

# Managing and Staffing an Adaptive Citizen Engagement Programme

## In brief

SAVI, a DFID funded programme implemented by Palladium, is an adaptive programme putting learning and adaptation at the centre of all decision-making. In relation to management and staffing SAVI has established the following approaches to facilitate this:

- *An adaptive approach to programme management:* Full time strategic technical leadership, that works closely with and complements programme management, has been essential to enabling SAVI to work in an adaptive way. This approach has ensured both that staff have appropriate skills, appropriate support and ways of working, and that the management of finances, human resources, incentives and milestones supports and enables adaptive programming.
- *Working with the right staff:* Adaptive programming requires staff with particular personal competencies, attitudes and behaviour. Learning from experience, SAVI takes the time to identify staff who are willing and able to work adaptively. This includes staff with a strong commitment to reform, the ability to facilitate rather than direct often from behind-the-scenes, work as part of a team, and develop relationships of trust with partners and counterparts. This staff profile has implications for staff recruitment and development, and for the selection and management of consultancy inputs.

# The challenge

## Management

In a conventionally run programme, plans, targets, budgets and human resources are agreed with the donor up front. Programme management is responsible for ensuring effective delivery to the donor – on time, within budget and according to agreed milestones. This management task drives the programme forward.

In an adaptive programme like SAVI, plans, budgets and milestones are still important but they need to accommodate learning and adaptation. If programme management continues to be driven by delivering against pre-set and top-down targets, the programme loses its ability to be nimble and responsive, and learning and adaptation is simply not possible.

A major challenge in modifying management systems to enable adaptive programming is that processes and expectations across the board – in programmes, service providers and donors – are all suited to blueprint planning. DFID is actively championing adaptive planning processes in programmes dealing with complex issues of institutional change, and this provides welcome support and a more conducive enabling environment for reform. But re-shaping management systems, expectations and demands to accommodate the requirements of adaptive planning is neither simple nor quick.

## Staffing

In a conventionally run programme, agreements are made between consortium partners at the contracting stage for the involvement of particular individuals, specified inputs and set numbers of days. In an adaptive programme, up front agreements on personnel are still necessary, but, without detail available on the skills needed, timelines, work plans and budgets, arrangements between consortium members become more challenging. If too much is pinned down, there is a danger that the commercial interests of consortium members will undermine adaptive planning. On the other hand, if too little is pinned down, the kind of specialist knowledge and skills programmes will need may not be available.

Blueprint planning is also associated with the transmission of 'best practice' solutions. Programme staff in this context are responsible for providing or for managing the provision of technical expertise. Adaptive programming, in contrast, is less about providing technical solutions than about facilitating processes of locally-led problem solving around agreed and prioritised concerns. This requires programme staff to have skills in facilitation and teamwork, as well as a degree of humility and willingness to support from behind-the-scenes. These are 'soft skills' which are generally not reflected in technical CVs, or prioritised in conventional approaches to recruitment. Getting the right staff in place for adaptive programming means a significant change in the profiles of staff recruited – as well as significant investment in staff support and development.

## Approach to management

### The management team

In a conventionally run programme, it is common to look to the team leader both to ensure effective delivery – on time, within budget and according to agreed milestones – and to provide technical leadership. Some programmes have additional strategic technical advisory support on a part time or occasional basis, but in others, strategic technical advice is confined to design and review processes.

Our experience is that critical to effectiveness in adaptive programming is strong strategic technical leadership working full time on

the programme, working closely with and complementing programme management. Technical leadership is about much more than sector-specific expertise. It is needed to train, support and empower front line staff to think and work politically, learn by doing, and to be adaptive – a big shift from conventional ways of working. It is also needed to shape management processes within the programme – approaches to monitoring and evaluation (M&E), financial management, human resources management and the definition and delivery of value for money – to enable learning and adaptation to take place, whilst at the same time delivering accountability to the donor.

### Box 1. SAVI management structures

#### Management

SAVI is managed by a full time Team Leader, based in the SAVI Head Office in Abuja, Nigeria. He works under the guidance of a Programme Director based in the Palladium Office in London. The SAVI Team Leader is supported by an Abuja based Operations Team responsible for managing finances, logistics and human resources, and by office managers, finance officers and office assistants in all ten SAVI state teams. The SAVI Team Leader and the Palladium Programme Director work in close liaison with DFID, particularly with the DFID Nigeria Governance Adviser (the 'Senior Responsible Owner') who oversees the programme, and the DFID Nigeria Programme Manager who takes responsibility for oversight of SAVI's financial management, assets and human resources.

#### Technical leadership

Technical leadership is provided by a full time Deputy Team Leader based in Abuja. He works very closely with the Team Leader and is supported by an Abuja-based Head of Strategic Planning and a Head of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL). He manages the Abuja-based team of technical advisers – who in turn provide support to SAVI state teams – and is supported by a part-time UK-based Technical Director.

### Skills and competencies

Palladium (then GRM) won the contract to manage SAVI through competitive tender in 2008. Their winning bid drew together senior management and technical staff from previous DFID-funded programmes in Nigeria whose focus and learning was directly relevant to the SAVI programme.

The management and technical leadership team has stayed together throughout the eight years of SAVI – and, in mid 2016, are continuing into SAVI's successor programme. The team members provide critical continuity – institutional memory and learning in relation to programmes and initiatives prior to SAVI, and institutional memory and learning from the whole history of SAVI.

From the outset, the SAVI management and technical leadership teams combined:

- Experience of managing programmes funded by DFID Nigeria.
- Experience of working for DFID Nigeria.
- Experience of bringing together and supporting successful, multi-stakeholder partnerships driving governance reforms and improvements in service delivery in Nigeria.
- Experience of failed as well as successful approaches to managing issues-based projects.
- Experience of successful home grown, non-donor funded community development in Nigeria.
- Credibility in the eyes of DFID.

### Management functions and relationships

All aspects of SAVI management have undergone a transition during the course of the programme – including the programme design,

staff recruitment and appraisal, financial planning and management, the development of indicators and milestones, the definition and delivery of value for money, and the approach to knowledge management and communications. Initially, in accordance with conventional practice, all of these were defined by the usual requirements of delivering to DFID in line with pre-set agreements and milestones. Over the course of time, all have come to be shaped additionally to create space and incentives for an adaptive, locally led approach, whilst still delivering results and accountability to DFID.

Critical to this transition has been the experience, confidence and credibility of the SAVI management team, and the quality of their working relationships. Success has been all about achieving and maintaining an appropriate balance of concerns, interests and insights between staff concerned with management, and staff concerned with technical leadership and front line implementation, as well as between staff from the SAVI programme, Palladium, and from DFID. Inevitably sometimes there are stresses and strains, but overall, working relations between all parties are characterised by commitment to the SAVI programme, mutual respect, robust discussion and debate, give and take and commitment to finding the right balance.

### **Championing an adaptive approach**

The *previous* experience of core members of the national technical team – of successfully bringing together and supporting successful, multi-stakeholder partnerships driving governance reforms and improvements in service delivery in Nigeria – informed the innovative winning technical bid. However, this innovative approach was not well understood by the wider management and implementation teams – and implementation set out along more conventional lines.

The full time Deputy Team Leader position was created early in the implementation phase to champion SAVI's innovative technical approach more effectively. Over time, the Deputy Team Leader, working closely with the Team Leader, supported by the core technical team, DFID and external reviewers, has gradually shaped and re-shaped SAVI leadership, technical advice, and administrative management in support of a locally-led, politically smart, adaptive approach.

Key elements of this internal championing have been:

- Providing technical advice on a SAVI's politically smart, locally led, adaptive approach to citizen engagement in governance to all State teams, to the national team, and to the management team, countering 'business as usual' expectations and approaches.
- Putting in extra effort where staff were receptive; supporting demonstration initiatives; letting results speak for themselves, and highlighting the relative ineffectiveness of conventional approaches (For

information on SAVI's innovative 'Facilitated Partnership Approach' to supporting citizen engagement in governance, see SAVI Approach Paper 2: Programme Design; and SAVI Approach Paper 4: Thinking and Working Politically).

- Developing technical frameworks, processes and systems to encourage and support a more locally-led, politically smart, adaptive approach – in relation to management processes including financial management, human resource management, monitoring and defining and reporting value for money (For further details, see SAVI Approach Paper 5: Defining and Measuring Results; SAVI Approach Paper 12: Managing Programme Finances and SAVI Approach Paper 13: Measuring Value for Money).
- Harnessing the support of external reviewers and DFID advisers in relation to SAVI's innovative approach. This ultimately led to the creation of a new staff post, linking SAVI to the emerging international community of practice on 'Thinking and Working Politically' and 'Doing Development Differently'. This provided powerful support and an increasingly enabling external environment to bolster adaptive programming within SAVI.

### **Approach to staffing**

#### **Programme approach**

SAVI aims to use its funding to support rather than to drive and incentivise citizen engagement in governance. To this end, we invest in in-house state teams who play a behind-the-scenes facilitation role. State teams support local partners – citizens, groups representing citizens, media personnel and organisations and State House of Assembly politicians – to shape change in their state. SAVI support is provided not through grants, but through hands-on mentoring, capacity building, relationship brokering and financial contributions to partners' activities on a diminishing basis.

#### **Staffing structure**

SAVI has a total of 100 locally appointed staff. A *national team based in Abuja* comprises senior administrative and technical management staff, the operations team supporting programme administration and a national technical team of ten staff providing support to state teams

*State teams in each of the ten states where SAVI works* comprise five to nine staff. Typically State Team Leaders work with a State Programme Officer and one or more State Programme Assistants on programme delivery, and with an Office Manager, Finance Officer and drivers on programme administration.

#### **Consortium arrangements**

SAVI is managed by a consortium of four service providers led by Palladium. Deliberate efforts were

made from the outset to avoid parcelling up outputs or particular state programmes to be managed by particular consortium partners because of the rigidities this would entail. All SAVI long-term staff are employed by Palladium, and all consortium partners work across all outputs of the programme.

## **Roles and responsibilities**

### **State teams**

State teams are the delivery arm of SAVI. In some ways they are the equivalent of 'grantees' in a conventional programme in that they are fully funded by, and accountable to, SAVI as a programme.

Authority is delegated to state teams to shape the SAVI programme in their state. This involves analysing the local political economy, identifying issues with

traction around which locally-led problem solving can coalesce, brokering loose working relationships amongst non-government actors and between non-government actors and the state government. State teams provide partners with mentoring and capacity building support and contribute funding to partners activities on a diminishing basis. SAVI state teams work closely with the DFID-funded SPARC programme, which provides support to state governments on governance reform in the same states. SAVI state teams are in a position to identify opportunities for synergies between partners' activities, and to broker working relationships to capitalise on these by having responsibility for engagement with all local partners, as well as a link into state government processes through SPARC.

### **Supporting locally-led, adaptive reform processes**

SAVI partners are the ones directly engaged in influencing change in their state – and it is their activities that lead to results.

SAVI's approach to working with local partners is consciously designed to promote local ownership, local accountability, and effective and sustainable reform processes. The aim is to facilitate relationships between local actors and mutual problem solving processes which are effective in bringing about reform – and which can take on a life of their own without continuing SAVI support.

Local partners are drawn together through their strong commitment to reform in their state. Because SAVI does not provide grants, partners have no formal accountability relationship to SAVI, and no reporting requirement. They have maximum flexibility to take ownership of their own priorities and activities, make their own plans, think and work politically, respond to shifting opportunities and momentum for change in their context, and work with the grain of local ways of doing things. The following SAVI Approach Papers provide more detail on this 'Facilitated Partnership' way of working:

SAVI Approach Paper 2: Programme Design

SAVI Approach Paper 4: Thinking and Working Politically

SAVI Approach Paper 12: Managing Programme Finances

SAVI state teams take responsibility for all SAVI programme requirements. This includes planning support to local partners; forecasting, managing and reporting expenditure in support of local partners' activities; and monitoring and reporting local partners' achievements.

### **National team**

A national team of resident technical advisers provides hands-on capacity building and mentoring support to state teams. Their regular visits provide a chance for state teams to stand back and reflect on their approach, major achievements and challenges, and to discuss next steps.

### **Short-term technical assistance**

The SAVI national technical team is supported by a small team of visiting international consultants with specific expertise in, amongst other things, strategic

planning, monitoring and evaluation, and value for money. Short-term Nigerian consultants are identified by the SAVI national and state teams to provide inputs of various kinds, including capacity building support for local partners on knowledge and skills gaps they have prioritised.

### **Recruitment**

From the outset, SAVI has recruited Nigerians in preference to international personnel for all staff posts, administrative as well as technical.

For state teams, SAVI looks for staff from the state in question. Local staff have a personal stake in their own state development – with personal standing, personal responsibility and accountability to the state not just to SAVI as a programme. Increasingly, new state staff are deliberately selected from diverse backgrounds including

previous work with state governments, civil society and citizens groups, media organisations and donor programmes. As such, state team members collectively constitute a neutral broker, able to facilitate working relations between diverse local actors.

Since 2013, all staff have been recruited on the basis of core values and agreed behaviours associated with these values. These were collectively devised and agreed by SAVI staff in a series of participatory workshops facilitated by a change management consultant (See SAVI Approach Paper 1: Core Values). Core values support us in 'practising what we preach' and 'being the change we want to see in the world'. They are a critical part of modelling to partners the responsive, inclusive and accountable attitudes and behaviours that are central to sustainable processes of citizen engagement in governance – which we track through our indicators of change.

Candidates' qualifications, experience and capabilities are all assessed and verified before interview – through screening CVs, phoning referees, and practical tests. Interviews focus on applicants' attitudes, behaviour and competences that are central to SAVI's way of working. This style of interview serves as a kind of pre-induction – an opportunity for self-reflection and learning. Candidates can often see for themselves the extent to which they might 'fit' with the philosophy and approach of the programme, making recruitment decisions easier both to make and to accept.

For short-term consultancy inputs, as for staff, Nigerian consultants are always recruited in preference to international ones, and continuity is given more importance than drawing a range of skills from a large number of different consultants. This helps to build long-term relationships of mutual appreciation and trust, and results in better engagement and learning. Where requisite skills are not available in Nigeria, international consultants are paired with staff from the SAVI national technical team, to ground their advice in local realities, and build the skills of the technical team.

Through long experience, SAVI has come to understand that some staff, consultants and partners are suited to SAVI's way of working but many are not. The critical distinction is how they position themselves in relation to donor money. We look for those who view donor money primarily as a means to empower others – and who have the willingness and ability, with support, to make politically smart decisions and to use their time and resources wisely to promote locally-led and self-sustaining reform.

### **Staff development**

SAVI invests heavily in building and supporting the capacity of state teams to undertake their role effectively, as well as to ensure consistency in approach and quality

control across states. This includes induction training for all new staff, and ongoing mentoring for all staff on the philosophy and approach of the programme by the national technical team.

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

Internal capacity building for staff aims to model a participatory, empowering, hands-on, applied approach which state teams in turn apply to the support they provide to partners. Our approach to capacity building is behind-the-scenes, hands-on and applied. It recognises that everyone has something to contribute and everyone has something to learn and places great emphasis on learning by doing and reflection. (For further information see SAVI Approach Paper 2: Programme Design.)

### **Staff management**

Line management focuses on mentoring staff, nurturing their potential, and supporting and promoting learning and teamwork. Efforts are made to form teams with a balance of staff with people skills and administrative/system skills, helping them to appreciate and accommodate each other's requirements and perspectives. This helps teams to understand and deliver the (all too often competing) technical demands of the programme at the same time as meeting DFID requirements. All staff are mandated through their Terms of Reference (ToRs) to work in teams, as well as to foster a culture of 'teamwork and mentoring'. This includes:

- Familiarising themselves with the ToRs of all their team members as well as with associated technical, financial and administrative policies and guidelines.
- Actively contributing to team-building, including through agreement on SAVI's shared mission, vision, values, identity and public profile.
- Use of formal and informal opportunities – meetings as well as social events – to foster team building.
- Mentoring partners and colleagues – within and outside of SAVI, and across states – through providing guidance and support, consistent with SAVI's mission, vision and values.
- Looking out for, highlighting and supporting resolution of internal challenges impacting on team performance.

Staff are appraised annually through performance reviews. These reflect on compliance with SAVI core values and associated behaviours as well as on task delivery. Initially staff performance was incentivised individually. Increasingly, it is also assessed and incentivised collectively, looking at the performance of particular teams and of the programme as a whole. Comparative analysis provides evidence of good or poor state team performance – which in turn highlights incidents of good or poor individual performance. This learning helps individual staff to be more effective and efficient, by reflecting on their own tasks and performance. Equally, it helps state teams, and the national team, to reflect on their collective performance, learn from each other and adapt effective approaches from elsewhere to suit their own context.

SAVI staff have considerable freedom to make decisions on partners to work with, and on ways of supporting these partners. This freedom and flexibility is a critical part of being locally-led, politically smart and adaptive, and essential to effectiveness. However, decisions taken by state staff are not necessarily always well informed or consistent with SAVI’s philosophy, and learning by doing is challenging. It is natural to seek to excuse or cover up failure rather than admit to it and learn from it. On the other hand, high profile recognition of success can also lead to grand-standing and complacency – and de-motivation for others. As SAVI data management systems have become more sophisticated, and the evidence from results achieved has become more revealing, this information has helped staff to be more reflective about initiatives that are working well, and initiatives that are not – and to learn, adapt and make progress accordingly.

## Practical tips and conclusions

- Adaptive programming requires more sophisticated management, more management time, and more investment in management. Higher management costs need to be seen as, and demonstrated to be, investment in achieving greater impact rather than poor value for money.

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- Suppliers need to face two ways – both being highly attentive to the programme's ability to deliver excellent results, and doing this in line with technical and commercial agreements with donors and offering them value for money. Developing excellent communications and relationships of trust between suppliers and donors is important to enable suppliers to sometimes push back to donors to create room for manoeuvre for the programme, without risking their reputation or failing to meet contractual obligations.

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- Technical leadership is essential. This is about much more than sector-specific expertise. Technical leadership is needed to train, support and empower front line staff to think and work politically, learn by doing, and be adaptive. It is also needed to shape the management systems to enable learning and adaptation can take place.

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- Adaptive programming requires 'soft skills' – facilitation, teamwork, humility and mutual problem solving. This can mean a significant change in the profiles of staff recruited. It is critical to spend time finding the right people committed to empowering others.

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- Supporting staff to work in adaptive ways is more effective through ongoing learning by doing and mentoring, than through expert-led training.

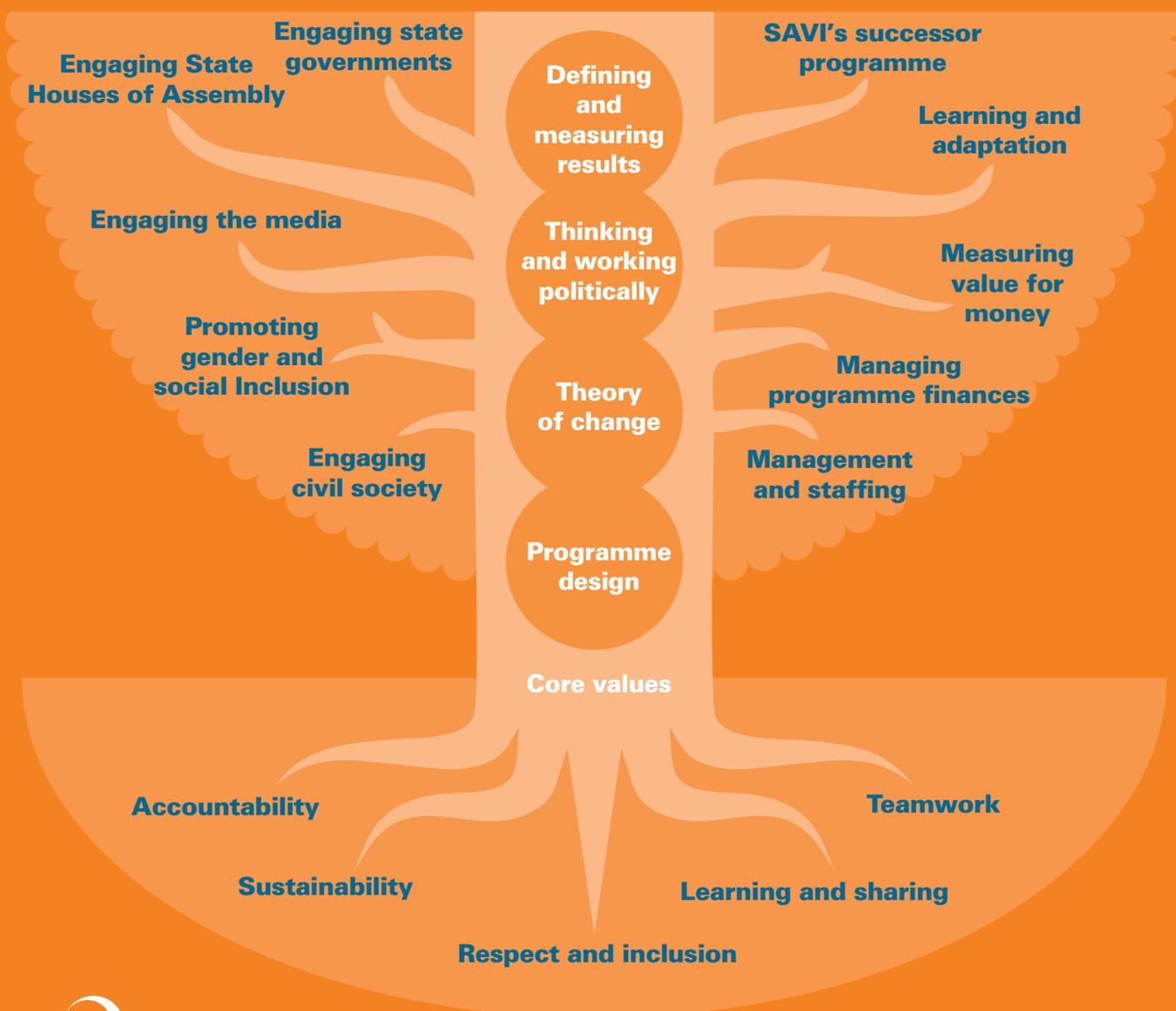
# SAVI's 'knowledge tree'

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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