



Department
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Moving Targets, Widening Nets: monitoring incremental and adaptive change in an Empowerment and Accountability programme

The experience of the State Accountability and Voice Initiative in Nigeria



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Measuring the results and effectiveness of empowerment and accountability programmes is difficult and fraught with pitfalls. New and influential thinking on ‘doing development differently’¹ is pointing the way to achieving greater programme effectiveness, but raising additional challenges in relation to monitoring and evaluation. This paper shares learning from SAVI, a DFID-funded empowerment and accountability programme in Nigeria. In accordance with problem-driven, iterative, and politically-smart principles², SAVI has evolved an approach to monitoring and evaluation which, whilst meeting DFID planning and reporting requirements, also enables reporting of results that derive from learning by doing, and planning which is flexible and adaptive to the local political economy context.

Introduction

Despite massive donor investment in demand-side governance since 2000, the evidence-base on impact and effective approaches remains weak³. In recent years, in the context of increased pressure from donors to demonstrate results, the search has been on for more credible and reliable ways of demonstrating effectiveness. There is a tension, however, between results agenda requirements for short-term, quantifiable and attributable results and the long-term, complex nature of governance reform. Linear results frameworks, with pre-planned quantitative targets and milestones, carry the danger of distorting and rigidifying what empowerment and accountability (E&A) programmes are aiming to do and achieve; undermining rather than facilitating the achievement of meaningful results.

There is a growing movement of development academics and practitioners interested in ‘doing development differently’, partly in response to the distortions and perverse incentives associated with implementation of the results agenda. Their conclusions are built on a body of case studies, including SAVI, which demonstrate that achieving results in relation to complex development challenges such as governance reform requires locally led, politically smart and adaptive ways of working⁴. This calls for innovation in approaches to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to facilitate iterative learning processes, to define and monitor results that are not predictable in advance, and to learn more about how change happens in order to replicate and scale up successful approaches.

SAVI’s approach to M&E has evolved through reflective practice since the programme started in

2008, building on lessons learnt in predecessor programmes⁵. Key innovations are allowing programme staff and partners to be adaptive and flexible, and capture unexpected and less tangible results. This paper shares SAVI's experience, learning and challenges as a contribution to current debates. It starts with a brief review of evolving thinking on measuring results. It goes on to explain SAVI's overall approach to M&E describing the key tools used, and concludes with an analysis of learning and ongoing challenges.

Evolution of thinking on measuring results

Monitoring the impact of E&A programmes

Since 2000, there has been massive donor investment in E&A programming on the assumption that reform towards more responsive and accountable governance will promote more effective and sustainable development across the board⁶. A major study of these interventions conducted by McGee and Gaventa⁷ in 2011 found the evidence-base on their impact and effectiveness to be very weak. Too many programme planning frameworks were characterised by a general vagueness about impact, with untested assumptions and underspecified relationships linking the planned activities of demand-side actors with outcomes and impacts requiring government action. Some planning frameworks were claiming impact in ways that were barely linked to the funded intervention, citing high-level governance indices or contribution to the Millennium Development Goals as Goal/Impact level changes. In reality such changes were likely to occur over a much longer period of time and as a result of a multitude of complex and inter-related factors in which the programme itself may barely register.

McGee and Gaventa conclude that complex political change processes such as these require complex, power-aware ways of assessing impact and understanding how it has occurred. They also conclude that to really understand impact on power relations 'we might need to look for it not where and when the [initiative] is implemented, but in different spaces, distant places or later episodes of the same officials' trajectory through their political or bureaucratic career or the same citizens' journey of mobilisation'.⁸

The Results Agenda

The search for more credible and reliable ways of measuring the impact and effectiveness of E&A programmes has taken place in the context of increased demand from donors for robustness in the measurement of impact, results and value for money overall – the so-called 'results agenda'. In the UK, increase of official development assistance to 0.7 per cent of GNI⁹ at a time of domestic austerity because of the international financial crisis, has increased pressure on the government to justify its spending to parliament and citizens. They want to be able to demonstrate in simple and straightforward terms that aid is being well spent and making a difference. This calls for a steady flow of quick, visible and understandable results, as well as evidence that these are the direct consequence of funded programmes.

An on-line survey conducted between October 2012 and February 2013,¹⁰ inviting respondents to assess the impact of this results agenda on their work, found different and conflicting experiences of the same 'artefacts'.¹¹ Overall the greatest criticism focused on the costs and frustrations associated with collecting 'meaningless, over-simplified quantitative data', towards 'inappropriate aggregated targets'. Some respondents experienced pressure to define measurable results and set out causal theories of change as the introduction of welcome realism and focus. Others found it was generating perverse incentives to pursue easy gains and curtailing transformative, political, and risky interventions. As one respondent suggests, 'By using indicators that are easily measurable, attention is given to activities that will contribute to "achieving the indicator" instead of activities which really matter but that are more difficult to measure.' Reporting on the survey, Whitty concludes that 'the devil is in the detail. How the tensions resolve and the perceptions play out depends on how the artefact is communicated, managed and tailored to its context. The *fit* appears to be important.'¹²

There are clear tensions between some of the ways the results agenda has been implemented, and the long-term, complex and unpredictable nature of governance reform. Andrews¹³ has reflected on the powerful incentives pre-planned results can generate for programmes to deliver what he terms *isomorphic mimicry*. This refers to

'best practice' reforms and solutions that look good to an external funder but which do not necessarily change anything or engage significantly with the complexities on the ground. This is a major challenge in E&A programming. Typically, E&A programmes operate through grant funds to civil society organisations (CSOs). Donor priorities or political economy studies define funding windows, funds are awarded competitively for comparatively short amounts of time, and grant recipients are responsible for delivering and reporting against pre-determined Output and Outcome indicators. Both of these are subject to isomorphic mimicry – in that grant recipients can often deliver successfully against them, without achieving change. Outcome indicators generally refer to changes in government behaviour towards greater transparency, accountability and responsiveness to citizens. Grant recipient CSOs are seeking to influence government behaviour, but they cannot control it – and consequently pre-determining Outcome indicators is particularly difficult. A common ambition is policy reform. Even if grant recipients do succeed in influencing policy – and often they don't – resultant policies are very often not implemented, and follow up within short grant windows is not possible. At Output level, grant recipients can achieve pre-planned targets on activities such as training, stakeholder meetings, and production of policy briefs, or on standard quantitative indicators such as 'the number of citizens supported to hold government to account',¹⁴ without necessarily harnessing or generating any momentum for change. A further challenge is that the flexibility and room for manoeuvre grant recipients need to engage with shifting opportunities and momentum for change is compounded when they are held accountable for delivering against pre-set targets and milestones.

Recent developments

Two recent developments are stimulating new thinking. These are renewed attention to complexity in processes of change,¹⁵ and a series of emerging case studies on what works in development.¹⁶

Ideas from the science of complex adaptive systems – around interdependence, uncertainty and the interaction of multiple actions and actors – are beginning to excite interest in relation to development planning and impact assessment.¹⁷ Many of the problems development agencies deal

with, including governance reform, are complex, interconnected, and dynamic. Snowden¹⁸ defines complex situations as ones where the relationship between cause and effect can only be perceived in retrospect. He contrasts this with simple situations where the cause and effect relationship is obvious to all, and complicated situations where cause and effect can be analysed and understood with the application of expertise. Too often development problems which are complex or even chaotic, are treated by development interventions as if they were simple. Pre-determined good practice solutions are applied to situations where processes of change are far more unpredictable, experimental and uncertain. Recognition of complexity calls for programmes and partners to use adaptive approaches to planning, monitoring and evaluation. This means testing their way to a solution through processes of trial and error, with mechanisms in place to amplify successful initiatives and dampen those which are not working. A related move towards theory-based approaches to evaluation accommodates complexity and uncertainty by putting the emphasis on examining and 'explaining the implicit assumptions, logic and mechanisms behind complex development interventions' and 'contributing to a better understanding of the causal/impact chains'.¹⁹

Case studies are also emerging on what works in development across sectors.²⁰ These are also challenging blue-print planning and the delivery of pre-planned solutions.²¹ Common to all these stories of achievement is that staff and partners have been able to work in ways that are problem-driven and adaptive, politically smart and locally led. There is a growing and influential body of development analysts and practitioners committed to drawing on these principles to 'do development differently'.

This new thinking still requires an emphasis on results and monitoring – but in ways which address some of the rigidities that have sometimes characterised the results agenda in practice. M&E systems need to be able to measure and report results which are not predicted or predictable in advance; to enable quick learning about how change happens to facilitate adaptive management during the course of the programme; and to facilitate understanding and learning about the intermediate processes of change for purposes of replication and scale-up.

SAVI – what it does and how it works

SAVI is a DFID-funded E&A programme. It works with citizens, civil society (CS) groups, media companies (mostly TV and radio stations) and State Houses of Assembly in ten Nigerian States, helping them to play their part in supporting more responsive, inclusive and accountable state governance. SAVI is part of a suite of DFID-funded State Level Programmes designed to impact collectively on governance and sector reform in the same states.

The way SAVI works has built on learning from DFID-funded programmes in Nigeria since the late 1990s²² as well as from home-grown self-help initiatives. Unlike most E&A programmes, SAVI does not call for proposals, and does not provide CSOs with grants or organisational development.²³ Instead, SAVI recruits and invests in training and supporting in-house state teams, made up of staff from diverse backgrounds²⁴ and indigenous to the state, to facilitate locally driven change. A national team of resident technical advisers (TA), supported by a small team of international TA, provide continuous hands-on mentoring and support to state teams.

Coordinating with sister programmes working on supply-side governance and sector reform, SAVI supports, what Fox refers to as, both ‘*voice*’ (citizen action) and ‘*teeth*’ (government capacity to respond to voice).²⁵ Taking a strategic approach, SAVI aims to scale up citizen engagement *horizontally*, working with politicians, the media and civil society (CS) groups to represent citizens’ views more effectively, and *vertically*, supporting state governments to listen and respond, and build trust and incentives for more citizen voice. The aim overall is to promote sustainable *institutions* (i.e. normal ways of behaving) for citizens and state governments to engage constructively with each other – rather than sustainable *organisations*.

To this end, state teams conduct, and continually update in formal and informal ways, political

economy analysis of their state context.²⁶ Through participatory processes²⁷, they identify service delivery issues (such as road construction, girls education and maternal and child healthcare) and governance processes (such as citizen participation in state planning, budgeting and project monitoring) to work on that have traction both with state governments and citizens. They also identify credible local actors who can provide a citizen-driven foundation for locally-led collective action. State teams nurture loose multi-stakeholder partnerships within and between demand- and supply-side actors. They play a hands-on role in bringing partnerships together – and also aim to foster an enabling environment for these kinds of partnerships to emerge organically. State teams provide technical support to partnerships, media companies and State Houses of Assembly through behind-the-scenes on-the-job mentoring, tailored training, and seed funding²⁸. Local actors are supported to work together to define solutions to locally agreed problems, gradually building the confidence, credibility, networks and momentum to take on ever-bigger challenges.

SAVI benefits from a highly experienced management and senior technical team, consistency in external reviewers²⁹ and good understanding with DFID advisers. Core team members contribute experience from: direct and on-going involvement with home-grown citizen-driven change in Nigeria; management and implementation of previous DFID Nigeria programmes promoting complex processes of change; work for DFID Nigeria; and advisory support to DFID globally on Results Frameworks and ways of measuring value for money. This wealth of experience has given SAVI the confidence and credibility to be bold and adventurous with programming decisions. It also means the management team are in a good position to understand the political economy of DFID – to know when it is important to be compliant and respond to demands, and when there is room for manoeuvre to push back and to challenge established practice.

SAVI's approach to monitoring and learning

Responsibilities for monitoring and learning

Because SAVI does not provide grants, partners have no SAVI Results Framework, no formal deliverables and no formal reporting requirements. This contributes to giving partners the flexibility to be locally led and locally accountable and to focus their efforts on what is relevant, politically salient and gaining traction. Partners are able to adapt their activities, ambitions and partnerships as opportunities and momentum shift and change.

SAVI staff take full responsibility for monitoring and reporting partners' progress against the SAVI Results Framework. Monitoring and learning is part of the role of all SAVI staff, rather than delegated to a separate M&E unit. Partners are supported to find their own ways to monitor and report what is important to them, in particular to learn from experience and re-strategise when things haven't gone as planned, to replicate and scale up successful approaches, and to share their achievements with others.

Reflective practice

Learning by doing and reflective practice are central to how SAVI works. Since the start of the SAVI programme in 2008, technical staff from all states have been coming together with national and international TA on a quarterly basis for Technical Group Meetings.³⁰ Here all the core elements of SAVI's way of working – including the approach to M&E – are, and continue to be, shaped, debated, agreed and reviewed. All of the M&E processes and tools used by SAVI staff – including the Results Framework and theory of change – have been developed, honed, worked and re-worked through such meetings. This process promotes the 'fit' of planning and monitoring artefacts to the programme. It also

builds ownership, capacity and confidence amongst all staff in the validity and use of tools and processes they have themselves shaped.

The aim has consistently been to forge processes and tools that *work for partners* i.e. that help partners to facilitate authentic citizen-driven sustainable change, while still meeting *programme management and DFID requirements*. Senior management and technical staff face both ways – continually learning from and supporting state staff and partners, and continually responding to DFID directives and advice. Achieving balance between these at times conflicting, demands takes skill, passion, patience and persistence. It also requires a very constructive working relationship with DFID, characterised by give and take and willingness to compromise on both sides.

Planning tools

Results Framework

Like all aspects of SAVI, the Results Framework has been regularly reviewed and revised internally, particularly in the context of annual review processes and contract amendments. SAVI staff have played a central role in shaping the levels of intervention, choosing sensible indicators and means of measurement, and building flexibility into milestones and targets, with expert guidance and support from SAVI and DFID advisers.

At the time of writing, the Results Framework is currently in its fourteenth official iteration since the programme started. Box 1 sets out the current Results Framework³¹ in outline form. For purposes of continuity, some 'bedrock' indicators have stayed constant throughout – notably the first two Impact level indicators. Other indicators have flexed and changed as the programme has evolved, extending the principle of adaptive programming to the M&E system itself.

SAVI Outline Results Framework

Impact

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

Indicators measure:

- changes in overall state government responsiveness and accountability to citizens
- citizen's satisfaction that their voice is being heard
- progress in the passage and implementation of key pieces of nationally-endorsed governance legislation at the state level

Outcome

State Houses of Assembly, civil society,³² media and citizens demonstrate more effectiveness in demanding better performance from government and holding government to account.

Indicators measure:

- tangible examples of state and local government action in response to citizen demand such as changes in policy, budgets or implementation and the processes of citizen engagement contributing to these, with evidence of contribution from SAVI
- general improvements in the functionality of civil society, media and State Houses of Assembly as effective agents of citizen voice

Outputs

These focus on the strength of multi-stakeholder issue-based and process-oriented advocacy partnerships, selected media houses and State Houses of Assembly, their relationships with citizens, with each other, and with government.

Indicators measure incremental, sustainable and replicable improvements in the capacity of these partners to facilitate citizen engagement in state government policy, planning, budgeting and project implementation processes from a range of perspectives:

- internal capacity
- external relations
- skills in policy advocacy and monitoring and/or budget and planning process engagement
- level of dependence/independence from SAVI support
- gender equality and social inclusion

At the start of the programme, SAVI had a very basic logframe³³. Staff involvement in developing this throughout the inception period set a precedent for staff involvement and ownership. At this stage, the programme logframe was first and foremost a planning tool that served to guide the development of state team work plans and budgets.³⁴ Initial quarterly reporting to DFID focused on activities, and annual reviews reflected on whether the programme was on track to achieve its end of programme targets. From 2010, DFID shifted from this largely narrative logframe to a 'Results

Framework' requiring detailed quarterly and annual reporting against numerical milestones and targets, and standardised indicators.

In the face of huge pressure to define quantitative results and milestones, SAVI drew on expertise and tactical thinking within the core team to develop composite numerical indices of attitude, behaviour and skill change. These were used to define and measure Output and Outcome level change in the functionality and collective influence of demand-side partners, tracking their progress along the

evolving theory of change. These indices enabled SAVI to retain a focus on qualitative process-related change but express it in quantitative terms (see following sections on ‘Theory of change’ and ‘Organisational and Partnership Capacity self-Assessments (OCAs and PCAs)’ under ‘Monitoring and learning tools’).

These indices satisfied DFID in terms of defining quantitative milestones and targets, but they did not effectively communicate what SAVI was achieving. For example, a shift in rating from 3.2 to 3.6 in ‘State House of Assembly functionality’ would be meaningless to an external audience. Pushed by DFID to demonstrate ‘real results’, SAVI succumbed to pressure to include a tangible Impact level indicator: ‘Extent of passage and implementation (by State Houses of Assembly and state governments) of key legislation that underpins good governance – i.e. fiscal responsibility bill, public procurement bill, freedom of information bill, and house service commission bill.’ Effort was made to retain flexibility and authenticity by devising fifteen steps of legislative process – from initial advocacy through to implementation (for example, 1=advocacy and conception, 5=second reading, 10=third reading and final passage, 12=signed into law, 15=implementation). Milestones and targets specified x number of states progressing x number of stages, without pinning down which states or which steps.

Further push from DFID for results which would demonstrate the outcome of the attitude, behaviour and skill change measured in Output and Outcome level indices, resulted in the transformation of a previous Outcome level indicator measuring partners’ ‘replication of SAVI supported approaches’ into an all-encompassing ‘Cumulative number of demonstrable changes in policy and implementation (behavioural change, policy change and change in practice) by state governments in response to public demand

where there is evidence of attribution to SAVI’s approach, a significant proportion of which reflect the voice of women and other socially excluded groups.’ This allowed reporting of results through retrospective outcome harvesting³⁵ from both SAVI-supported demonstration partnerships and from partners’ independent replication initiatives. The setting of targets and milestones for the aggregate number of such results to be achieved gave DFID confidence that real things would happen – without predicting in advance exactly what they would be (see section on ‘Results Evidence Sheets’).

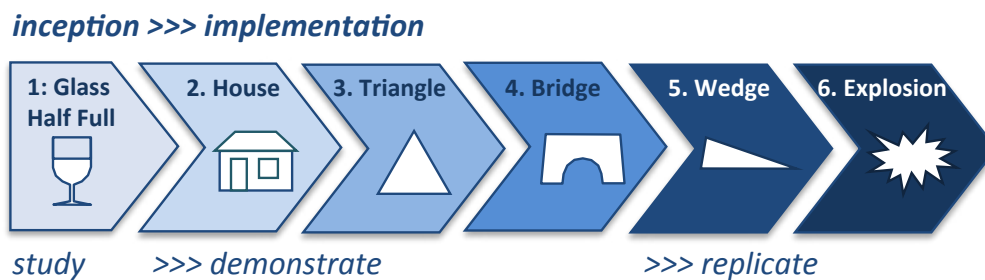
Theory of change

SAVI’s theory of change (ToC) is a simple, easy-to-understand-and-remember six-stage framework setting out attitude, behaviour and skill change amongst demand-side players’ driving reform towards more responsive, inclusive and accountable governance. It was evolved by SAVI staff over the first few years of the programme building on discussion and analysis of what was working in states to bring about change, as well as on learning from predecessor programmes³⁶.

For SAVI *partners*, the ToC is a widely used and valued practical tool to reflect on and enhance their own effectiveness. Its utility goes beyond the confines of SAVI as a programme – to planning and reflecting on any process of citizen engagement with the state mediated through State Houses of Assembly, media companies or CS groups³⁷.

For SAVI *staff*, the ToC provides a framework for planning and measuring incremental change in partners’ capacity at Output and Outcome levels (see section on ‘Organisational and Partnership Capacity self-Assessments (OCAs and PCAs)’ under ‘Monitoring and learning tools’), as well as the extent of institutional change in the relationship between state governments and their citizens.

Theory of Change



Stage 1: Glass half full: The starting point for the SAVI programme in any state – the Inception phase – is for state teams to recognise that they are looking for and dealing with a ‘glass half full’. SAVI state teams analyse the political economy of the state and of specific sub-sectors and issues. They aim to identify issues or processes that have traction both with state governments and with citizens, and build on existing momentum for change both in the state government and in wider society. Potential partners, with demonstrable passion and credibility, are identified through these processes.

Stage 2: House: The first stage of support to partners is enabling them to ‘get their own house in order’. This includes consideration of their links and accountability to citizens; their evidence-base; their ability to work in partnership with others; their ability to harness their own networks, knowledge, skills and resources and build these as required; and their ability to understand and work with the politics and power dynamics surrounding their issue of concern.

Stage 3: Triangle: The next stage is to break down barriers and build bridges between groups of citizens, their elected state level representatives and the media. By doing so, these different demand side players start to reinforce each other’s voice, enhance each other’s relationship with citizens and hold one another to account. They begin to realise through experience that they can accomplish more by working together than they can separately. Existing partnerships are strengthened, and new partnerships, platforms and broad alliances organically emerge.

Stage 4: Bridge: This stage is about facilitating constructive engagement between demand-side partners and the state government. Partners are supported to operate in a politically savvy way. This includes appreciating the complexity of actors and processes involved; understanding the policy, planning and budget processes they are seeking to influence; and identifying entry points. Partners are supported to forge alliances and working relations with key actors within the government; build their case, frame their arguments and marshal their evidence to influence change simultaneously at multiple levels. They plan in incremental stages through learning by doing and reflection, focusing on short-term achievable targets and building the confidence and credibility to take on bigger challenges.

Stage 5: Wedge: SAVI encourages partners to adapt new approaches they have found to be effective to their lobbying work on other issues, in other sectors, and in neighbouring states, to tell others and share their story. The effectiveness of SAVI partners in achieving results also attracts the attention of other demand and supply side actors – demonstrating how the business of governance can be done differently, more effectively and in a self-sustaining way. This not only serves to scale-up, but also consolidate and sustain partners’ existing achievements.

Stage 6: Explosion: The final stage of the theory of change is to push forward to a ‘critical mass’ of citizens, media companies, State Houses of Assembly and government officials who are actively engaged in participatory, responsive and inclusive governance. This is about linking them up to further spread the word, demonstrate the wider benefits, and engage the interest of central civil society and government coordinating agencies to showcase demonstrations and champion change.

Monitoring and learning tools

Organisational and Partnership Capacity self-Assessments (OCAs and PCAs)

Organisational Capacity Assessments (OCAs) and Partnership Capacity Assessments (PCAs)³⁸ are facilitated tools for partners to self-assess their capacity as effective agents of citizen voice. At the start of their engagement with SAVI, members of advocacy partnerships, media partners and State House of Assembly staff and members rate their partnership or organisation on a range of sub-indicators relating to their internal and external functioning on the basis of descriptive benchmarks. The use of ‘rubrics’³⁹ – qualitative descriptions of attitude, behaviour and skill change – adds important objectivity, richness, and value to the

discussion and assessment. Using a five-point scale, these rubrics reflect the stages of SAVI’s theory of change, and aggregate ratings give a good indication of where partners are along its trajectory (See Table 1 for an example of one PCA sub-indicator and descriptive benchmarks).

For SAVI *partners*, OCAs and PCAs are a critical part of their capacity building process – holding up a mirror, opening their eyes to aspects of their own functioning that could be improved, and raising their aspirations. Partners use these tools to identify their strengths and their priorities for capacity building, as well as to develop strategic and operational plans. After initial facilitation by SAVI state teams, partners continue to use OCAs and PCAs periodically for their own monitoring, reflection and re-planning purposes.

Table 1: Extract from Partnership Capacity Assessment self-Assessment Tool

Indicator: Programme skills in facilitating public involvement in government budget and planning process	
Sub indicator: understanding of budget process – content and issues	
Level 1	Understanding is based on individual experience within partners’ own contexts. The partners know they need to do further research – to engage with citizens to gather evidence and appreciate the perspectives of others. They are unsure as to how to go about gathering this information.
Level 2	Partners are starting to link with the media and the State House of Assembly, to understand and engage in budget processes. They appreciate the need to incorporate the perspectives of the government/supply-side to ensure advocacy recommendations are implementable. They are seeking advice on how to go about this.
Level 3	Partners are well linked to citizens, media and policymakers. Regular dialogue with citizens and government strengthens the partnership’s understanding of the budgetary issue and its content, and the roles and perspectives of all those involved. This informs the processes partners follow to build bridges and influence positive change.
Level 4	Partners understand the budget issue, content and process well enough to be able to guide others on their understanding of the process. The bridge between demand and supply side actors is now being maintained by mutual understanding and appreciation.
Level 5	Understanding of the inter-connectivity of budgetary policy processes is such that demand and supply actors support each other. Partners are bringing evidence-based analysis of positive change into the wider environment sharing their learning strategically.

For SAVI *staff*, OCAs and PCAs are tools for monitoring incremental change in partners' capacity, and planning support accordingly. They are used to set Output level baselines and targets and monitor progress against Output indicators in the SAVI Results Framework. Composite indices aggregate sub-indicator ratings, converting qualitative incremental change into a quantitative measurement.

Results Evidence Sheets (RES)

Results Evidence Sheets (RES)⁴⁰ are used by SAVI staff as an outcome harvesting approach to record and evidence 'real results' at Outcome level. RES enable staff to provide tangible examples of government responsiveness to citizens with evidence of contribution from SAVI partners. These might be government initiated consultation processes, policy reforms, budget allocations, budget releases or examples of project implementation directly responding to citizens' concerns. State teams also document, in a concise and structured narrative, the *back story*. This includes the political economy context, what SAVI did and what partners did at the different stages of the theory of change. If relevant, they can record ways in which others actors contributed towards achievement of the result. RES conclude with reflection on the significance of the result in terms of governance reform and service delivery. Increasingly these Outcome level results have become the *key indicator* of SAVI's effectiveness. Inclusion in the RES of the cost of SAVI support, the value of partners' contribution and the value of the government response also make these a critical source of tangible value for money analysis.

SAVI state teams glean some information to complete the RES from their usual interaction with partners and participation in partners' events. State teams also include part-time investigative reporters to assist them to gather the information needed to

flesh out the RES back stories. These investigative reporters are usually local freelance journalists who are already involved in SAVI-supported advocacy or media partnerships, and consequently familiar with the way SAVI works. Investigative reporters benefit SAVI by bringing a more independent investigative eye to the story – but they also benefit personally. Based on their investigations, they can work up a good local story to pitch to the media publicising home-grown initiative and achievement.

For SAVI partners, the results evidencing process should contribute positively to their local profile – enabling their state government and demand-side partners to celebrate and be credited for their achievement. *For SAVI staff*, RES are for reporting, analysing and communicating results more effectively. RES ultimately form the basis for narrative case studies, telling the story of government action influenced by SAVI partners, which are shared with wider audiences through the SAVI website.⁴¹ Equally they are an important learning process for SAVI staff, reinforcing their understanding and interpretation of the SAVI theory of change and informing subsequent planning processes.

There is clearly a danger in this kind of retrospective reporting of post-hoc justification and self-importance bias – talking up the connection between the government action and the activities of SAVI and SAVI partners. The requirement for a rigorous structured and evidenced 'contribution' story guards against this. It is hard to make up. Results reported by state teams are also interrogated internally by the central TA team and M&E staff, as well as by external reviewers, who interview key players. The prospect of online publication acts as an extra check on whether or not staff are confident for their story to go into the public domain. Further verification measures being explored include 'peer review' by local independent impact monitoring groups ('critical friends' of SAVI) – and by neighbouring state teams and partners.

Identifying and learning from result trends

SAVI partnerships and partners' processes of engagement with government are on-going – some partnerships have been in existence for all eight years of the programme. Consequently, the 'real results' recorded by the RES often link together, recording milestones of achievement in relation to a particular issue or process over a period of time. SAVI categorises and analyses the RES results along the trajectories set out in the following table, with expectation of an improving trend over time.

The left-hand side of the table represents lower levels of achievement; the right-hand side more significant and sustained change that impacts citizens' lives. For example, improving trends would be demonstrated in an initial reported result which is a *policy change* by a state government in relation to disability rights responding to citizen demand, later followed by state government budget

allocation and release, and later still by tangible examples of *budget implementation* benefitting disabled people. Equally, an unprecedented '*one off*' example of the state government consulting with citizens on a particular issue, would become an improving trend if the state government repeated this action in relation to the same issue, or, learning from positive experience, replicated it in relation to different issues.

Results on the left-hand side of the table are comparatively low hanging fruit. SAVI's theory of change is that success at this level should build partners' confidence, credibility and networks enabling them to take on bigger challenges and achieve the higher level results on the right-hand side. Analysing results on the basis of this framework assists in encouraging, identifying and celebrating improving trends – but it also draws attention to partnerships and processes of influencing that are stuck in lower level activities and achievements.

Table 2: Identifying and learning from result trends

	Low IMPACT		Medium IMPACT		High IMPACT
<i>Type of government action</i>	Process of consultation	Policy or procedure change	Budget allocation	Budget release	Implementation
<i>Scope of government action</i>	Issue	Process	Sub-sector	Sector/zone	State structures (impacting on all sectors/zones)
<i>Scale of government action</i>	Single local government	Several local governments	Single state government	Neighbouring state government	Several state governments (whole region)
<i>Trend of government action</i>	One off	Repeat	Improving trend	Self-regulation	Institutionalisation
<i>Level of inclusiveness of government action</i>	Awareness of the voice of women and other socially excluded groups	Permitting the voice of women and other socially excluded groups	Facilitating the voice of women and other socially excluded groups	Promoting the voice of women and other socially excluded groups	Institutionalising the voice of women and other socially excluded groups

Additional Monitoring Tools

In addition to the above, SAVI also uses some tools more conventionally associated with the monitoring and evaluation of demand-side governance programmes.

Impact and Outcome level changes in the overall responsiveness of state governments to citizens are measured through a Governance Index and Citizens' Perception Survey.⁴² These are conducted by independent peer review mechanisms and survey teams respectively, at the start of the SAVI programme in each state and at mid and end points.

The Governance Index⁴³ consists of a set of qualitative sub-indicators relating to the role of each major stakeholder group in responsive governance (State Government, State House of Assembly, the media and civil society in general), and questions are asked of independent state-based experts. The Citizens Perception Survey assesses citizens' satisfaction with various aspects of state governance. The main survey is field-based and is the responsibility of an Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Project (IMEP), responsible for independent M&E of DFID's suite of State Level Programmes. SAVI also supports a national agency to conduct a parallel survey through mobile phone polling. For six-monthly monitoring purposes, state teams have established independent monitoring groups who commission mini surveys to measure progress on some or all of the sub indicators covered by these surveys.

By combining objective measurement with learning and reflection, these tools serve the needs of external reviewers, but also assist state teams and local partners with learning from experience and empower local independent 'critical friends' to provide structured and informed advice to SAVI and partners.

Analysis

Measuring the impact and effectiveness of E&A processes

We noted at the start of this paper that monitoring E&A programmes is complex and fraught with pitfalls. It has tended to swing from the extreme of being too vague – with untested assumptions linking programme activities to high-level impacts

on governance reform – to the opposite extreme of being too specific and prescribed. Increased pressure from donors to demonstrate results has incentivised a focus on Outputs that deliver on pre-planned indicators and targets but do not necessarily achieve real change on the ground.

Recent influential thinking on complexity and 'doing development differently' is highlighting the importance of locally-led, politically smart, adaptive approaches for more effective implementation – and this throws up new M&E challenges. These include the need to report results that may not be predictable in advance; to enable quick learning about how change happens to facilitate adaptive programming; and to draw conclusions about intermediate processes of change. In this final section, we summarise the progress SAVI has made in relation to these challenges.

Learning from SAVI

Achieving 'fit'

The SAVI Results Framework, theory of change, monitoring tools and processes have all been shaped by SAVI staff in processes of reflection and adaptive learning and they continue to evolve. The aim has consistently been to forge processes and tools that *work for SAVI partners* i.e. that help partners to facilitate citizen-driven change, while still meeting *programme management and DFID requirements*.

An example of this is the approach SAVI has taken to meeting DFID's requirement for quantitative indicators and targets. SAVI places great emphasis on qualitative change in partners' effectiveness as agents of citizen voice. This includes their accountability to citizens, their ability to think and work politically, their work in strategic partnerships and their ability to engage constructively with their state government. At all levels of the Results Framework, SAVI measures this kind of qualitative change in functionality in quantitative terms, using numerical indices. This satisfies DFID's demand for numbers, whilst also keeping staff and partners focused on the processes that bring about change on the ground.

At the time of writing, the SAVI Results Framework is in its fourteenth official iteration. Some 'bedrock' impact and outcome indicators have remained fixed throughout the eight years of the programme to

ensure continuity and measure historical trends. Other indicators at all levels have been modified to meet changing DFID requirements and to reflect and shape the evolving programme – extending the principle of adaptive programming to the M&E system itself.

All SAVI's M&E tools are available on the SAVI website⁴⁴ for anyone to customise to their needs. The main learning, however, is that 'fit' is achieved through continuing processes of adaptive learning by doing and negotiation with annual review teams and DFID.

Reporting results that are not predictable in advance

In governance programmes, it is hard to predict where change will happen, particularly in terms of government responsiveness. To accommodate this, SAVI uses an open ended 'concrete change' indicator. This commits SAVI to delivering a target number of governance improvement results, defined as tangible examples of state government responsiveness to their citizens, influenced by SAVI partners. Setting targets and milestones for the estimated number of such results to be achieved in a given state, based on political economy analysis, gives DFID confidence that real things will happen – without predicting in advance exactly what or where they will be.

SAVI state teams use an outcome harvesting approach to capture and tell the structured and evidenced back story to these results. RES include the political economy context, SAVI and partners' contribution to influencing government action, the action of other influential players, and analysis of the significance of the result. Rigorous internal scrutiny by SAVI central M&E and technical teams guards against false claims of attribution.

Drawing conclusions about intermediate processes of change

The SAVI ToC is separate and complementary to the Results Framework. The Results Framework sets out what the programme will achieve: the ToC broadly maps out *how* – the intermediate processes of change that are expected to lead to results. Though they may appear simplistic, the stages of the ToC are based on extensive experience of reform processes in Nigeria, and are also fully in tune with research conclusions on what works in

demand-side governance programming. The utility of the ToC has repeatedly been demonstrated by SAVI partners within and outside the confines of SAVI as a programme.

SAVI's Output indicators measure incremental changes in the effectiveness of SAVI partners as agents of citizen voice. Composite numerical indices chart their progress along the stages of the ToC – as they build their evidence-base and accountability to citizens, link effectively and strategically with other non government partners including civil society, media and State Houses of Assembly representatives, and engage constructively with their state government.

As partners are successful in influencing government action, as discussed above, the ToC is used to structure the back story in the RES – setting out what SAVI did and what partners did at the various stages of the ToC to influence government action. This serves to link results in terms of government action to the intermediate processes of change that brought them about – at the same time continually interrogating and reinforcing the validity of the ToC.

Learning for adaptive planning

SAVI encourages staff and partners to learn by doing, progressing in regular learning loops. In simple terms, this means: formulating their long term vision; analysing their current context and capacity; developing a plan of action focused on a realistic and achievable short term goal; putting the plan into action; reflecting on what they have done and achieved – what went well, what didn't, what could they do differently – informing the next stage of activity; and then planning the next stage. The expectation is that initial achievement of comparatively low level results will gradually build partners' confidence, credibility and networks to take on bigger challenges and achieve higher level results with greater impact on citizens' lives.

To date, SAVI's M&E system has played an informal part in this process of reflection and learning – with quarterly and annual review processes and quarterly technical meetings used for structured reflection, learning and re-strategising. These learning, or feedback loops are critical to the programme progressing in an adaptive manner; as argued

by Barder: 'As change-makers we should not try to design a better world. We should make better feedback loops'.⁴⁵

SAVI is now in a position to use M&E data to identify trends in the nature, scope and impact of state government responsiveness. An improving trend might be demonstrated in, for example, an initial reported result which is a *policy change* by a state government responding to citizen demand, later followed by state government *budget allocation and release*, and later still by tangible examples of *implementation* benefitting citizens. A more negative trend might be a state government budget allocation responding to citizen demand which is never released, or repeated state government consultations with citizens which yield no tangible action. There is great potential to make more use of this data to structure and incentivise processes of reflection and re-planning within the programme.

Conclusion

SAVI's experience demonstrates that – even in the white heat of the results agenda – it is possible for programmes to find ways of delivering and reporting on results that derive from politically smart, locally led, adaptive processes of change. This has required skill, confidence and credibility in the programme team and an internal culture of reflective practice. It has also required a permissive enabling environment from DFID. Changing policy, planning and monitoring requirements from DFID have at times provided a useful external stimulus to improve systems and processes in SAVI, when there has been sufficient give and take for SAVI to

respond in ways which are appropriate to what the programme is aiming to achieve.

DFID and many other donors are now acknowledging and seeking to address some of the challenges associated with rigid enforcement of the results agenda. Important steps are being taken to promote more flexible and adaptive programming, including allowing greater flexibility in framing and reviewing indicators, milestones and targets.⁴⁷ Lessons from SAVI provide some useful food for thought for E&A programmes and programmes seeking to promote complex institutional change about some ways of putting these adaptive principles into practice.

During 2016, SAVI will be evolving into a successor programme – the Engaged Citizens Pillar of the new DFID Nigeria Public Sector Accountability and Governance Programme which is scheduled to start in mid-way through the year. This new programme is designed to build on the progress SAVI has made to date, and to scale up ambition and impact on citizens' lives. The approach to M&E will continue to evolve on the basis of experience and through processes of learning by doing and reflection. One of the areas the technical team will work on is a more structured approach to feedback loops, using M&E data to incentivise the ratcheting up of partners' ambition and impact, as well as to inform hard decisions on scaling-up, scaling-down or stopping support based on measures of performance.

The programme team will continue to share approaches and lessons and look forward to continuing to work with and learn from others grappling with similar challenges.

Endnotes

- ¹ www.doingdevelopmentdifferently.com
- ² Booth, D. and Unsworth, S. (2014); www.doingdevelopmentdifferently.com
- ³ Africa Power and Politics Research Programme (2007-12); Citizenship, Participation and Accountability Development Research Centre (2001-11); Centre for Future State (2000-2010) and Booth et al (2016)
- ⁴ op.cit.
- ⁵ Notably from Joint Wetlands Livelihoods project (JWL 2002-2007) and the Capacity Building for Decentralised Development project (CBDD 1998-2002)
- ⁶ See, for example, World Bank (2003) and DFID (2006)
- ⁷ McGee, R. and Gaventa, J. (2011)
- ⁸ *ibid.* p.31
- ⁹ Gross National Income
- ¹⁰ Whitty, B. (2013)
- ¹¹ Whitty uses the term ‘artefact’ to refer to the range of development processes and instruments – such as Results Frameworks, theories of change, reporting requirements and value for money rubrics – through which development programmes experience the results agenda.
- ¹² op.cit. p.3
- ¹³ Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woodcock, M. (2012) and Andrews (2013)
- ¹⁴ This is the standard DFID indicator for E&A programmes and country plans. The emphasis is on numbers that are simple to measure, aggregate and communicate.
- ¹⁵ www.simonmaxwell.eu/blog/review-of-aid-on-the-edge-of-chaos-by-ben-ramalingam.html
- ¹⁶ Booth, D. and Chambers, V. (2014)
- ¹⁷ Ramalingam, B. (2014); Befani, B., Ramalingam, B. and Stern, E. (2015); Befani, B., Barnett, C. and Stern, E. (2014)
- ¹⁸ Snowden D. (2010), Cynefin Framework www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7oz366X0-8
- ¹⁹ O’Neil et al (2007) cited in McGee, R. and Gaventa, J. (2011) p.14
- ²⁰ i.e. not only in relation to governance reform, but in many aspects of development and change.
- ²¹ Booth, D. and Unsworth, S. (2014), Wild, L. et al (2015)
- ²² Notably from Joint Wetlands Livelihoods project (JWL 2002-2007) and the Capacity Building for Decentralised Development project (CBDD 1998-2002)
- ²³ Derbyshire, H., Fraser, S. and Mwamba, W. (2014)
- ²⁴ Increasingly SAVI recruits staff from the diverse groups they are seeking to bring together – i.e. staff who have previously worked with the state government, local media companies, State Houses of Assembly and civil society groups.
- ²⁵ Fox, J. (2014)
- ²⁶ SAVI Approach Paper 4 Participatory Political Economy: Supporting partners and staff to think and act politically www.savi-nigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/SAVI_ApproachPaper4_Web.pdf
- ²⁷ *ibid.*; Derbyshire, H., Fraser, S. and Mwamba, W. (2013)
- ²⁸ SAVI Approach Paper 2 ‘Programme Design: a facilitated partnership approach to supporting citizen engagement in governance’ www.savi-nigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/SAVI_ApproachPaper2_2015_FINAL.pdf
- ²⁹ SAVI has had only two external reviewers throughout the programme, one from 2008-10 (who now works with SAVI as part of the international

TA team), and one from 2010 (who also works with SAVI's sister programme, SPARC, as part of their international TA team).

³⁰ Operational and support staff hold similar regular meetings, and are often directly involved in technical meetings and technical activities to foster team spirit and teamwork among all SAVI staff.

³¹ www.savi-nigeria.org/resource/savi-logframe-summary

³² Meaning: groups or organisations outside of government that represent citizens interests: not just CSOs, NGOs, and CBOs, but also trade unions, professional, business, advocacy, and voluntary associations, academic/research bodies, think-tanks, women's organisations, traditional authorities, faith-based groups, coalitions, foundations, development agencies, etc.

³³ This is because SAVI was separated out as a programme in its own right late in the planning process from its now sister programme SPARC, which supports supply-side governance.

³⁴ Initially this perception was held among the core technical team, in their efforts to support state teams to think and plan more strategically. Many state staff viewed the logframe as primarily a tool for annual review purposes, though this perception gradually changed as they became more familiar with it and its utility.

³⁵ www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/outcome-harvesting and www.betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/outcome_harvesting

³⁶ SAVI Approach 3 Theory of Change: empowering citizens to engage with governance www.savi-nigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/SAVI_ApproachPaper3_Web2.pdf

³⁷ Its application in fact goes wider even than this broad governance context. Members of SAVI staff and partners have used the theory of change, away from work, in the context of community development, church organisation, business development and even family management.

³⁸ Partnership Capacity Assessments (PCAs) are for civil society and multi stakeholder Advocacy Partnerships. Organisational Capacity Assessments (OCAs) are for media companies and State Houses

of Assembly, with separate tools for each. Each of these tools is on the SAVI website www.savi-nigeria.org/resource/partnershiporganisational-capacity-assessment-pcaoca-self-assessment-tools

³⁹ www.betterevaluation.org/evaluation-options/rubrics

⁴⁰ SAVI's Result Evidence Sheets can be found on the SAVI website www.savi-nigeria.org/resources

⁴¹ SAVI case studies can be found on the SAVI website www.savi-nigeria.org/results

⁴² Both the Governance Index and the Citizens Perception Survey, including the How To guides and focus group discussion templates, can be found on the SAVI website www.savi-nigeria.org/resources

⁴³ The Governance Index draw on the World Governance Index www.info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home

⁴⁴ www.savi-nigeria.org

⁴⁵ Barder, O. (2010). Presentation of Development, complexity and evolution www.media.owen.org/Evolution/player.html

⁴⁶ See, for example, DFID Smart Rules www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-smart-rules-better-programme-delivery

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