

# Engaging State Houses of Assembly

## In brief

The overall aim of SAVI engagement with State Houses of Assembly is to promote lasting reforms that are not dependent on external funding and which promote an increasingly more responsive and accountable relationship between Nigerian state governments and their citizens.

State Houses of Assembly are supported to be more effective agents of citizen voice and public accountability, demanding better performance from the executive arm of state government on behalf of citizens and holding the executive to account. Our support is designed to:

- Facilitate State Houses of Assembly independence from the State Executive.
- Build linkages between elected members and citizens.
- Strengthen members' skills and systems in budget analysis and oversight.
- Broker and support complementary work and working relationships between elected members and media and civil society groups representing citizens' interests.

We focus our support on issues and processes that elected members themselves prioritise and drive forward, and in which they invest their own resources.

# Context

Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, after years of military dictatorship. It has a federal system of government with significant powers devolved to state level, and each state has its own State House of Assembly (SHoA). SHoAs have been in place and new members elected four times since 1999, but in most states they remain weak institutions facing a plethora of challenges. The SHoA is generally funded directly by the State Government Executive and many still go cap in hand to the Executive every time they need to fund planned activities. In many states, the SHoA is regarded as little more than a rubber stamp for the governor and Executive. Relations between the

SHoA, civil society (CS) groups and the media are generally characterised by mutual suspicion.

Most SHoAs have benefitted from programmes of government funded and/or donor-supported capacity building. These tend to follow a standard approach of pre-determined training courses for members, exchange visits to other countries, and provision of equipment and grants. In some cases donor programmes use SHoAs to push through their own priority legislation, without seeking to develop SHoA capacities more holistically. In some states, elected SHoA members, and the civil service staff supporting them, have received no formal training or guidance at all.

## Core principles

SAVI's work with SHoAs is based on a number of key working principles:

- *Identifying and building on existing momentum for change.* State teams take time to get to know the SHoA, with the aim of identifying reform-minded support staff and members, understanding entry points and blockages to reform, and building on existing momentum for change.
- *Helping the staff and members to rise up to their constitutional role.* We encourage Honourable Members to look beyond what's in it for them. Instead, they are encouraged, with the support of SHoA staff, to identify as and with citizens of their state. This means strengthening their role and legitimacy as agents of citizen voice, asserting their independence from the State Government Executive, influencing the executive arms of state government and holding them to account.
- *Managing expectations from the outset.* From the initial point of engagement, SAVI state teams manage expectations and make clear that this is not the business as usual approach of providing training packages, exchange visits and equipment, or funding SHoAs to deliver donor prioritised legislation.
- *SHoA partners in the driving seat.* SHoA staff and members are supported to develop their own reform agenda. SAVI state teams assist them behind the scenes to implement this through building their knowledge and skills, brokering working relationships, and providing seed funding for pilot initiatives.
- *SHoA members investing their own resources in the changes they prioritise.* SAVI promotes SHoA financial independence from the Executive and encourages members to invest their own resources in building the systems and capacities that they themselves prioritise.
- *Formal and informal engagement.* SAVI staff build relationships with SHoA staff and members 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. This results in informal cordial relationships with support staff and members.
- *Strategic and sustained support.* SAVI's engagement with SHoAs is long term and on-going. We recognise that the challenges facing SHoAs are complex, and processes of change will be incremental and long-term.

## Core approach

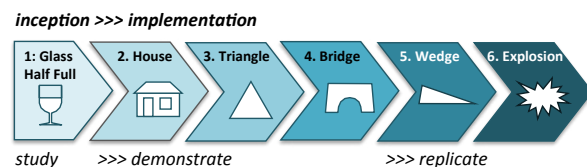
In all SAVI's state programmes, state teams directly engage with and support the SHoA. The overall aim is to support reform processes that

are prioritised and managed by SHoA staff and members, and have the potential to be sustained without external funding.

Support to SHoA staff and elected members 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 SHoAs at each stage of the theory of change



### Stage 1: Glass half full

The starting point for engagement with SHoAs is SAVI state teams' political economy analysis (PEA) of the functioning of the SHoA. Through formal and informal discussions with the support staff and with present and former members of the House, SAVI staff investigate relations between the House and the Executive, party affiliations, power relations, and the functionality of House systems and processes. The aim is to understand the dynamics, complexities and challenges, and determine opportunities, change agents and entry points for processes of change.

Through these initial entry points, SAVI attempts to establish a basis for negotiating programme support. To avoid raising expectations, this is quietly handled behind the scenes by the SAVI state team with the Clerk and Speaker of the House, with no fanfare and as little involvement of SAVI management and donor representatives as possible. This approach has been easier in the five newer SAVI states, where the SAVI started in 2011 or 2013. These state teams have been able to build on the reputation SAVI has established in the original five states (where SAVI started in 2008), developing trust and understanding of SAVI's intentions much more quickly.

### Stage 2: House

This first stage of SAVI's programme of support to SHoAs focuses on helping them to 'get their own house in order'. This starts with expectation management – clarifying that this is not the business as usual approach of providing equipment, funding exchange visits, providing training, or paying SHoA members to deliver donor prioritised legislation. SHoA staff and members are

themselves expected to be in the driving seat. They are expected to determine their own priorities and activities – with SAVI providing support from behind the scenes.

The SHoA Organisational Capacity Self-Assessment (OCA) is a critical tool to this end. It helps to manage the whole House's expectations of SAVI, as well as enable staff and members to analyse and reflect on their strengths, challenges and gaps. The OCA tool, initially facilitated by SAVI staff, asks House staff and members collectively to rate the functionality of their own SHoA, on the basis of described stages of change, in three areas: internal processes, external relations, and oversight functions. This enables them to reflect on their own progress, engages their interest and attention, helps them make decisions on priorities for improvements, and develop a work plan accordingly. Some refer to this as their 'house development plan' or 'legislative term agenda'. The OCA exercise – which also serves as a baseline and means of measuring progress against SAVI indicators – is repeated annually and work plans are reviewed as part of this. (See SAVI Approach Paper 2: Programme Design.)

Mentoring and capacity building support from SAVI builds on collectively agreed priorities. Training is not rolled out as a package – demand and priorities have to come from SHoA support staff and members, and solutions are tailor-made. Each House has different challenges and pressure points. Interest in a reform agenda can be quick or slow to develop, sometimes requiring careful building of relationships and appreciation of importance over time. As much as possible, SAVI state teams also try to harness and direct demands emerging from civil society and media partners towards the House, to trigger or motivate reforms.

This is the point at which SHoA staff and members 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, they are encouraged to look internally for the resources they need to achieve their own development, drawing inspiration from other states and from the National Assembly. Unlike the civil society groups and many of the media houses SAVI engages with, SHoAs have recourse to the state budget to fund their own activities. SAVI supports SHoAs in establishing their independence from the State Government Executive and securing control over their own budget.

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

Initial capacity building support from SAVI tends to focus on strengthening *internal SHoA relations and systems*.

Activities vary with context, but can involve:

- Strengthening members' understanding of their own roles and responsibilities within the House, their appreciation and effective use of internal rules and systems, and the staff who manage them. SAVI supports SHoA staff to provide much of this information, building their profile, enhancing members respect for them, and ensuring continuity between elected assemblies.
- Strengthening the financial independence of the House from the executive arm of government, through establishment of their own House Service Commission with its own budget and staff.
- Strengthening the mechanisms for members to engage with the general public, including public access to information through public hearings and publication of House proceedings.
- Strengthening members' capacity to engage with the executive arm of government, including scrutinising public financial documents and enriching annual state budget processes.

### **Stage 3: Triangle**

As internal House functions improve, the focus of SAVI support shifts to strengthening *external relations* – building members' engagement with their constituents and with the general public. This is not something the House can easily do alone. It requires first breaking down barriers and building bridges with CS groups and media organisations, which are also representing citizens' interests and seeking to influence the state government. Mutual suspicion and mistrust needs to give way to mutual respect and benefits. Assistance from SAVI is driven by SHoA members' interests and priorities, as well as the supportive capacity of their staff. SAVI support can involve:

- Strengthening the capacity of members to engage with the public through effective use of mechanisms such as constituency offices, public hearings, their Civil Society Liaison Desk and Media Desk. Where these mechanisms are weak, the focus is on strengthening them.
- Brokering linkages with SAVI-supported Advocacy Partnerships (APs) working on issues-based policy advocacy, monitoring and budget tracking.
- Brokering linkages with SAVI-supported media houses and civil society groups facilitating public participation in governance processes through interactive programming and civic education – including improving public understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the SHoA.

### **Stage 4: Bridge**

Building on the strength of their external relations, this next stage focuses on strengthening House relations with the Government Executive. This involves enhancing the independence of the SHoA from the Executive and systematising its role in shaping legislation and overseeing the work of the Executive. Support can include:

- Strengthening the capacity of members to engage with the executive arm of government through effective use of internal mechanisms such as House sub-committees aligned to government ministries, departments and agencies; the Legislative Budget and Research Office; and the Public Petitions Sub-Committee – and where these mechanisms are weak, the focus is on strengthening them.
- Strengthening members’ role in financial oversight and annual budget scrutiny, with the support of their Legislative Budget and Research Office.
- Developing working relationships between individual members and APs seeking to influence particular government policy, budget and planning processes.

These first four stages of the theory of change form the focus of SAVI’s direct support. Many SHoAs are now achieving notable reform and progress – including achieving greater independence from the state executive; seeking out and representing public concerns; exercising greater scrutiny over state government budgets; and working together with credible civil society groups and media houses to influence state government decisions on behalf of citizens and hold the Executive to account. The remaining two stages are about institutionalising these reforms and scaling-up this progress towards greater government responsiveness and accountability to citizens.

### Stage 5: Wedge

At this stage, support is focussed on sustaining the developments made by each House, scaling them up and replicating them in other states. State level changes are reinforced through:

- Consolidation of relations with civil society, the media and citizens through House support to other APs working on other policy issues, annual reinforcement of citizens engagement in budget processes, and regular constituency engagement by members.
- Consolidation of internal processes for induction of new House members, for review of House standing rules, committee structure and management systems, human resource utilisation and long-term development planning.
- Engagement with national platforms including the Conference of Speakers, Forum of Clerks, National Budget and Research Office and other bodies within the National Assembly.
- Strengthening of regional ties between House staff and members and their counterparts in neighbouring states, as well as cross-state sharing and learning between SAVI-supported SHoAs.
- Passage and implementation of legislation enshrining good governance – particular attention is paid to four key areas of legislation: fiscal responsibility, public procurement, freedom of information, and SHoA autonomy.

### Stage 6: Explosion

This final stage is about connecting all the demonstrable changes in the functionality of state level agents of citizens’ voice – within civil society, the media and the SHoA – and acts of government responsiveness, to form a critical mass for change. Here the House has a key role to play. It provides a focal space to make the connections between all these changes, bringing together their leading agents, and enshrining common objectives in legislation which institutionalises more responsive and accountable forms of state governance.

### Defining and measuring results

The effectiveness of SAVI support to SHoAs is measured directly through a set of qualitative output indicators, with progress measured through moderated OCA reflection and assessment processes.

<b>Output 4</b> Improved systems for transparency, public engagement and financial oversight in State Houses of Assembly (SHoA).	<b>4.1</b> Level of quality of systems for recruitment and retention of house support staff and aides. (1=very weak, 5=very strong) <i>Source: SHoA Organisational Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI)</i>
	<b>4.2</b> Level of quality of systems for induction and monitoring of compliance with house rules and procedures. (1=very weak, 5=very strong) <i>Source: SHoA Organisational Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI)</i>
	<b>4.3</b> Level of quality of systems for public access to information and processes in the house and representation of public interests by members. (1=very weak, 5=very strong) <i>Source: SHoA Organisational Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI)</i>
	<b>4.4</b> Level of quality of systems for scrutinizing public financial documents in the house. (1=very weak, 5=very strong) <i>Source: SHoA Organisational Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI)</i>
	<b>4.5</b> Cumulative number of house committees and SHoAs improving the quality of their systems based on approaches initially demonstrated with SAVI support. <i>Source: SHoA Organisational Capacity Self-Assessment (facilitated by SAVI) and result/replication diaries (kept by SAVI)</i>

SAVI’s outcome and impact level indicators measure cumulative results deriving from all five programme outputs and the influence of all programme partners, as well as overall improvements in the functionality of the SHoA in each state as an agent of citizen voice. (See SAVI Approach Paper 5: Defining and Measuring Results.)



## **SHoA members leading reform processes in Yobe State**

The Yobe State House of Assembly has achieved remarkable progress after just two years of SAVI support, from a starting point in late 2011 when neither members nor staff had received any training or support, and systems were weak or non-existent. All members participated in developing a strategic plan to cover their remaining period in office until the next election in 2015, starting with a one year fully costed operational plan for 2013. The operational plan was used by SHoA members on a daily basis, and funding was released by the Yobe State Government according to the agreed budget. Key achievements in this first year of operation include 90 million Naira (£300,000) released by the state government for the construction of a House Service Commission. This is a significant step towards securing the independence of the SHoA from the State Government Executive and implementation of SHoA plans for members to recruit and train their own staff. Another milestone was members initiating quarterly oversight visits to ministries and bringing back reports for discussion on the floor of the House. Members also collaborated with local CS groups to hold citizens platforms around the state generating concerns from citizens requiring government action to be included in the state government budget. Five citizen issues were included in the 2013 state budget – the first time this has happened – and all are now in various stages of implementation. The SHoA now plans to extend CS-facilitated citizen engagement to all 17 Local Government Areas.

## **Lagos State House of Assembly demonstrates success by working in partnership with civil society**

In Lagos State, the Organisational Capacity Self-Assessment process helped SHoA members to realise that to be effective in performing their oversight function, they needed to improve their skills in budget analysis. Members have taken a number of steps to improve their capacities, including prioritising the need for a Legislative Budget and Research Office, and establishing and financing a working party to draw up terms of reference, a timeline and a draft bill to provide the necessary legal framework.

LACSOP, a state-level CS partnership supported by SAVI, have established their credibility and value as a resource for SHoA members, providing informed and credible budget analysis that members can use for their own budget scrutiny. In 2012, for example, LACSOP

conducted a Citizens Performance Appraisal of the budget and distributed it to every SHoA member. Members used this analysis to help them to scrutinize the 2013 Budget Appropriation Bill and invited CSOs to be part of the budget appropriation discussion – the first time this had happened in any Nigerian state.

In the first quarter of 2013, partly influenced by informed budget analysis from CS and SHoA, the Lagos State Executive reduced the state budget from 510 billion Naira to 490 billion Naira to refocus resources on projects that could be completed during the current administration – a welcome move towards greater budget realism. In the second quarter, the Executive recorded a 22 per cent increase in budget performance compared with the first quarter.

## **Civil society, media and State Houses of Assembly work together in Jigawa State**

With behind the scenes support from SAVI, in 2012, for the first time, the Jigawa SHoA Committee on Education invited civil society organisations to participate in their budget review process. The SAVI-supported CS Partnership for Transforming Education raised well-informed and credible concerns to the House Education Committee on congested classrooms, dilapidated structures, inadequate furniture and inadequate teachers. The House Committee reflected these concerns in their first and second quarter 2012 oversight reports, Freedom Radio aired special reports on the House Education Committee findings, and citizens sent in text messages to affirm and support the findings and recommendations.

In a direct response to the public controversy generated by the House Committee report, the Jigawa State Governor met with the House Committee on Education and Ministry of Education Officials. The Government mandated the purchase of school furniture for primary and secondary schools worth 700 million Naira (£2.3 million), and release of 274 million Naira (£800,000) for the construction and renovation of female hostels, construction of offices, toilets, and school gates, and mass procurement of furniture for the State Colleges of Islamic and Legal Studies, of Agriculture and of Education.

## Practical tips and conclusions

- *The SHoA OCA is the key trigger from which all else follows:*  
The OCA is a powerful tool, with the potential to raise House staff and members' knowledge and aspirations to what they have the potential to be and enable them to develop their own agenda for change. But sensitive facilitation is critical – ensuring the focus always remains the staff/members and their needs and priorities even if the pace of change is slow.
- *Enable House staff and members to define and drive forward their own reform agenda:* Facilitate a process whereby support staff and members own their own reform initiatives, prioritising and implementing at their own pace, drawing on their own resources.
- *Include civil servants/support staff in training and capacity building:*  
Civil servants provide critical continuity across different elected assemblies and training raises their skills, credibility and profile, enhancing their working relationship with members.
- *Use 'seed money' to pilot new initiatives that House staff and members can scale-up:* Using seed money to demonstrate key strategies, for instance, cost-effective and strategic constituency engagement, is effective and fosters replication on a large scale.
- *Facilitate working relationships between SHoA members and credible CS and media groups:* Each group becomes a powerful resource and ally for the others, holding each other to account and reinforcing each other's accountability to citizens.

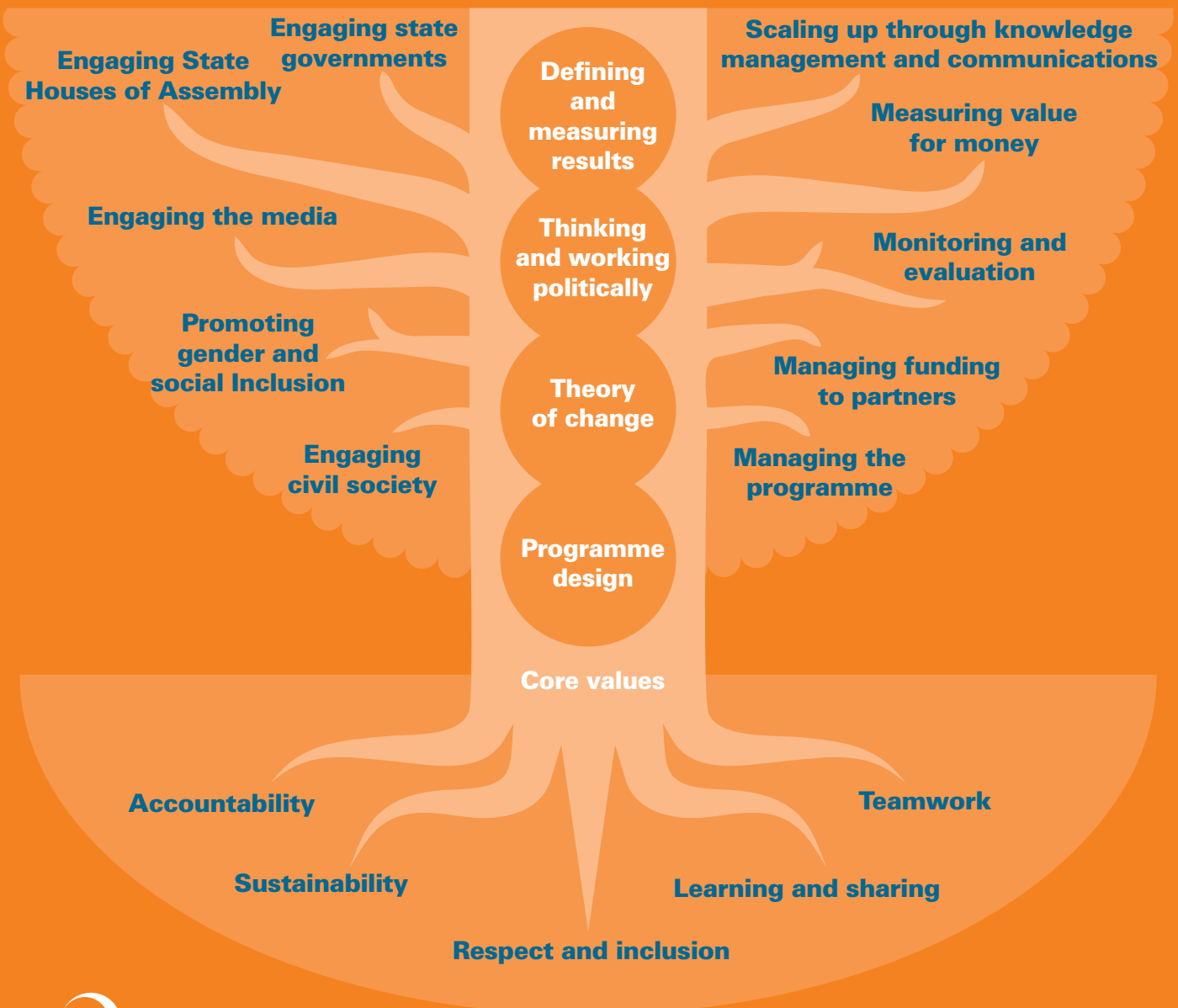
# SAVI's 'knowledge tree'

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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