability perspective. (See SAVI Approach Paper 5: Defining and Measuring Results.)



## **Radio stations play their part in influencing state government spending on health worker training in Katsina State**

In 2013, the Katsina State Government released 148 million Naira for equipping a new independent School of Health and Midwifery and recruiting 20 new lecturers. This was in response to the combined voices of citizens, CS groups, media houses and SHoA representatives all requesting action. A donor-funded CS group had already been campaigning for three years for government action on health training, without success. This was after the Katsina State Government had merged the School of Nursing and Midwifery with the College of Health Technology, resulting in insufficient staff, equipment and lecture halls, and loss of national accreditation. Critical in stimulating a changed response from government was citizen voice. SAVI linked the existing CS advocacy group with the SHoA and with media partners – Companion FM and Katsina State Radio. For the first time, partners collectively organised a phone-in programme engaging the public in live debate over five programmes about health and health priorities in the state, and this was instrumental in influencing government action.

## **Radio stations are linking with CS groups in Enugu State, giving voice to citizens on issues of the day**

In Enugu State, SAVI CS partners are now regularly working with a number of radio and TV phone-in programmes giving a voice to citizens on pertinent issues of the day and providing a platform for constructive debate with government. This partnership is already one that is sustainable, not instigated by or dependent on external funding, with each party constituting an invaluable resource for the other. It represents a significant step change from the starting point where media houses tended to represent the voice of government, and viewed engagement with civil society activists as compromising. The approach now taken was inspired by *Nigeria Go Better*, a pioneering radio programme run by the Federal Radio Corporation, and funded by SAVI as a pilot. This programme brought together

live on air government staff and credible CS representatives to discuss issues affecting citizens in the state, and invited citizens to phone in with questions and comments. The approach was 'constructive engagement' with the government, not the kind of confrontational approach that had caused trouble for media stations in the past. This has proved popular with radio and TV stations, citizens and the government and is providing valuable opportunities for citizen engagement and government responsiveness.

## **Yobe Broadcasting Corporation strengthening its capacity to provide a voice for citizens in the State**

In 2013, the Yobe State Broadcasting Corporation (YBC) presented its own annual budget to the Yobe State Government for the first time. This was approved and released in full and replaced the previous non-negotiated quarterly budgets. The SAVI-facilitated Organisational Capacity Assessment process had raised the awareness of YBC management and staff that part of their constitutional role is to be a voice for citizens in the state – and provide a platform for government to respond to citizens' concerns. With SAVI support, YBC management took the initiative to develop their own strategic and operational plans to exercise more control over their own function and development. In accordance with their new operational plan, YBC have initiated a magazine programme on sectoral issues. Producers are consciously trying to promote public engagement, with three dedicated phone lines, as well as encouragement to communication by letter and text. The programme is taking a deliberately non-confrontational stance drawing attention to what the government has done well, as well as highlighting issues and areas where citizens are identifying challenges and gaps. Having previously been wholly based in the capital, YBC has also posted five reporters to different regions of the Yobe State to extend its reach and engagement with citizens. These initiatives have already succeeded in stimulating debate and constructive action and responsiveness from government.

## Practical tips and conclusions

- Building bridges and working relationships between *credible* CS groups and media stations *motivated to provide a platform for citizen voice* has proved very effective. Each constitutes a critical resource for the other with civil society providing resource people and content, and media providing publicity and opportunities for direct public engagement.
- Changing media mind-sets away from being paid to implement donor agendas, and 'pay to play', requires careful expectation management from the outset. Engaging the right organisations and personnel with some level of personal motivation is critical, as is relating to them as partners, not as sub-contractors.
- The self-administered OCA is a very powerful tool, raising participants' aspirations to what they have the potential to be and enabling them to develop their own agenda for change. Training is often highly welcomed. Many media staff have received no training in their entire professional career, and hugely welcome and make good use of new knowledge, skills and networks.
- Supporting media houses to gain control and influence over at least some of their own budgets has been instrumental in enabling them to assert their autonomy and determine their own agenda.
- Engaging with the senior management of media houses has proved very effective in ramping up impact and institutionalising change.

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> [savi-nigeria.org/resources](http://savi-nigeria.org/resources)

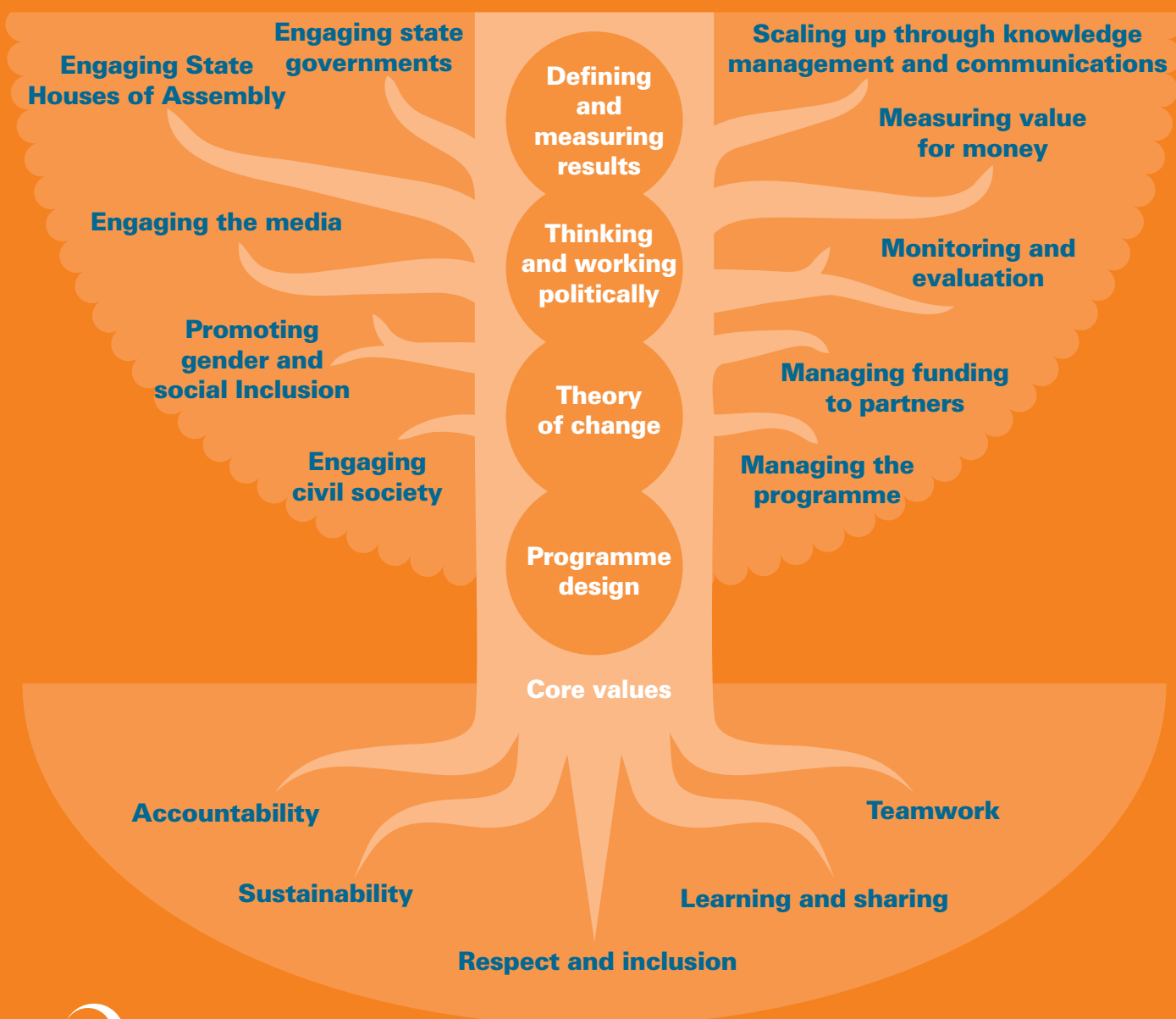
# SAVI's 'knowledge tree'

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](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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