



– DISCUSSION PAPER –



The SAVI programme in Nigeria:

Towards politically smart, locally led development

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Key messages

- More examples are needed of aid programming that works by being responsive to country realities: politically smart, problem-driven and locally led
- DFID's SAVI programme has revealed a hitherto untapped potential for change leading to better development results at state level in Nigeria
- SAVI provides low-profile support to state-level organisations and partnerships, building their capacity to engage constructively with government
- It avoid the pitfalls of a donor-driven approach by 'taking the money off the table'
- This illustrates the power of facilitated multi-stakeholder engagement and the disadvantages of seeing this in terms of 'supply side' and 'demand side' governance
- The set-up of the DFID suite of state-level programmes, with separately managed sector support and 'governance' initiatives, has limited realisation of the potential
- Key enabling conditions were that DFID provided space for an experience-based design process and permitted tangible results to be judged retrospectively, not pre-programmed

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Abbreviations

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
C4C	Coalitions for Change
CBDD	Capacity Building for Decentralised Development
Citizenship DRC	Citizenship, Participation and Accountability Development Research Centre
CSO	Civil society organisation
CUBE	Capacity for Universal Basic Education
DAI	Development Alternatives Incorporated
DFID	Department for International Development
DoC	Drivers of Change
ENABLE	Enhancing Nigerian Advocacy for a Better Business Environment
ESSPIN	Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria
GEMS	Growth and Employment in States
GSI	Gender and Social Inclusion
IBP	Issue Based Project
IMEP	Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Project for the SLPs
INTRAC	International NGO Training and Research Centre
ITAD	Information, Training and Development
J4A	Justice for All
JEWEL	Jigawa Enhancement of Wetlands Livelihoods
JWL	Joint Wetlands Livelihoods
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NNWGI	Northern Nigeria Water Governance Initiative
OCA	Organisation Capacity Assessment
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PATHS	Partnership for Transforming Health Systems
PAV	Partnership for Accountability and Voice
PCA	Partnership Capacity Assessment
PDIA	Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PM	Programme Memorandum
PRRINN-MNCH	Partnership for Reviving Routine Immunisation in Northern Nigeria – Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Initiative
SAVI	State Accountability and Voice Initiative
SCN	Savanna Conservation Nigeria
S-DoC	State Drivers of Change
SGLP	State and Local Government Programme
SHoA	State House of Assembly
SLP	State-Level Programme
SPARC	State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and

TA	Capability
TPP	Technical assistance
UK	The Policy Practice
US	United Kingdom
USAID	United States
V&A	US Agency for International Development
WRWSI	Voice and Accountability
	Wudil Regional Water Supply Initiative

Executive summary

More than ten years after Sue Unsworth made the argument that DFID should ground its work more firmly in country realities, development assistance programmes that start from careful analysis of what works and what does not in country contexts are still remarkably rare. This is mainly because aid programming is heavily constrained by what politicians in donor countries believe, often on limited evidence, about recipient country needs and possibilities. To a lesser extent, it is because we lack well documented examples of programming that achieves a ‘good fit’ with country context, or is ‘politically smart’, problem-driven, adaptive, locally led, etc. This paper is a contribution to an expanding set of studies that is helping to correct this evidence gap. It examines the experience of SAVI, one of a suite of state-level DFID programmes in Nigeria. It is based on interviews, documentary analysis and discussions completed in Nigeria and the UK over several months in mid-2014.

SAVI belongs to the formal category of ‘demand side’ governance programmes; the acronym stands for State Accountability and Voice Initiative. It provides support to State Houses of Assembly, mass media organisations and civil society organisations (CSOs), while another state-level programme, SPARC, provides public management assistance to the executive branch of government. The paper asks to what extent SAVI differs from previous programmes in Nigeria and elsewhere that are similarly labelled, and whether it may be accurately described as politically smart and locally led.

We show that in important ways SAVI differs from the usual type of ‘demand side’ donor intervention. It builds the capacity of state-level actors to promote action on locally salient but politically tractable issues, mainly in the fields of education, health and state budgeting. The programme itself keeps a low profile, with programme staff who are indigenes of the state providing mentoring and support to other stakeholders, including government staff, to work together to resolve issues of shared concern.

SAVI’s design reflects significant learning about previous programming in Nigeria. It draws on evidence that allocating grants to civil society organisations to engage in advocacy around issues selected by DFID has produced little positive impact. This approach has had the effect of locking stakeholders into fixed adversarial positions, which reduces rather than enhances real accountabilities. The programme team has adopted and adapted a model of facilitated multi-stakeholder engagement that was successfully applied in natural resource and livelihood projects in northern Nigeria between the late 1990s and the mid-2000s.

Applying this approach to health, education and budget issues at state level has meant a good deal of learning and error-correction, as civil society partners and some programme staff have struggled to shake off the legacies of the CSO advocacy grant model. However, over the years since SAVI’s inception in 2008 the programme has arrived at a distinctive way of working that achieves results. Capacity development of state-level organisations and partnerships is based on a self-assessment scheme that elicits intrinsic motivation, collective action and constructive engagement with other players. At the same time, it provides the programme with a useful means of monitoring and assessing progress. Although the outputs in the programme logframe are about attitudes, behaviours and systems, SAVI has become adept at collecting retrospective stories about changes in government policies and their implementation that are attributable to the approach. Although not large in relation to the scale of Nigeria’s development challenges, these ‘tangible’ outcomes are revealing the power of the method to achieve change.

Conceived as a ‘demonstration’ initiative, SAVI has successfully shown that there is real potential to achieve significant change even in the very difficult political context of Nigeria if tried and tested methods of multi-stakeholder facilitation are adopted. In many developing country contexts, there is scope for cooperation across the divide between state and non-state (or non-executive) stakeholders, as actors discover convergent interests in

addressing local problems. A key step is breaking down initial mistrust and building self-confidence, credibility and self-reliance. This is powerfully assisted when the donor programme ‘takes the money off the table’.

SAVI itself has only been able to go so far in exploiting this potential because in important respects it is a ‘round peg in a square hole’. In the design of the suite of state-level programmes that DFID funds, there is a division of labour in which technical support to the health, education and growth/employment sectors is delivered by distinct programmes, run by different contractors, with SPARC and SAVI providing complementary ‘governance’ inputs. Collaboration among the programmes sometimes allows this to work well, so that the governance inputs take the form of politically smart ways of working on substantive development issues. However, much of the time it does not, because the programmes have both different managers and different ways of working. Additional ‘family troubles’ arise from the fact that the health and education programmes in the state-level suite have their own ‘voice and accountability’ funds, and the growth and employment programme has been slow to find its feet.

In the paper, this prompts two general reflections. One is about the unhelpfulness of the demand/supply metaphor in governance programming. This conceptualisation is unfortunate in its suggestion that progress on big development challenges occurs when citizens ‘hold governments to account’, so that it makes sense to set up stand-alone ‘demand-side’ initiatives. In fact, such programmes inhibit politically smart, constructive engagement across the state/non-state divide. The metaphor, based on a questionable analogy with markets, also misrepresents both the challenges and the progressive potentialities of well-facilitated multi-stakeholder interactions.

A second reflection is about the desirability of taking governance programming out of the ‘ghetto’ to which it has tended to be assigned in recent years. If future programming could treat ‘governance’ as part and parcel of efforts to achieve better results in substantive fields of development, this would address the unease that donor governance advisers have often felt with the so-called ‘results agenda’. Interventions that are both well-informed about governance realities and ‘savvy’ about how they handle them do as a matter of fact deliver better tangible development outcomes than those that lack these qualities. This could become more central to the justification of governance work. In turn, such a reorientation would help to deal with the difficulty that – according to the best research – there are few generally valid indicators of progress in governance reform other than the demonstrated ability to address development problems.

For this reorientation to be successful, however, it would be necessary to reproduce on a large scale the particular circumstances that enabled SAVI to develop and apply its innovative approach. The key conditions included an intelligent approach in DFID to the initial design, which gave an experienced programme team space to elaborate and refine their model. Another positive factor was the willingness of successive advisors and Heads of Office to allow the programme to adopt a low level of ‘branding’ and visibility, and to accept that impacts would need to be judged retrospectively, rather than on the basis of a pre-programmed delivery schedule.

Together with other recently documented experience, SAVI shows that official development agencies *can* provide this type of enabling environment for programming if they really want to. However, in view of the scale of the challenge it may be wise also to consider alternative models, such as those in which the official agency delivers its support ‘at arm’s length’, through a trusted intermediary organisation that faces fewer constraints.

1 Introduction

It is more than a decade since a senior Department for International Development (DFID) official called Sue Unsworth (2001; 2002) made the radical suggestion that the programming of development assistance should begin from a deep understanding of the needs and possibilities of countries, rather than from the resources, knowledge and ideas that donors wish to transfer to them. In the intervening years, the movement to root the aid business in country realities, giving it a stronger sense of history and a greater sensitivity to politics, has broadened and deepened (Carothers and de Gramont, 2013: Chapters 5-6). Unfortunately, growing consensus along these lines among specialists has been mirrored by almost equal forces working in the opposite direction and arising from fundamental aspects of the way aid is led and managed.

On the one hand, the range of new ideas exercising significant influence on thinking in the field has included pleas to reduce governance reform overload (Grindle, 2004); to aim for ‘good fit’ (Levy, 2014; Levy and Kpundeh, 2004); to emphasise institutional functions rather than institutional forms (Rodrik, 2007); to single out the governance qualities that demonstrably matter for development (Kelsall, 2013; Khan, 2007); and to build on what works (Moore and Unsworth, 2010; Booth and Cammack, 2013). Over the same period, on the other hand, the aid business as a whole has arguably become more impatient for visible results, more inclined to ideological proselytism, more persuaded that aid programmes should be measured by the size of their disbursements and more preoccupied with delivering programmes at speed. It might be said that a stalemate has been reached. Carothers and de Gramont titled their Chapter 6, ‘Politically Smart Development Aid?’, with the question mark signalling their doubts about the feasibility of the whole project.

There are some deep structural reasons why it has been hard to translate the Unsworth vision into new practices. These include the place foreign aid occupies in the political systems of donor countries and the way civil servants typically interpret the mandates their political masters hand down. For our politicians, aid is – compared with the main alternatives – a cheap, low-risk way of showing they care about the plight of the global poor (Glennie, 2008). But this works only if the bureaucracy is prepared to provide evidence of some kind – the simpler and cruder the better – that assistance is being delivered and is making a difference. This leaves little space for subtlety and genuine evidence on what works and what doesn’t.

It is good to recognise these bottom-line realities before engaging in soul-searching about the reasons for the limited impact of ‘good fit’ and ‘starting from country realities’. However, it is also becoming clear that a change of gear is required if these ideas are to have any significant effect on what aid programmes do.

Among the proximate factors helping slow the adoption of more relevant and realistic practices is the way effort has been concentrated on the single strand of skilling-up donor staffs in the use of applied political economy analysis. Development practitioners in international agencies *do* need to get better at the simple business of understanding the countries in which they work. For this, a range of concepts belonging to the broad field of political economy analysis can be helpful. But, as revealed by, among other things, feedback from participants in training courses on this subject (e.g. ODI and TPP, recurrent), lack of appropriate analytical tools is only one of the problems. Another, and bigger, challenge is the shortage of easily recognised alternative operational models – models that are consistent with the incentives professional advisors and programme managers face at country level. In short, undue emphasis has been placed on getting more sophisticated country *analysis*, leaving largely unexplored the challenge of *programming* in a completely different way. Our colleague Alina Rocha Menocal has expressed this as the need to move the focus from ‘thinking politically’ to ‘working differently’ (2014).

Two recent developments have helped stimulate new thinking in this area. One is the renewed attention being given to complexity and uncertainty in human affairs generally, and development in particular (Harford, 2011; Ramalingam, 2013; Ries, 2011; Root, 2013; Sims, 2011). Uncertainty is one of the features of change processes

at country level with which development agencies have always dealt badly, as large bureaucracies with an addiction to a 'blueprint' concept of planning (Porter et al., 1991; Rondinelli, 1983; Therkildsen, 1988). Recent literature has both helped spell out the practical meaning of 'complexity' and showed how unexpected development successes can be achieved by treating uncertainty as an opportunity and not just a problem (Andrews, 2013; Andrews et al., 2013; Grindle, 2002; The Asia Foundation, 2011).

The other recent development is the drawing-together of validated case studies of alternative ways of working with aid that appear to have had good results. One thing these experiences have in common is that actors have been enabled to engage with the political economic realities of countries by working in a 'problem-driven, iterative and adaptive' (PDIA) way (Andrews et al., 2013) or adopting an 'entrepreneurial' logic (Booth, 2014; Faustino, 2012), rather than being compelled to implement supposedly known solutions on the basis of a detailed plan. This has been possible because the interventions were set up so that they could be, in one sense or another, both 'politically smart' and 'locally led' (Booth and Unsworth, 2014). These studies are beginning to suggest how attention can be widened from the analytics of applied political economy to the practicalities of embedding sensitivity to development blockages and opportunities within recognisably different operational styles. More such evidence is needed.

One of the places in the world where there is the most need for both understanding of a complex country reality and innovative practices to assist progressive change is Nigeria. The country's oil wealth, sharp ethno-regional divisions and gross inequalities have combined to make the politics of development unusually challenging. A good candidate for exemplifying an innovative working method that produces results in a difficult environment is one of the DFID-funded programmes working at state level within Nigeria's federal set-up: SAVI (Derbyshire and Mwamba, 2013). SAVI is a £29 million programme initiated in 2008, now operating in 10 of Nigeria's 36 states and with a scheduled end date of 2016. The SAVI experience is the subject of this study.

We have taken a particular approach to this enquiry. Importantly, we have not treated it as any type of evaluation or review but rather as exploratory research geared towards answering specific questions about how to think and work politically with aid. We have not aimed for 'balance' in assessing the highs and lows of the programme design and implementation, in part because this task is already in the hands of others who are much better equipped than we are. We have focused deliberately on what the programme has done best, what it has discovered, how this was possible and what can be learnt from this experience for application to other places and contexts, as well as for future DFID programming in Nigeria.

We have two sets of questions. The major set arises from the argument of the Booth/Unsworth paper cited above:

- How politically smart is SAVI (how well does it live up to what the acronym implies)?
- How far and in what senses is the programme locally led, and with what benefits?
- To the extent that the programme has politically smart/locally led characteristics, what features of its funding and management have enabled this to happen?

There are good grounds for posing these questions. DFID programming in Nigeria has had several false starts since the reintroduction of competitive civilian politics in 1999. The very first was to base aid to Nigeria on the assumption that agreement on a liberal democratic constitution for the federal government and the states would imply a new and quite large set of opportunities to make good use of aid, by helping governments implement their election pledges. The second was the way programming was initially reshaped in the light of the ensuing disillusionment with government performance. From the mid-2000s, DFID strategy in Nigeria was increasingly concerned with 'doing something about governance'. A comprehensive set of Drivers of Change (DoC) studies was undertaken in 2004, the main outcome of which was the adoption of a new Issues-Based Approach. The results from this initial effort to make programming more politically realistic, as reflected particularly in the 2007-2011 Coalitions for Change (C4C) Programme, were also disappointing.

In the C4C phase, some of the civil society organisations (CSOs) that had received external support for advocacy against military rule in the 1990s, and were orphaned during the initial donor enthusiasm for the democratic transition, were hired to implement the new donor vision. The DoC studies had argued for the building of coalitions of interest cutting across civil society, government, the private sector and the media.

However, the Issue-Based Projects (IBPs) in the C4C portfolio were, with one exception,¹ run as civil society advocacy campaigns. Three, focused on issues identified by DFID – transparency in the oil sector, monitoring the Virtual Poverty Fund and anti-corruption – were expected to build broad coalitions but failed to do so. Others picked up longstanding CSO campaign issues – disability, the Constitutional Review Dialogue Mechanism, affirmative action on gender and climate change – with mixed success. Implementation was influenced by the international turn towards ‘demand-side’ governance initiatives and ‘voice and accountability’ (V&A) programming reflected in contemporary flagship publications like the 2004 World Development Report on service delivery.

We characterise this as a false start on the grounds that C4C was offered as evidence of aid becoming more attuned to political context. In reality, however, the amount of rhetorical attention being given to issues of governance had changed much more than perspectives on what that might mean in practice for donor programming. C4C had little impact, some IBPs were closed prematurely and the option to develop a second phase was not pursued (DFID, 2009a). While, as we shall explain, a good deal had been learnt over the previous decade about ways of working on issues that can make headway in the Nigerian context, these experiences were not yet informing top-level programming.

DFID funds programmes at both the federal and the state levels in Nigeria. SAVI was part of a new suite of state-level programmes (SLPs) formulated in 2007. The previous suite had included health, justice and basic education sector support,² and a State and Local Government Programme (SGLP, 2001-2008). SLGP had included both public sector management and, after 2004, what were retrospectively dubbed ‘demand-side’ initiatives or Issue-Based Projects. The new suite included three large sector programmes, Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN), Partnership for Transforming Health Systems 2 (PATHS2) and Growth and Employment in States (GEMS). In the initial design concept, it also included one large state-level governance programme called State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC). However, ahead of the procurement phase it was decided to tender the V&A component of SPARC as a separate programme. The management contract for this programme was awarded to a consortium led by one of the world’s largest service-providing contractors in development, GRM International, while SPARC was awarded to HTSPE (formerly Huntings, now Development Alternatives Incorporated, DAI). The programme came to be called the State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI).

In the SLP suite, therefore, SAVI is a component with a particular responsibility for stimulating government accountability to citizens. There is a much larger component of direct support to government capacity and responsiveness at state level (SPARC) as well as substantial technical assistance (TA) to the social sectors and, more recently, to economic growth and employment. Defenders of the suite approach, of whom there are many, argue the package needs to be seen and assessed as a whole. Its effectiveness depends on the ability to improve governance by combining supply- and demand-side interventions and to stimulate and harness these gains by addressing major issues of public sector delivery in the sectors. This joint aspiration is expressed in logical framework terms, as Table 1 shows. The Outputs to be delivered and the Outcome sought by SAVI are contributions, among others, to the Outcome in SPARC’s logframe. In turn, these are contributions to the combined Impact that the suite as a whole is designed to facilitate.

¹ The exception was the Northern Nigeria Water Governance Initiative (NNWGI), which received a two-year accountable grant under C4C but was in effect a way of allowing a two-year exit phase to the existing Joint Wetlands Livelihoods (JWL) project. Section 2 and Box 1 provide further details of this and other predecessor projects.

² Partnership for Transforming Health Systems (PATHS1), Justice for All (J4A) and Capacity for Universal Basic Education (CUBE).

Table 1: Extract from SAVI results framework (version 12, January 2014)

<p>Super-Impact (the SLP suite’s combined Impact) Nigeria’s own resources used efficiently and effectively to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (primarily on Health, Education and Economic Growth).</p>
<p>Impact (SPARC’s Outcome) The efficiency and effectiveness of selected state-level governments’ use of public resources is enhanced.</p>
<p>Outcome (SAVI’s contribution to SPARC’s Outcome) State houses of assembly (SHoAs), civil society, media and citizens demonstrate more effectiveness in demanding better performance from government and holding government to account.</p>
<p>Output 1 Civil society demonstrates a replicable and sustainable approach to issue-based policy advocacy and monitoring. <i>Weight: 20%</i></p>
<p>Output 2 Civil society demonstrates a replicable and sustainable approach to facilitating public involvement in government budget and planning processes. <i>Weight: 20%</i></p>
<p>Output 3 More open and inclusive systems of communication and improved understanding between citizens, civil society, media, SHoAs and government. <i>Weight: 20%</i></p>
<p>Output 4 Improved systems for transparency, public engagement and financial oversight in SHoAs. <i>Weight: 30%</i></p>
<p>Output 5 Other development partners take a more sustainable and replicable approach to strengthening V&A. <i>Weight: 10%</i></p>

This may be so. However, this account of the matter suggests to us a second set of questions to be settled by our enquiry:

- How does SAVI’s approach compare with that of other voice and accountability or ‘demand-side’ governance programmes, in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa?
- What does SAVI’s experience suggest about the wisdom of setting up initiatives to specialise i) in ‘governance’ and ii) in ‘demand-side’ governance, with expertise and influence on substantive social and economic reforms being delivered in parallel by a different set of actors?

These are not innocent questions. The first stems from our awareness (based on Derbyshire and Mwamba, 2013) that what SAVI does is a good deal more interesting and innovative than the formal programme name and its origins as a ‘voice’ initiative would suggest. The second reflects some of the latest discussion among adherents of the idea of politically smart programming.

Over the past decade, recognition of the importance of institutions in development has resulted in an explosion of ‘governance programming’. High priority has been given to improving aspects of governance on the assumption that this is likely to be the most powerful way of affecting development performance across the board in the medium term. In agencies like DFID, the cadre of governance advisors has grown steadily, with major branches specialising in public financial management and civil society advocacy. Increasingly, however, aid policy at the highest level has called for a steady and predictable flow of ‘tangible’ or at least visible development results.

Governance specialists have been caught somewhat on the back foot by this. While insisting governance really matters, they have had to point out that improvements in the quality of governance in response to aid are inevitably going to be slow – hard to capture in three- or five-year implementation cycles. Some would add that they will be unpredictable, hard to measure and near impossible to attribute to particular causes.

In reality, the research evidence suggests a more radical set of difficulties. How political systems function in developing countries is shaped almost entirely by domestic forces and historical path dependencies. The influence of aid-funded programmes is quite slight, usually restricted to placing a veneer of formal institutionality on top of what really goes on politically in a country. Even more fundamentally, the research evidence cited in the second paragraph of this Introduction tends to suggest that what counts as governance improvement is context-specific. There is no one-to-one relationship between form and function. A key criterion of the quality of an institution is whether it helps solve pressing development problems.

This being the case, a question that cannot be avoided is whether it is ever sensible to set up programmes to deliver governance-related outputs that are defined independently of their ability to solve substantive development problems. Is it not better to target tangible objectives that *either* make a big difference to people's livelihoods or the performance of the economy in the immediate term *or* help create the socioeconomic structural conditions that history tells us are critical to the emergence of effective states and liberal democratic political systems in the long term? The 'governance' element then consists of a way of working towards these objectives that is effective because it is politically informed and astute, and not predicated on donor-driven, ideological assumptions about institutional needs. Among other things, such an approach helps meet the need to demonstrate 'results' as development ministers currently conceive them, because, as noted above, there is growing evidence that interventions that are politically smart and locally led deliver better results than those that are not.

These, then, are the questions that structure our approach to the SAVI experience. It has seemed important to put our cards on the table in this regard. Our research methods were also different from those of a disinterested evaluation. We gave priority to examining what the programme was doing at its best, giving weight to what the programme team has learned since 2008, rather than trying to establish an average level of performance or dwell on mistakes or setbacks for their own sake. On these grounds, we conducted several extended group interviews with the national programme team and then focused on the programme's experience in a purposive sample of three states, from a possible total of ten.

The focus states were Jigawa, Lagos and Yobe. The selection logic started with the fact that the programme team hold all three as among the most successful examples of the approach that they have developed, on the back of a certain amount of negative experience in other states. Jigawa and Lagos are among the original set of five states (also including Enugu, Kaduna and Kano) with the longest span of SAVI experience. Yobe is one of the set of three states (with Katsina and Zamfara) where work began three years later. We did not focus closely on the SAVI experience in the most recent (2013) additions to the programme – Anambra and Niger. The authors visited Lagos and held meetings with the programme team, several groups of partners and the Lagos state SPARC team. Because of the security situation in the north of Nigeria, meetings were scheduled in Abuja with the state programme teams from Jigawa and Yobe, and some of their main partners also travelled to Abuja to meet us.

This paper reports the conclusions the authors reached on the basis of combining, cross-checking and interrogating the explanations and testimony gathered from these various sources as well as the relevant documents. We have benefited from substantial feedback on oral summaries and written drafts, without which we would have made many errors of fact or interpretation. We are grateful for the substantial time and effort members of the SAVI team, their partners and their advisors and reviewers have devoted to informing us and sharing insights.

The paper is divided into two main parts. The first is structured around the answers to our principal questions about the programme experience itself; the second deals with the question of the conditions in the DFID environment and beyond that enabled the programme to take the form and make the progress that it did. In the final section, we draw conclusions and spell out some wider implications.

2 The potential revealed

The SAVI programme has revealed hitherto untapped potential for change leading to improved development results at state level in Nigeria. This is the most significant general finding of this study. It carries particular weight because, by common consent, Nigeria is one of the countries in the world in which it has been hardest to achieve improved development outcomes with aid-funded interventions. It makes SAVI (hereafter, ‘the programme’) a major source of learning for the design of future DFID support to development in Nigeria and beyond. In this section, we explain and assess i) what the programme has done; ii) the learning process it went through; and iii) what this demonstrates about the broader potential of the approach. We begin by underlining some familiar and some important and possibly under-appreciated aspects of the Nigerian context.

2.1 The setting

A colossus in terms of population, economic weight and geography, Nigeria is also a textbook example of growing poverty accompanying badly utilised natural resource riches. A colonial creation bringing together several large ethno-linguistic clusters, any one of which could have been the basis of a nation, the Nigerian state revealed its potential to fall apart within seven years of its independence in 1960. The Biafra war of 1967-1970 inaugurated a long period of military dominance of politics, which, despite a formal democratic transition in 1999, has in important respects hardly ended.³

The military and civilian elites that dominated national politics from the 1970s took a hard line on maintaining the integrity of the state under a variety of federal formulas designed to weaken secessionist tendencies. But they failed to achieve the central coordination needed to overcome the collective action challenges that typically afflict ethno-regionally fragmented ruling elites in developing countries. In this respect, they did worse than the leaders of other large, ethnically heterogeneous and resource-rich ex-colonies such as Indonesia (Lewis, 2007), and far worse than those of other similarly placed countries like Malaysia (Slater, 2010). Politics became, and has remained, an unrestrained competition for control of rents, with strong ethno-regional dimensions. The limited space remaining for ideas-led public policy-making for development has been occupied by visions of progress that are the opposite of those associated with inclusive economic growth and rapid human development in parts of Asia (Henley, 2013; forthcoming).

The civilian political system inaugurated in 1999 may be fairly described as immature, even at the federal level. Political parties are patronage machines and political campaigns centre on the personal qualities of their current leaders. Outside of the Yoruba heartlands in the southwest, parties do not have historic ideological affiliations. Only in the metropolitan region of Lagos is there the sort of separation of business interests from the affairs of the dominant political families that allows for the emergence of a tax-accountability relationship between the state and civil society. In the terms used by North et al. (2009; 2013), this is very much a limited access order, meeting few of the conditions for the advance towards some form of liberal democratic capitalism. General economic development is stifled as a result. The bitter conflicts arising first in the oil-rich Niger delta region and now in the predominantly Islamic northern states and their borderlands contribute in obvious ways to discouraging private investment in fields other than oil trading and financial services.

In Nigerian states, the situation varies but the level of political development is generally lower than at the federal level. The rule of thumb developed by the state-level DFID governance programmes is that an overwhelming proportion of the spending funded by federal transfers to the states is in practice earmarked for purposes other than providing public goods and services. A public sector wage bill inflated by the patronage of previous

³ The party formed by the military to steer the transition back to civilian rule (the People’s Democratic Party, PDP) is still dominant, and the formation of a credible opposition alliance of three parties is quite recent.

regimes absorbs a large proportion. A further share pays off the political debts of incumbent governors, which in the poorer states often implies a return flow out of the state. The modest remaining percentage is what pays for public goods and services.

Under the constitution, state governments are answerable to SHoAs. Not only are these new entities, but also, until now, most are dependent on the executive branch for their funding and staff support. Civil society in the classical sense – self-funding associations of citizens – exists only in Lagos. But, in most states, the civil society panorama includes some membership-based associations, notably faith-based organisations and trade unions; community-based organisations of various sorts; and (semi-governmental) traditional authorities. There are also single-person voluntary initiatives, sometimes linked to well-wishers in government, as well as what might be termed ‘professional CSOs’. Media houses, both print and radio, are considered vibrant by African standards.

A crucial dimension of the context for SAVI is the way the democratic transition and the presence of donor funding shaped and reshaped ‘professional civil society’. As we said in the Introduction, many CSOs grew up, with donor support, in the struggle to get the military to return to the barracks. When democracy appeared to have arrived, the initial donor response was to shift attention to helping the new government deliver on its election pledges. Disillusionment was not long in coming, and resulted in a relative shift from supporting the supply of better public policies to cultivating the ‘demand side’ by fostering a new wave of issue-based advocacy activity by CSOs. The shift was stimulated in part by DFID Nigeria’s 2004 DoC studies, but a change of direction was also taking place in the global intellectual environment. Reflected in the 2004 World Development Report, the idea of the moment was accountability to citizens; the only significant disagreement was about whether to wager on the ‘long route’ via democratic politics or on the ‘short route’ of client voice or market power.

In the Nigerian context, long-term observers agree that the impact of donor-funded CSO advocacy in this period had no observable impact on what governments did with public resources. It did, on the other hand, have a marked effect on the way senior politicians regarded CSOs. Having been regarded by military politicians as the attack dogs of the international liberal establishment, professional CSOs were now seen increasingly as ill-informed and untrustworthy opposition forces that should be kept as much as possible at arm’s length. CSOs, for their part, conformed to the expectations of their donor funders – shrill, high-minded and uncompromising in the pursuit of citizens’ rights.

This was the point of departure where the SAVI learning experience stepped off. As noted earlier, DFID has been supporting SLPs since 2000/01. These have included sector support in health, education and justice, and a comprehensive ‘governance’ package (SLGP). SAVI emerged as part the new suite of SLPs initiated in 2008. The other programmes entail sectoral support to education, health and growth/employment and SPARC, which delivers public management assistance to state governments. There is also an Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Project for the SLPs (IMEP). Both the growth/employment programme (GEMS) and IMEP started later than the other SLPs. The suite was scheduled to last until 2014, but this was recently extended to 2016 – the other side of the next Nigerian elections.

As we said in the Introduction, SAVI was originally to have been the ‘demand-side’ component of a single state-level governance programme called SPARC, following the comprehensive approach of the former SLGP. However, it was decided, relatively late in DFID’s design process, to invite tenders for this component separately. This decision stemmed principally from the perception that it was impractical to provide responsive, confidential TA to state governments while also stimulating civil society and media monitoring of public performance within the same management structure. However, the late separation of what was then called Partnerships for Accountability and Voice (PAVs) from SPARC had the beneficial effect of allowing the programme’s shape and approach to be defined in a stepwise fashion during the tendering of the management contract and after. The outline design in the relevant annex of the SPARC Programme Memorandum (PM) (DFID, 2007) was deepened in the winning Technical Tender (GRM, 2008) and further fleshed out in the SAVI Inception Report (2009).

Crucially, this process provided an opportunity to draw on a decade of learning from working on ‘issues’ in Nigeria and not just on the particular interpretation of the 2004 DoC studies that led to the federal-level C4C. While the PM reflected much of the then current donor thinking on ‘advocacy projects’, independent budget

monitoring and support to parliamentary and media organisations, it also drew attention to a particular experience within SLGP (the Wudil Regional Water Supply Issue Based Project). This came from a different tradition of formal and informal multi-stakeholder engagement pioneered in natural resource projects in northern Nigeria. The winning proposal was submitted by the consortium led by GRM International, which also included ITAD (monitoring and evaluation specialists), the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) and ActionAid Nigeria. Drafted principally by Julian Barr of ITAD, the technical sections of the proposal deepened the reflection on the range of experience gained in predecessor projects, including the JWL project, which was the principal inspiration for the approach of the above-mentioned Wudil Water Project. The document declared that the new suite of SLPs was a great opportunity to extend the approach of these water initiatives – finding entry points for gaining ‘traction’ with the general public and ‘leverage’ with the government in the north of Nigeria – to health, education, commerce and industry. Two members of the JWL team, Steve Fraser and Ishaya Bajama, were named in the bid. Together with Barr and Adam Suleiman, another JWL veteran, they shaped the SAVI Inception Report, which initiated the practice – explained below – of not spelling out the words behind the programme acronym but foregrounding the slogan ‘collective responsibility, collective accountability’.

All of this helps explain how and why SAVI has been able to be more than a standard demand-side governance programme. It also suggests a sense in which, as Fraser puts it, SAVI has tended to be a round peg in a square hole. It has been led by people with a great deal of field experience and a vision of feasible change that predates the ‘governance’ boom of the mid-2000s and draws inspiration from insights from DFID livelihoods and natural resource work going back to the 1990s (see Box 1 for details). These people are relatively unencumbered with illusions about the power of citizen voice to achieve change on its own. Yet the structure of the SLP suite defines the role of SAVI in conventional ‘demand-side’ terms.

Box 1: Predecessor projects that influenced SAVI

- In 1997/98 the DFID programme Capacity-Building for Decentralised Development (CBDD) used its Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) fund to provide a grant to Savanna Conservation Nigeria (SCN). SCN staff members had established an initiative to address natural resource management conflict in Kaduna, which was achieving some success using locally led, issue-based, multi-stakeholder platforms for dialogue between government and citizens. CBDD funded the pastoral inclusion programme within this initiative.
- In 2001/02, DFID’s ‘focal states’ initiative funded the Jigawa Enhancement of Wetlands Livelihoods (JEWEL) project (2002-2008) to address escalating conflict over management of natural resources in northeast Nigeria. Almost immediately after its inception, JEWEL was expanded to include other states and was renamed the JWL project. The design of the project built on lessons from SCN and CBDD and the approach was ‘locally led, issue-based, multi-sectoral, multi-state, multi-stakeholder platform-driven’. It did not include NGO grant funding and adopted a ‘no branding’ approach. Despite its success (reflected in an unprecedented score of ‘1’ ahead of completion) and partly because the ‘no branding’ gave the project a low profile in the DFID office in Abuja, JWL’s funding was cut in 2006 to make way for larger-scale projects and the transition from ‘livelihoods’ to ‘growth’.
- Between 2004 and 2007, the DFID SLGP (2001-2008) began to experiment with issue-based approaches in the four states it functioned in. In Jigawa state, SLGP collaborated with JWL on a riverine infrastructural project. The JWL multi-stakeholder, informal and formal engagement approach began to influence SLGP Issue-Based Projects in other states. The Wudil Regional Water Supply Initiative (WRWSI) in Kano is a good example of this (other examples can be found in Ekiti and Enugu). WRWSI achieved modest reforms in public and procurement processes and increased space for the private sector in service delivery at the same time as increasing public participation.
- In 2007, funding was found to enable JWL to complete its exit phase. Renamed the Northern Nigeria Water Governance Initiative (NNWGI), the project received a two-year accountable grant under the C4C programme.

2.2 What has been done

During its Inception Phase, SAVI recruited staff with experience in several previous DFID programmes, including not only JWL, SLGP and C4C but also the earlier (1998/99) civil society capacity-building initiative, CBDD. The majority had not been involved in the JWL multi-stakeholder, issues-based way of working described in the technical proposal. Only Fraser and Bajama had experience of working on all four predecessor programmes and were in a position to draw conclusions on the basis of what had worked and what had not across the board.

SAVI has been therefore, among other things, a process of sharing, consolidating and refining a new way of operating with DFID funding. SAVI staff have been helped to understand and appreciate a multi-stakeholder partnership approach, thanks to active mentoring by the central technical team and learning by doing it for themselves, in their own states and contexts. The technical team have treated implementation in an iterative and adaptive way, running SAVI as a learning organisation, with regular monthly and quarterly reflection and feedback loops, developing the details of the approach together with all staff. In the following pages, we set out the main features of this approach as we see it. Box 2 provides an alternative summary, one with which we broadly agree.

Among the things the central technical team were convinced about, on the basis of their previous experience, were two negatives. They were convinced that the approach of awarding grants to professional CSOs to carry out pre-programmed advocacy on particular issues had not yielded impressive results and, if anything, had undermined public accountability. They also doubted the value of heavy inputs of international, including Nigerian diaspora, TA, one of the mainstays of many DFID programmes in Nigeria.

Not doing grants or technical assistance

In an early move, it was decided not to make use of the small grant fund inherited from the initial SPARC design, and to redistribute this into other budget lines for programme activities. Understanding what SAVI has done starts with appreciating this aspect of what it has *not* done: it has not continued the tradition of using donor funds to distribute grants to NGOs or CSOs, on the basis of competitive proposal-writing, to advocate for donor-determined, or at least predetermined, improvements in public policy. Its relations with partners are of another kind.

SAVI also distinguished itself from the beginning by avoiding heavy use of expatriate staff and TA personnel. The programme has only two permanent staff who are not Nigerians,⁴ both long-term residents with families in the country. In the states, the programme has a local profile. The state teams (typically three technical professionals, plus office and finance managers and drivers) are not just Nigerians but nearly always indigenes of the state.⁵ The support they get from the national office is largely provided by a Nigerian team of specialists.⁶ As recorded above, the first cohort of staff came from a number of previous DFID programmes. Increasingly, there is a career path within the programme, as those performing well in junior roles are promoted or moved sideways to other states where they are better suited.

Short-term international TA was used during the Inception Phase to support national staff with the initial political economy analysis in each state and the process of identifying stakeholders and issues. SAVI continues to draw on a small team of international advisors to support the national team on issues relating to change management, M&E and results communications. The impression that might be gathered from a cursory look at the programme budget, that this is largely a training operation delivered by outsiders, would be quite wrong, although this description may well apply to other DFID programmes in Nigeria. The programme budget is

⁴ The National Team Leader, Kevin Gager, and the Deputy Team Leader – Technical, Steve Fraser. Other senior staff are a Programme Director (Audu Grema) and a Deputy Team Leader – Operations (Kemakolam Egere), both of whom are very experienced Nigerians. GRM provides programme management support, mainly from London.

⁵ The heavy reliance on state indigenes is unusual for DFID SLPs, several of which make a good deal of use of diaspora Nigerians at higher pay grades. The criterion is applied loosely when necessary, though more loosely for operational than for technical staff: among the programme teams in the states we focused on, we found one member who was born in a neighbouring state.

⁶ Now covering Strategic Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), Knowledge Management and Communications, Gender and Social Inclusion, Media Relations, SHoA Relations and Federal Relations.

largely used for national TA to state teams, to a limited extent for training and more extensively for mentoring, facilitation and ongoing advice and support for local-level partners.

Box 2: Essential elements of the SAVI approach

According to SAVI's most recent Annual Review (Williams et al., 2014), the following are the distinctive elements of its approach:

- *Building coalitions of like-minded and committed actors.* SAVI's advocacy partnerships have proven to be an effective and flexible vehicle for enabling civil society actors to find collective voice and common interests.
- *Triangular relationships.* SAVI works to strengthen connections between civil society, the media and SHoAs. Improved communication between these demand-side actors greatly increases the potential to influence change.
- *Bridging demand and supply sides of governance processes.* SAVI works to strengthen connections between demand-side actors and the executive. SAVI promotes constructive engagement as being a more realistic strategy for influencing government rather than highly adversarial styles of advocacy.
- *Inclusiveness.* SAVI has made a particular effort to promote inclusiveness in the processes and focus of the work of advocacy partnerships, focusing in particular on gender and disability.
- *Applied political economy analysis.* SAVI's locally recruited staff have an in-depth understanding of local political processes, and this has enabled the programme to identify opportunities to promote change and to inform tactics.
- *Behind the scenes working.* SAVI's approach carries political risk, which is partly mitigated by maintaining a low profile. Partners are also incentivised to engage with SAVI because they can direct their own work and claim credit for success.
- *Adaptability, flexibility and experimentation.* SAVI operates in 10 states with different and dynamic governance contexts and challenges. This requires a high level of adaptation to local contexts, flexibility to respond to changing conditions and a willingness to experiment (including the acceptance of failure).
- *Change through demonstration and replication.* SAVI works to achieve change through demonstration projects that indicate the potential of demand-side actors to bring about change. It is expected that these results will be scaled up through processes of replication, whereby other actors outside the SAVI programme adopt successful approaches pioneered by SAVI and its partners.
- *Avoidance of providing grants to CSOs.* Unlike most empowerment and accountability programmes, SAVI does not provide grants to its civil society partners. Instead, it engages them in ongoing processes of training, mentoring and facilitation that support partners to pool and generate their own resources from locally sustainable sources. This avoids commonly encountered problems with grant programmes of creating dependency and distorting advocacy agendas towards DFID's funding priorities.

Being smart about campaign issues

One of the positives the technical team brought into SAVI from previous experience was the belief that there are issues on which it is possible to get 'traction' in the Nigerian context and others on which it is not. Political economy analysis at the state level that drills down into sectors and sub-sectoral issues (known as State Drivers of Change, or S-DoC, analysis) is seen as, fundamentally, a tool for selecting topics around which coalitions for change – called advocacy partnerships by SAVI – can be built with some prospect of success, given the prevailing political economic realities.

In states where governors have been showing some inclination to break with pure patronage politics, this extends to trying to demonstrate the viability of delivering on campaign promises and thereby establishing precedents for winning on the basis of programmatic achievements and not just by buying votes. More generally, however, the principle is to select 'demonstration issues' that allow the first essential step to be taken, that of showing to the government that civil society is not a threat and can be useful.

In most cases, this has meant a focus on service delivery issues, especially in the social sectors, and on the utilisation of the portion of state budgets that are not formally or informally earmarked for paying civil servants

or for ‘money politics’ – that is, paying political debts. The focus on social services was partly the product of DFID influence, as DFID wanted members of the SLP suite to complement each other, and GEMS – the growth and employment sub-suite – was slow to start. The combination of the tractability criterion (not threatening powerful stakeholders) and DFID guidance on sectoral priorities has effectively excluded work on economics and livelihood issues such as inefficient or inequitable subsidies, the state-level business environment, regulation and taxation, despite the salience of these issues in Nigeria.⁷

With that limitation, in the national office and some states SAVI has staff with a sophisticated understanding of how to ‘think outside the box’ in terms of promoting development progress. One of the metaphors that is popular in the Lagos team is one taken from the writings of Edward de Bono about what can be achieved by emulating the flow of water around the rocks in a stream (as opposed to hitting a rock with another rock). Another is a very Nigerian metaphor about choosing a route so as to avoid roadblocks. These ideas are already being applied to legislative tactics in ways that would be fairly obvious to an experienced parliamentary lobbyist but tend to be obscured when progress is assumed to be all about claiming citizens’ rights or ‘holding government to account’.

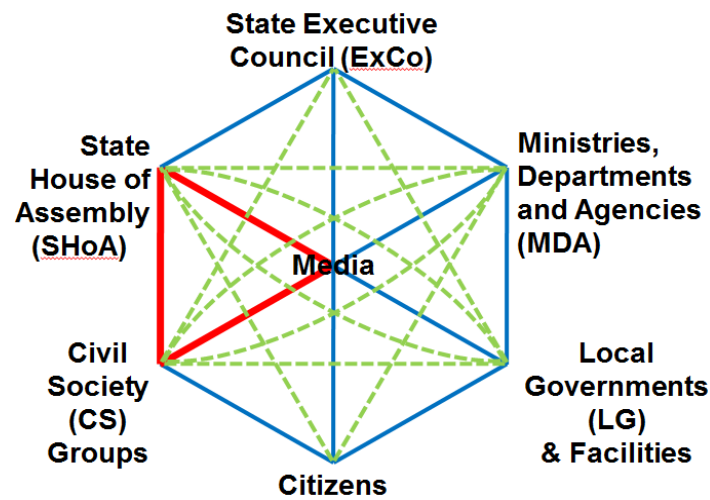
Working methods

What SAVI has added to previous ‘issue-based’ working in Nigeria is a method for using facilitated discussions with stakeholder groups to identify not only the issues combining local salience and tractability, but also the actors who might contribute to viable advocacy partnerships. This method was built up over several years. Various team members have contributed ideas from earlier programme experience and training – about beneficiary-driven development, about the importance of engaging with local elites and about adaptive design. In the process, some mistakes have been made and lessons have had to be drawn.

After state-level programme teams have conducted political economy studies, SAVI staff establish working relationships with three categories of ‘demand-side’ stakeholders: SHoAs (members and staff), mass media actors (including journalists, editors and radio and TV programmers and presenters) and elements of ‘civil society’. This complies with the supply/demand conceptualisation of the division of labour between the two governance programmes (SPARC and SAVI) and the sectoral members of the SLP suite. In theory, the role of SAVI is to facilitate issue-based partnerships among the elements of the triangle: SHoAs, media and civil society. These efforts are meant to marry up with the capacity-building on the supply side of governance by SPARC and with sector-specific supply and demand interventions by the other SLPs, making the whole suite a coherent, coordinated contribution to a common overall objective. Figure 1 reproduces an early effort to illustrate this concept. While the SAVI stakeholders are a triangle, the triangle is part of a hexagonal relationship among the salient actors.

⁷ There is also a federal-level ‘demand-side’ DFID programme on the business climate (Enhancing Nigerian Advocacy for a Better Business Environment, ENABLE), which collaborates with GEMS on some issues. Until recently, SAVI has been discouraged from invading the ‘turf’ of this other programme, managed by Adam Smith International.

Figure 1: The SAVI triangle as part of the SLP hexagon

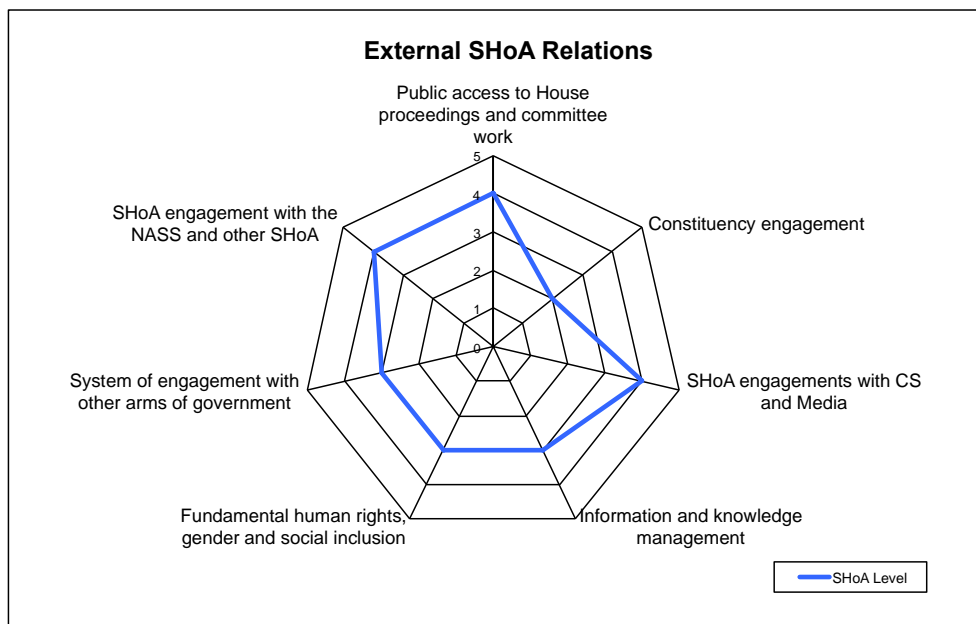


Source: SAVI.

In practice, as we shall see, the SAVI-facilitated partnerships that have worked often cut across the theoretical boundary between state and non-state, or executive and legislative, spheres. The ‘demand’ for joint working on issues does not always come from the non-state actors. This results from both the collaborative multi-stakeholder dynamics the SAVI technical team favours (based on the JWL experience) and efforts to achieve coordination among the DFID programmes.

Appreciating the period and the history is important for understanding the heavy investment SAVI makes in its innovative method of capacity development. This takes the form of tailored, responsive support to each of the three categories of stakeholder: media houses, SHoAs and civil society advocacy partnerships. The support is innovative in its reliance on self-assessment tools. Training is provided in response to specific demands arising from self-assessments, not on a supply-driven basis. A ‘theory of change’ has been developed, the main steps of which are about growing self-determination, competence and confidence; generating resourcefulness and mutual respect; constructive engagement with government; and, finally, replication of successful approaches, building to a critical mass for change. Figure 2 illustrates the results of a typical self-assessment exercise – in this case, an Organisation Capacity Assessment (OCA) for a SHoA on one of three standard dimensions, External Relations. We go into the detail of the self-assessment scheme further below.

Figure 2: OCA for a SHoA – External Relations dimension



Source: SAVI.

First things first? Building capacity to achieve tangible results

The attention SAVI gives to developing the capacities of stakeholders is fully justified in view of the novelty and immaturity of the SHoAs on the one hand and the heavy shaping and reshaping of the associational life of the states by the recent history of donor–CSO relationships on the other. Thus, the SHoAs are at an early stage in defining their role, with only the Constitution to guide them. Newspapers and radio stations are a vibrant presence but not necessarily good at issue-based debate. Civil society has needed to get rid of much of the baggage it acquired in previous, and some ongoing, interactions with donor programmes. Efforts have been required to break the monopolisation of civil society action by ‘professional’ CSOs built up in the previous donor-created market for voice and accountability services. All of the partners have needed, and still need, to build both self-confidence and credibility with each other. Given the legacies of the previous model, big investments in ‘unlearning’ have been needed.

The current level of self-confidence and credibility among partners has been achieved partly by exploring issues – that is, trying out some limited collaboration and reflecting on how it has gone. At the same time, the need to construct and test the viability of the partnerships has meant making rather slow progress in terms of actually addressing the issues and realising ‘tangible’ gains. By 2014, however, partnerships established with the help of the SAVI state teams have shown their ability to have an impact on policies and their implementation in several areas. The gains are not dramatic in relation to the scale of Nigeria’s problems – one consequence of giving priority to ‘tractable’ issues – but we think they should be considered signals of what may be possible in the future. In our three focus states, for example, the partnerships have achieved:⁸

- A major breakthrough on disability policy and legislation (Lagos) with implementation funded by the state government;
- Facilitation of a governor’s initiative relating to climate change (Lagos);
- Modification of the governor’s procurement bill to retain safeguards (Lagos);
- Legal precedents (in Lagos) enhancing the financial and staffing autonomy of SHoAs;
- A precedent in control of corruption by means of community monitoring of state government infrastructure contract implementation (Jigawa);

⁸ The latest SAVI Annual Review (Williams et al., 2014) lists some 40 validated results stories compiled up to the end of 2013. Derbyshire and Mwamba (2013) report several case studies in detail.

- ‘Domestication’ of Nigeria’s gender policy for application to Muslim majority populations, which has encouraged increases in female employment in teaching, nursing, midwifery and the government bureaucracy (Jigawa);
- Increased budgets for maternal and child health following SAVI-supported radio phone-in programmes (Jigawa);
- A decision to renovate the General Hospital at Damagun (Yobe);
- Routine delivery of auditor-general reports to the SHoA Public Accounts Committee (Yobe).

While the examples listed above refer primarily to changes in formal rules, there is some evidence to indicate either these are being implemented in practice or there is a good expectation that they will be.

2.3 The learning process

Several important lessons have been learned in the SAVI implementation process to date. We discuss seven of them.

Breaking bad habits

Unlearning the pattern of donor–CSO–government interaction built up since the 1990s was even harder than the central technical team – all experienced Nigeria hands – had led themselves to expect. Many CSO partners found it extraordinarily difficult to break with an adversarial ‘naming and shaming’ approach to government. This ‘business as usual’ made it difficult to gain the ear of potentially sympathetic actors in government or to build trust on the basis of expertise in a field rather than loudness of voice. Some partners, as well as some staff, struggled with the idea that SAVI was not providing the usual grants for the usual purposes. Having joined a campaign along with other self-motivated volunteers, some CSOs continued to harbour the belief that SAVI was going to hire them to implement the next stages of the intervention. In one case (in Kaduna), an important partner organisation, having completed a ‘demonstration’ campaign, wanted to bill SAVI for the service.

Methods for dealing with these challenges were developed on the basis of experience. Lessons gained from the first states where the programme became engaged were applied in the next set of states, where work began more recently, with beneficial results. Learning-by-doing was necessary and came to be appreciated. One of SAVI’s strengths as a programme relates to this ability to treat setbacks and errors of judgement as a good source of learning at both the state and the national level, not as a waste of effort.

Who are the actors?

The partnerships that have worked best and show the greatest potential for promoting change beyond their own immediate sphere are not triangles. At the very least they are rectangles, with players inside state governments providing an invaluable addition. Some partnerships started with involvement of actors from the executive branch; others progressed to this. The pattern differs a little, of course, between states where the incumbent governor is viewed as a ‘reformer’ (currently including Lagos, Jigawa and, to a lesser extent, Yobe) and the rest, where the leadership remains unreservedly patrimonial. But, even in the latter type of situation, the state teams have found heads of ministries or public agencies who are interested in getting assistance from well-informed non-government actors in implementing their policies. In other words, the ‘demand’ for the interaction is mutual, and all of the actors ‘supply’ something to it.

In defence of the SLP suite concept, it can be said that the triangular linkage between SHoAs, the media and civil society partnerships was never expected to produce change on its own; that was to have been the joint effect of the suite. However, we think it is significant that SAVI *itself* has had success in facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships including government actors, even when effective coordination among the components of the suite has been weak, as it quite often has been (see below). Not only have SAVI’s own efforts not been restricted by the concept of a triangle-within-a-hexagon (recalling Figure 1), but also doubt has been cast on whether the most significant potential relationships among government and non-government actors are well captured by the idea of ‘demand’ meeting ‘supply’.

To reference some of the relevant research, our suggestion here is that the SAVI experience adds to the evidence on the value in ‘blurring the boundaries’ between the state and citizen movements for change (Citizenship DRC, 2011; Gaventa and McGee, 2010). It also provides additional reasons for getting rid of the straitjacket on

thinking and programming on multi-stakeholder interventions provided by the demand/supply metaphor and its close cousin, the principal-agent conceptualisation of what is wrong with governance in Africa (Booth and Cammack, 2013). We return to this theme below.

These points having been made, SAVI's main logframe outputs are still concerned with the three so-called demand-side stakeholders, and the main expenditure of effort has been focused on these. In recent years, with the endorsement of the programme's external reviewers, efforts have been spread more evenly, with greater investment in SHoA and media engagement than previously, and more recruitment of staff with experience in these areas (Williams et al., 2014).

With regard to the civil society partnerships specifically, it appears that these are quite diverse, varying across issues and, to an extent, across states. Sometimes, associations with a membership base assume the main roles; other times they are picked up by NGOs with some involvement in community-level activities and yet others by individuals from the media, the SHoA or the civil service. Some leaders are concerned citizens who do not represent any organisation, including retired public servants. People are co-opted into campaigns, to fill gaps in relevant knowledge or convening capacity or to open up new networks of contacts. Issue-based partnerships often add members and associates as they go along, especially as they become more ambitious. They sometimes split, with different sub-groups taking on particular aspects of the original issue.

Getting the right partners

A key to the SAVI approach, in cases where it has worked best, is the identification and harnessing of individuals and organisations that are self-motivated to work on improving their society or the lives of their compatriots – ‘missionaries, not mercenaries’ in the phrase the national team's strategy specialist uses. There is a need for a core or hub around which a broader advocacy partnership and its network of contacts can be built. Many of these will be volunteers, assembly members, NGO employees, media people, retired officials or civil servants taking time off from their main jobs (it is said that most Nigerians wear more than one hat). An important question is how to reliably identify such motivated and committed people.

The SAVI team learned from experience that this is not best done by having programme staff privately select a group of people they judge to be especially passionate, reform-minded, competent, etc. At least for ‘soft’, non-threatening, issues like health and education, the preferred approach now begins with public debate – for example hosting a roundtable discussion on a subject, if possible with the help of a local media house. Leaders emerge to some extent through self-selection, as some offer bright ideas and show themselves willing to commit resources and others do not. SAVI state teams then interact with them, keeping a low profile to the extent possible⁹ and often learning things in the process that they didn't know about the people and politics around the issue. Those that are looking to be funded, and lack intrinsic motivation, drop out. Those that remain are sometimes so motivated by the experience that they call up SAVI staff, or each other, in the middle of the night for advice on tactics.

It is not the case that *no* SAVI funding finds its way into building the partnerships and their capabilities. Depending on the local circumstances, funding is provided for piloting and testing new partnership activities or for the venue hire and transportation costs of roundtable meetings. Radio or TV productions to open up public discussion on a topic are sometimes commissioned and paid for. Sometimes, SAVI reimburses travel or provides transportation. It tries to avoid paying any *per diems* or sitting allowances, although partner organisations do so when their established procedures require it. Seed-funding for the start-up activities of advocacy partnerships is provided on the understanding – stimulated through the use of the OCA/Partnership Capacity Assessment (PCA) self-assessment tools (discussed below) – that groups can become resourceful in pooling their existing resources and accessing available funding for activities they prioritise.

Limited funding in these forms is thought necessary to demonstrate the latent potential for autonomous, self-sustaining action on issues that partnerships have themselves prioritised. By the standards of donor programmes in Nigeria, the inputs are very modest. Nonetheless, the experience has been that SAVI can get the attention and

⁹ Sometimes, SAVI programme staff are present in the key meetings but with the status of a partner among others and/or as individually committed citizens of the state. This works only up to a point, of course; ‘people are not stupid’. But it represents a significant departure from usual programme practice in Nigeria. It appears that, as the programme has expanded to cover more states, it has learned how to operate more and more behind the scenes, without any direct involvement.

stimulate the motivation of state-level actors with this approach more effectively than some big-spending programmes. The key difference is the sense of self-reliance, self-worth, valued relationship-building and collective achievement the SAVI approach facilitates.¹⁰

Empowering local leadership

SAVI has found that the use of self-assessment tools at the two levels (those of organisations and partnerships) is a powerful way of facilitating a process of self-discovery that unleashes previously unrecognised motivations and resources for promoting developmental change. The OCA/PCA instrument was initially developed as a way of setting a baseline for programme M&E, given that programme outputs were focused on institutional strengthening. The results, presented either as a table or as a spidergram, showed in a visually attractive way the current capacity profile of the organisation or partnership. When repeated, they served as a useful measure for tracking and reporting progress towards programme objectives. However, OCAs and PCAs have also been shown to serve more intrinsic purposes. Organisations and partnerships find they help them by holding up a mirror, allowing them to appreciate more or less objectively their current weaknesses and strengths and to open their eyes to their potentials. Box 3 and Figure 3 provide further details and illustration.

Box 3: SAVI tools for OCA and PCA

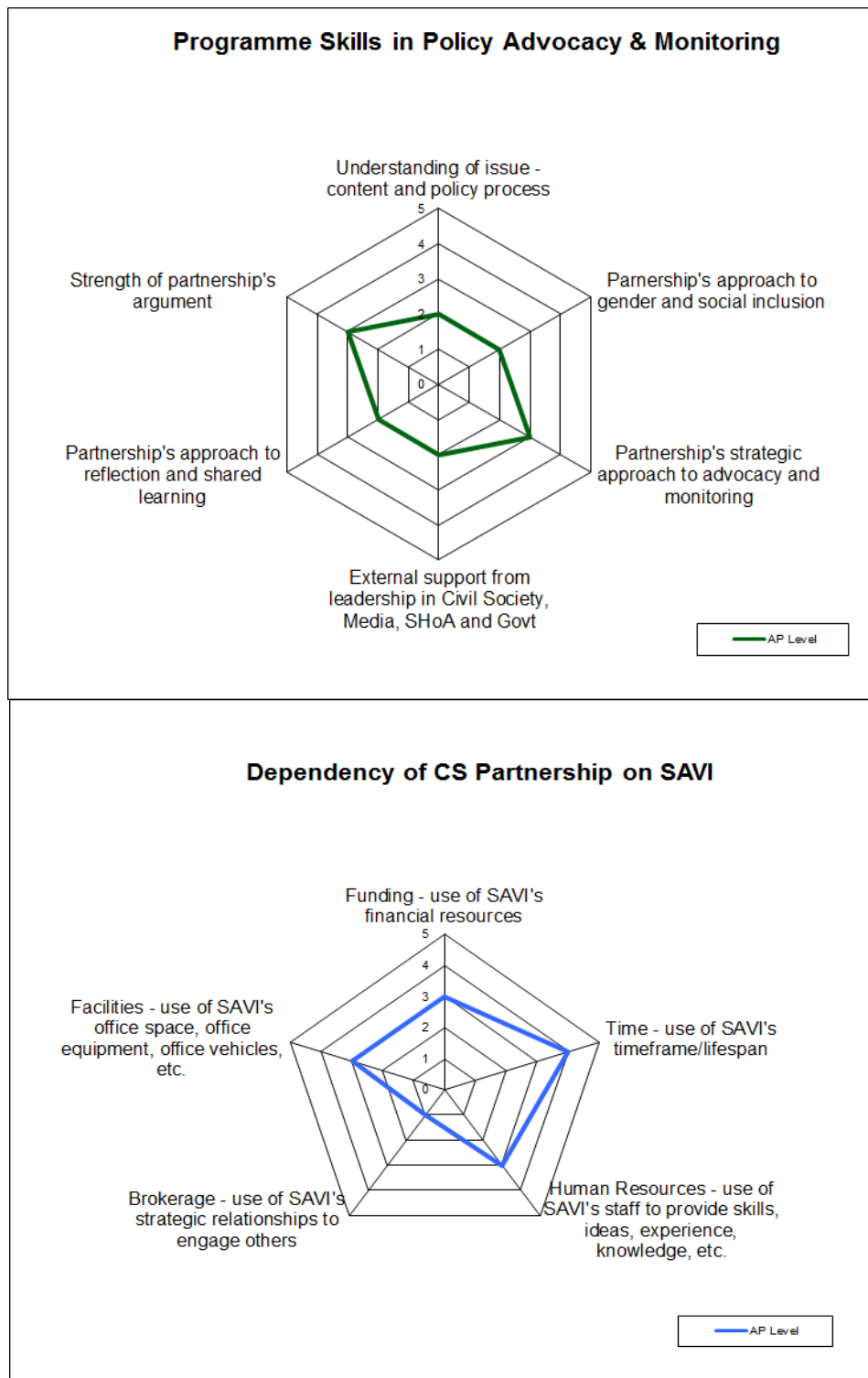
SAVI has developed a set of self-assessment tools to enable the organisations and partnerships with which it works to regularly assess their functional capacities and identify their strengths and weaknesses, and the challenges and opportunities they face.

OCAs measure organisational capacity and have been developed for SHoAs and the media. They are also used with CSOs prior to engagement. PCAs measure partnership capacity and have been developed for advocacy partnerships. Both the OCA and PCA require that the organisations/partners score themselves on a scale from one to five on a range of aspects of their internal, programmatic and external functioning, including the organisation/partnership mandate; its structural and operational mechanisms; its external relations; and its influence on voice and accountability in the state. The PCA includes an additional dimension that measures the partnership's dependency on SAVI.

For the organisations/partners, the assessment enables them to reflect on and learn from their experiences; it helps them see their potential and is used as a motivational exercise. The SAVI team uses these self-assessments as a baseline and as a means of monitoring incremental institutional change. It provides indicators relating to the logframe and a useful forward planning tool.

¹⁰ Arguably, though, in the case where full-time NGO employees are participating in voluntary activities for SAVI-induced partnerships, the donor funding for their day jobs is an enabling condition.

Figure 3: Examples of advocacy partnership capacity assessment on two of the standard dimensions



Source: SAVI.

One of the obstacles to productive collaboration among state-level stakeholders supported by the traditional method of grants has been the compulsion to claim 'credit' for interventions. This exists at two levels. First, the competition for funding among potential grant recipients leads to a struggle for the kind of profile that will ensure continuing funding. In the interests of organisational survival, grantees must claim credit for any

campaign victories, which puts up barriers to cooperative relations with other players. Second, the grant-providing programmes are interested in visibility for themselves or DFID, resulting in frequent use of organisational logos (e.g. PATHS2 or UK Aid). This puts grant recipients publicly in the position of being sub-contractors paid to deliver a donor-defined agenda, which is a further obstacle to collaboration.

In contrast, SAVI has learned that its approach facilitates collective action. The programme takes a behind-the-scenes approach; it does not 'brand' any partnerships or activities with its own logo, either nationally or in the states, to ensure SAVI's partners rather than SAVI itself are seen as the change agents. In turn, state teams discourage the formalisation of advocacy partnerships. The practice in the federal-level 'demand-side' programme – C4C – was to brand itself and each of its coalitions, and encourage coalitions to seek official registration and to establish a campaign office, incurring the attendant overhead costs. SAVI encourages advocacy partnerships to remain open, informal and fluid, and to be strategic and inclusive in attributing credit for results achieved.

Another important difference between SAVI's partnering style and the usual relationship between donors and recipients of CSO advocacy grants is that the programme does not transfer its logframe-based planning and monitoring requirements to its partners. The commonest forms of civil society funding, even when they involve an accountable grant rather than a service contract, involve transfer to the front-line actors of both the logframe objectives and the management tools preferred by the donor. This is one of the reasons why the resulting initiatives cannot be considered locally led, even when all of the personnel are natives of the country.

In contrast, SAVI encourages advocacy partners to be responsible and accountable to each other and to their compatriots. There are annual reviews using the self-assessment tools but no reporting obligations to SAVI, partly because the relationship is not primarily about funding. The burden of reporting against the highly elaborated programme logframes that DFID currently favours is assumed wholly by SAVI staff – state teams and the national team. The role of SAVI staff in cushioning the impact of donor risk aversion and value-for-money concerns on front-line development actors parallels other experiences where locally led initiatives seem to have been successful. We return to the topic in our conclusion.

Managing the programme

None of the above could have been achieved without building strong enough state-level teams of SAVI programme staff and providing them, in turn, with the right sort of support, encouragement and mentoring. State teams are recruited with an eye to relevant experience and potential ability to work in the style the technical team prefers, centring on advising and motivating others rather than on the conventional programme implementation skillset. This has not always been successful, we are told, but over time the programme has learned how to recruit staff with attitudes and behaviour appropriate to the way the programme works. There is also a process of natural selection by means of which staff who show they cannot or will not work in this way eventually drop out, whereas those who show enthusiasm and capabilities for the task are promoted when opportunities arise.

The guidance and mentoring the national team provide is substantial. It involves the guided application of standard, although evolving, frameworks and procedures, including the S-DoC diagnostic exercise to determine a shortlist of tractable action issues and critical actors, and a theory of change that guides support to partners. At each stage, national team members are present in the background, explaining, advising and encouraging. These activities are expensive in terms of time and resources.

Family troubles

The work has been made more difficult than it could have been because of the way other DFID programmes have been designed and run. The scale of other DFID-funded operations in many states (there are 15-17 individual programmes in Jigawa, for example) makes this a significant issue. We do not think it is sufficient to treat it as a mere implementation problem affecting an otherwise sound design. The difficulties are partly about the division of labour and partly about different working methods.

Most of the programmes in the SLP suite started together in 2008, and were designed to have a collective impact on improved use of state government resources for health, education and, in due course, economic growth. There are reported to be numerous instances where this has worked reasonably well, but apparently this has not always

been the case. The question of alignment among the SLPs was hotly debated during the joint Inception Review of the suite, and again during its joint Mid-Term Review. The individual programme contracts include some obligation to seek alignment with the other programmes, but practical implementation of this was problematic from the outset, given that the programmes are separately contracted, with logframes that do not give a central place to this particular concern.

As noted earlier, DFID steered SAVI strongly towards health- and education-related issues, to align with and complement the efforts of the other programmes in the SLP suite that started at the same time. However, one source of difficulty was that the sector programmes in education and health had their own V&A components, which helped muddy the division of labour. This was resolved to some extent by a pragmatic agreement at the Inception Review that the V&A components of PATHS2 and ESSPIN would concern themselves with ‘short route accountability’ as defined by the World Development Report 2004 – in other words, they would be supporting community-level service users in committees to monitor front-line provision. SAVI’s niche, as by far the smallest programme in the SLP suite, would be demonstrating a replicable and sustainable approach to ‘long route accountability’ – that is, influencing policies, planning, programmes and budgets by mobilising state-level scrutiny and ‘voice’. There was an expectation of strong linkages between these levels of activity.

This pragmatic solution was not entirely satisfactory, however. To begin with, the international research evidence does not support the notion that service user committees can be effective without links to powerful, top-down drivers of change (Booth and Cammack, 2013; Mansuri and Rao, 2012). Facilitation of such links was weakened by a clash of working methods. PATHS2 and ESSPIN host conventional NGO grant schemes, whereby local organisations bid to provide a predefined service: stimulating and supporting service user groups. Occasionally, the two approaches have come into head-on collision. In 2011 in Kaduna, for example, ESSPIN made a large funding offer to a SAVI partner that was doing useful work on a largely self-reliant basis. Even though the various components of GEMS are generally not working on the same policy issues as SAVI, in Jigawa SAVI’s work with the SHoA was undermined when the GEMS3 management began offering funding to assembly members to assist with the passage of legislation.

In the past few years, DFID has shown more flexibility on the question of how SAVI relates to sectors and substantive policy issues. There have also been some initiatives in which collaboration across the divide between the ‘governance’ programmes and ‘sector’ interventions have been set up in a new way. In SAVI’s three second-phase states – Zamfara, Yobe and Katsina – SAVI and SPARC were invited in 2012 to work alongside the Partnership for Reviving Routine Immunisation in Northern Nigeria – Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Initiative (PRRINN-MNCH), a DFID-funded programme that had been on the ground for some time. PRRINN-MNCH had recognised that its conventional approach to eliciting government support was not working effectively and welcomed SAVI and SPARC as providing potential solutions. This is perhaps a belated recognition that there are no big issues in Nigeria that are not about governance *and* that a more direct and forceful approach is needed to bring politically smart operational styles into sectoral work.¹¹

Tangible wins and tractability

In the Introduction, we explained that our concerns in approaching the SAVI experience included not only the extent of the programme’s political smartness and local leadership, but also its ability to break out of the ‘governance ghetto’ in which similar programmes worldwide tend to find themselves. SAVI was set up to achieve improvements in relationships of governance, using ‘tangible results’ mainly as a means of demonstrating the feasibility of new forms of collective action among state-level stakeholders. The five Outputs in the programme logframe (recall Table 1) are all about ‘approaches’ and systems. While this makes sense in a context where it is impossible to predict what tangible gains may be achieved, it is also problematic in two ways.

First, governance gains are hard to obtain and difficult to measure in a credible way, partly because what counts as improvement is liable to be contested (given the withering critique to which universal criteria of ‘good’ governance have been subjected, rightly, in recent years). Unless and until they produce some changes, ‘tangible’ or otherwise, going beyond relationships and processes, any improvements can be considered mere concessions to ideological convention. Over the years, SAVI managers and reviewers have increasingly

¹¹ It may also be thought that in states where the security situation is worsening (as it was in the PRRINN-MNCH states at the time), the behind-closed-doors approach of SPARC and the under-the-radar approach of SAVI are the most practical.

recognised this, with more attention being given to collecting and recording ‘results stories’ retrospectively. These exercises in outcome mapping are not just about the result but about the particular processes of relationship-building and discovery that produced the result. Moreover, as we have seen, the list of such stories is no longer insignificant.

Second, in selecting issues to work on, ‘smart’ should not mean unambitious. The tangible results that may seem best for demonstrating the usefulness of new forms of collective action, because they are non-threatening to the authorities, are unlikely to be the most technically desirable. That may be an acceptable price to pay when the political context is as we have described it in Nigeria of 2008-2014. However, the optimal approach would surely be one that combines an assessment of political feasibility with a technically informed judgement about scale of impact and sustainability. In other words, there may be other gains that are feasible with the method of facilitated multi-stakeholder interaction, which have bigger impacts and are more productive of enduring development effects. At any rate, those are what we should be looking for.¹²

Some of the tangible results that SAVI has assisted score reasonably well in terms of setting precedents in one state that may get emulated in others. An example would be the success of the Lagos SHoA in legislating for its financial autonomy. An initiative of the Jigawa state government supported by SPARC and SAVI to ‘domesticate’ the National Gender Policy may be another (Box 4). Moreover, the SAVI team has given some attention to ways to lock in legislative measures so they get implemented; they express this with the image of putting wedges under a lorry’s wheels to prevent it from rolling back down a hill. In other words, the team are aware that – at the same time as refining the way the self-assessment instruments are used to track progress on governance and collective action – the proof of the SAVI pudding will ultimately lie in the ability of the method to generate substantial (and measurable) effects on wider development outcomes.

Box 4: Domestication of the national gender policy in Jigawa

Jigawa State is a Muslim state in northern Nigeria. In July 2013, it became the first of the northern states to draft and approve a state gender policy following an initiative by the state government to ‘domesticate’ the National Gender Policy. This required culturally sensitive, behind-the-scenes negotiations to ensure the goals of the policy were in accordance with Sharia law.

The SAVI-supported Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI) partnership facilitated part of this process when they were called on by the Jigawa commissioner of women’s affairs to support the state government. GSI drew on the resources within their partnership and relations with respected individuals to help shape the discussion during multiple stakeholder consultations. These included religious and traditional leaders, SHoA representatives, government officials and CSOs. This slow, duly respectful, process focused on helping people understand that gender awareness is relevant to them and to the benefit of Jigawa state. The state gender policy that emerged from this process adapted elements of the National Policy considered unacceptable in the local culture in order to allow for approval of its principal elements. This involved removing clauses about children’s rights and modifying the goal from gender equality to gender equity.

One of the obstacles SAVI and any successor programme will face in moving in this direction lies in getting the right kind of technical advice on developmental reforms, outside of familiar sectors and states, that might be amenable to the multi-stakeholder partnership approach. As a ‘governance’ initiative, SAVI has naturally turned to political scientists to guide the diagnostic work that produces the shortlist of tractable issues for each state. But generalist political scientists may not be the best qualified to identify initiatives that are technically sound, in that they might achieve big impacts in a simple way, as well as being potentially feasible in the political circumstances. One obstacle to pushing out the boundaries in terms of subject specialisms is the tendency of DFID to think in professional silos. In the future, DFID economists in Nigeria might be expected to work much more directly with SAVI than has been the case until now.

¹² The combination of political feasibility and technical soundness defined in this way is what activists facilitated by The Asia Foundation look for when defining objectives in the Philippines (Booth, 2014; Faustino, 2012; The Asia Foundation, 2011).

2.4 What has been demonstrated

Having outlined what SAVI thinks it has learned, here we shift attention to the related but distinct question of what this shows about the more general question of how to facilitate developmental results in a context like that of Nigeria. There are just three main points here. They concern, respectively:

- The malleability of political economic relationships that can be revealed when stakeholders who have not been communicating with each other discover mutual interests, overcome collective action challenges and undertake joint actions;
- The powerful positive effects that can be generated when dealing with state-level actors by ‘taking the money off the table’, wagering instead on self-motivated and self-reliant reform efforts;
- The possibility of using small improvements in governance institutions and relationships to bring about large gains in laws, policies and practices that are both measurable and sustainable.

Malleable relationships

The SAVI experience adds to the evidence that, in many developing countries, relationships among political and economic actors can change in unexpected ways, or at least in ways not predicted by the more hard-nosed forms of political economy analysis. In a non-adversarial setting, unlikely alliances can be forged as stakeholders discover congruent or mutual interests they didn’t know they had.

This starts with reducing the vulnerability actors feel in an adversarial political context. In the SAVI case, each set of actors started from a position of feeling threatened by, or highly critical of, the others. The change process began with an increase in trust. It then became a matter of credibility. Each step taken with SAVI help to build the self-confidence and credibility of one player made that player of greater interest to another as a potential partner. The cooperation that emerged in the best cases was about helping each other fulfil their desired roles: NGOs provided technical information that allowed a SHoA to be taken more seriously by a governor’s office; a partnership between SHoA members and expert journalists provided the executive with evidence-based arguments that allowed it to avoid a politically costly error; and so on. Stakeholders leveraged each other to get something working around a shared goal.

Such hidden mutualities of interest have been emphasised in other research, especially by the previously mentioned Citizenship DRC, that drew heavily on Latin American experience of reform efforts spanning the state and civil society. As we have seen, the national technical team brought to SAVI a rich experience from the previous 10 years of DFID programming in Nigeria, including, notably, that of the JWL project, its precursors and its successors. Until now, however, it has been less possible to draw such conclusions from broader African experience because of the hegemony of the demand/supply concept in governance programming.

As we have argued, the encouragement of an adversarial ‘naming and shaming’ style of CSO engagement has delivered little that is positive. Both in Nigeria and in other parts of the continent (ICAI, 2013), it has had the significantly negative effect of polarising the scene and obscuring the potential for productive collaboration. SAVI makes a difference in this respect. It has demonstrated that this is not the only way of doing things; that there is a potential for development progress arising from mutual redefinitions of self-interest; and that there are effective ways of facilitating such change.

Taking the money off the table

The second important revelation is about the beneficial effects of not attempting to buy progress by funding organisations to implement donor-designed programmes. Using donor resources not to pay people to do things but to support the things they are willing to do with their own resources has proven extraordinarily powerful as a working method.

The reasons why this is so have partly to do with uncertainty; no one really knows how to achieve desired reforms in many important fields of public policy in developing countries. Initiatives that are locally led – informed by local knowledge and detached from the donor preconceptions that ordinarily go along with donor funding – lend themselves to a learning-by-doing or PDIA method. SAVI is promoting learning-by-doing and showing how and why this works to achieve results. It is not yet providing fully fledged examples of development entrepreneurship – discovering pathways of change by making a series of ‘little bets’ and then

rapidly adjusting to their payoffs (Faustino and Booth, 2014). But it has shown how to unleash the sort of motivations and capabilities that are needed to put flesh on the bones of such an approach.

The Nigerian experience suggests donor money distributed through competitive NGO grant schemes and subcontracts may have suppressed indigenous incentives and capabilities for self-help collective action. Placed alongside systematic evidence on the subject from Pakistan (Bano, 2012), this is a shocking discovery. In SAVI, limiting the use of donor resources to convening, facilitating and, at the limit, providing seed money for action initiatives has helped in a small way to reverse this pattern. But, if we are right in our interpretation of the transition from C4C to SAVI in Nigeria, this reversal should be taking place on a much larger scale, both in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa.

From small process changes to big development results

Not the least important thing SAVI and its precursors demonstrate is that ‘tangible’ results can be achieved with the sort of partnership-building approach they have pioneered in Nigeria. The SAVI programme was set up as a demonstration exercise. It has succeeded in demonstrating that building partnerships around tractable issues of public concern is a good formula for institutional-strengthening in the states. It has also shown that worthwhile tangible outcomes can be achieved in the process. This is an important contribution to the recent stream of thinking around politically smart, locally led development interventions (Booth and Unsworth, 2014) or development entrepreneurship (Faustino and Booth, 2014) in which the purpose of being politically smart is to achieve big development impacts. That being the case, we believe it is time for DFID programmers in Nigeria to raise the level of ambition and begin to reverse the relationship between development results and ‘governance’ interventions.

2.5 Discussion

Beyond voice and accountability

As we have seen, SAVI practice is not chiefly about ‘voice’ or just about accountability; it is about building a range of types of constructive mutual relations among key players including CSOs, media, SHoAs *and* state governments. Formally, the acronym SAVI stands for State Accountability and Voice Initiative. We therefore commend the programme team for its decision never to use the full title, and rather to rely on the acronym. The acronym does convey quite well one major feature of the potential that the programme has revealed; it suggests an approach that gets results by being politically ‘smart’. The other main feature we have highlighted is the willingness of the programme to limit itself to a facilitating role, so change is in a real sense locally led (depending on the efforts of state-level indigenes and their organisations). In this significant sense, it is not donor-driven. As experience in Yobe state suggests,¹³ an additional strength of the approach is its ability to provide support to continuing change even under conditions of extreme insecurity. These findings allow us to give an upbeat set of answers to most of our opening questions about SAVI.

On the question about the wisdom of setting up initiatives to specialise i) in ‘governance’ and ii) in ‘demand-side’ governance, with a different set of actors delivering expertise and influence on substantive social and economic reforms in parallel, we obviously need to be more reserved. The ‘demand-side’ formulation in the SAVI design is clearly problematic in the light of what SAVI actually does to achieve results. As for setting up governance and sector programmes separately, this may have made sense in the past; it is not clear it will be advisable in the future.

Stepping up the level of ambition

Having revealed the potential of an approach that is politically smart and locally led, the next task for SAVI or any SAVI-inspired successor programmes must surely be to put the institutional gains to work on a wider range of top-priority development challenges in the states. We would accept that the work done around the least risky health, education and budget issues has usefully created some basic institutional preconditions for further issue-based work, notably by reversing some of the negative side-effects of previous donor interventions. But the institutional gains should not be treated as self-validating, or as ends in themselves.

¹³ The Yobe SAVI team, established in 2011, was obliged to move its base to neighbouring Jigawa in 2013, from where it appears to be able to continue being effective in supporting and mentoring its local partners.

As we have seen, in SAVI so far the *main* focus has been on creating an apparatus of better-connected state organisations, putting this apparatus to work on significant social challenges but not yet on large economic challenges. This probably needs to change, at least in those states where the groundwork of relationship-building has been done. We would suggest that, in Lagos and a few other first-round states, the issues tackled in future might include the challenges associated with getting more inclusive economic growth. DFID is keen for its country programmes to give adequate attention to influencing economic development processes. Yet in many countries, including Nigeria, it is not obvious *how* a donor can usefully contribute to an inclusive growth agenda, given the powerful domestic forces at work – the nature of the political settlement, the style of policy-making this engenders and the vested interests in key sectors. In some other politically ‘difficult’ middle-income countries, such as the Philippines again, this is considered exactly the *forte* of a politically smart, locally led approach.

The importance of remaining politically smart, and if possible becoming more so, cannot be overstated. But, if SAVI and any successors are to make a substantial contribution to development in Nigeria, this must surely mean not just focusing on ‘soft’ issues, but also discovering the ‘soft’ parts of some of the harder issues. Metaphors about traction and tractability may not be the best for assessing the options in this regard. We would recommend searching out what Philippines activists call technically sound and politically possible reform objectives, where soundness is partly about scale and sustainability of development impact and feasibility is about discovering clever ways around the most substantial political obstacles.

No doubt, turning in the suggested direction implies some big practical challenges for SAVI in the short term. One type of challenge arises from the fact that GEMS is currently the main repository of expertise in market and employment issues, and GEMS is managed separately and in several sub-programmes. Moreover, it does not have the same commitments to being politically smart or locally led, and is anyway still finding its feet in some of the states where SAVI is well embedded. SAVI’s own teams have been recruited and technical inputs have been organised on the assumption that campaigns will be about state budgets and the social sectors. These considerations may imply new recruitment criteria in future rounds.

Implications for DFID

Two broader conclusions about DFID governance programming may be in order before we move on to consider enabling conditions. The implications of these conclusions apply as much to what DFID does outside Nigeria as to Nigeria and the future of the SLPs.

First and most obviously, the supply–demand metaphor and the V&A concept of governance work for development have clearly outlived their usefulness. They have become a serious obstacle to understanding, communicating and consolidating the sort of relationship-building that is illustrated by what SAVI actually does in Nigerian states. As we have tried to make clear, the problem with demand/supply is not just that it may appear to validate a practice in which those working with state and non-state actors do not cooperate. It is also fundamentally misleading about the source of the potential gains from multi-stakeholder interactions, which are about missing coordination and collective action, not about one set of actors demanding things from another set.

This is not a Nigeria-specific finding but an observation about the whole direction of donor, including World Bank, thinking about governance over the past decade, as we have argued elsewhere (Booth and Cammack, 2013). It is interesting, however, to note that much of what we are saying was well understood in the livelihoods projects in Nigeria that DFID supported in the early 2000s and which seem to have inspired what is best in SAVI. This seems like a significant case of a development agency forgetting something it used to know. If we are right, the logframes of DFID governance interventions should stop building in the assumption – or uncritically adopting theories of change that imply – that progress on big development challenges happens when citizens ‘hold governments to account’. In this sense, there should be no more ‘demand-side’ programmes, but only politically smart multi-stakeholder initiatives.¹⁴

¹⁴ This does not necessarily mean there is no place for programming, in SPARC style, that is exclusively and confidentially provided to the executive branch of government. It does mean recognising that SAVI’s approach can be of assistance to reform-minded players in the executive branch, and not just to those wishing to influence it from the outside, and that this potential is likely to be suppressed if the main complementary activity is about articulating demands or claiming accountability.

If relying on ‘citizen demand’ looks so implausible on the ground, this invites a question as to why donors are so keen on this formula. That is a rather large topic that ought to be discussed on a broader canvas. However, any such discussion would have to acknowledge that the politicians and civil servants who run official aid have been guilty of importing into developing countries ideological preoccupations that are of extremely recent historical origin. The mantras about citizens holding governments to account that inform so much governance assistance are rooted in the short post-World War II phase of democratisation in the North Atlantic region.¹⁵ The sense of history and willingness to start from country realities for which Sue Unsworth has appealed remains conspicuous by its absence.

The second conclusion we want to draw is less obvious and may be more controversial, even among those who agree with our last set of comments. This is that governance programmes have also had their day – or, at least, that governance work needs to come out of its ghetto and be merged in a thoroughgoing way with economic and ‘sector’ programming. What we need more of are not just politically smart multi-stakeholder initiatives but ones that have substantive development results in their sights. This does not mean that programmes should have results goals that are specified in detail, or set out as milestones, in advance. It does mean that the goals should be development outcomes and working on ‘governance’ only the means of getting them. It certainly means having political smartness embedded in sector programmes and not relying on separately managed programmes to ‘coordinate’.

Governance advisors in DFID and other large agencies increasingly accept the advice of Dani Rodrik (2007) that it is the functionality of institutions that matters and not their form. Lip service is also commonly paid to Brian Levy’s invocation to seek ‘good fit’, and not to apply dubiously relevant ‘best practices’, when promoting developmental reforms. Everyone now admits in principle that governance needs to be ‘good enough’ to allow development to take place; it does not need to be perfect. But there is less acknowledgement of the corollary, which is that support for institutional improvement needs to be set up in a way that allows functionality, adequacy of fit and what is ‘good enough’ to be discovered and then tested. This means settling on some high-priority development challenges in a country and then building up some experience on what it takes, governance-wise, to get them addressed. This in turn implies not seeing governance improvement as separate from the conditions for achieving development objectives.

¹⁵ If not indeed, even more narrowly, in post-1970s Anglo-American experience.

3 How was it done? The enabling conditions

It is proving possible to show that, by adopting politically smart, locally led development initiatives, donors including DFID can achieve results that cannot be achieved with more conventional aid strategies. However, in all of the cases documented so far (Booth, 2014; Booth and Unsworth, 2014), the intervention was able to take the form it did because of some other-than-normal conditions affecting the way it was designed, financed and monitored by its main funding agency.

In the DFID cases studied by Booth and Unsworth, these conditions were in several instances those that applied in past periods of the department's history or in sectors of work where the now-normal rules did not apply. For one reason or another, programmes were given flexibility to learn during implementation, without the hindrance of pre-programmed milestones and expenditure plans. With DFID, as well as with the Australian and US (AusAID and USAID) cases, key individuals played a significant enabling role, creating spaces in which programme managers had greater freedom of action than usual and a relatively open-ended programme design could be defended to senior management. Trusted programme managers also helped this happen by providing just enough of what the donor needed, so the created space remained open.

How was SAVI able to do what it did? In our assessment, SAVI could easily have been a not-very-interesting blueprint programme, delivering the standard elements of a contracted V&A intervention. That it was able to be much more was the product of a particular combination of circumstances. As anticipated, the relevant factors are partly about enabling conditions in DFID and partly about how the programme team managed itself.

3.1 Enabling conditions in DFID

An important SAVI feature highlighted in Section 2 is that it was designed in steps, through the DFID PM, the winning technical tender and the Inception Phase, with substantial learning continuing during implementation. Relative to the norm in DFID, the programme was 'under-designed' at inception – without a heavily pre-programmed set of outputs and activities. This was partly because SAVI was separated as a programme in its own right late in the DFID design process, and partly because of a conscious decision by the responsible DFID Advisor, Graham Gass, to give the programme team room to work out the rest. As a relatively long-term resident of Nigeria until his departure to Ghana in 2009, Gass was aware of the wealth of previous programme experience that was relevant to the design, and signalled the importance of taking this into account in the PM. With an experienced technical team in place, he was prepared to see them continuing to refine the programme design. He persuaded others with overall responsibility for the suite (the Head of Office, Eamon Cassidy, and senior Governance Advisor, Annabel Gerry) to give this a try.

Having committed to developing a fresh approach, the SAVI team and GRM needed periodic reassurance. The rapid turnover of governance advisors in DFID country offices is often a problem in this regard. One of its effects is that even senior advisory positions are held by people who have had little time to acquire in-depth country knowledge. More seriously, the rate of turnover combined with often-inadequate handover arrangements can mean responsible advisors have little knowledge of the past history of programmes and decisions about them; 'institutional memory' can be very deficient. In these circumstances, there was always the possibility that, when Gass left DFID Nigeria in 2009, a new advisor would have supervised SAVI, one who would neither understand nor appreciate the programme's peculiarities. Learning-by-doing, which was central to the programme approach, might not suit the professional style of an incoming advisor.

Gass handed over responsibility for SAVI to a fellow governance advisor in DFID Nigeria, Scott Caldwell. An accountant by profession and therefore more familiar with the kind of public management work done by SPARC than with ‘voice’ programmes, Caldwell nonetheless took time to understand SAVI, and again allowed the team space to refine their approach. Much later, Wilf Mwamba came into the role with a strong background on the highs and lows of DFID ‘demand-side’ programming in other parts of Africa. He helped to give new impetus to SAVI’s efforts to communicate its approach to the DFID office and other policy audiences.

The need for the funder to permit a slow and not entirely predictable build-up of spending has been identified as an issue for programmes that aim to be politically smart and locally led. This, too, could have been a stumbling block for SAVI; although some 80% of its monthly expenditure consists of routine running costs, it took some time for the programme to build up to a spending plateau. In an era in which DFID offices were under pressure to spend and to increase spending predictably, this could have been a problem. It became something of a problem around 2010, when ministers put heavy pressure on DFID to ‘increase its footprint’ in Nigeria. This was followed in 2011 by calls for ‘consolidation’ and fuller justification of programme deliverables in terms of value for money. Then came an imperative to respond somehow to the political and security meltdown in the northern states. These ups and downs married badly with the natural pace of work on the ground.

It was fortunate, therefore, that the programme’s advisors and successive heads and deputy heads of office were strong advocates of finding better ways of working on governance in Nigeria. This played an important role in protecting DFID Nigeria’s portfolio from the full force of the ‘results agenda’, with its emphasis on early achievement of measurable and attributable development outcomes. During the Nigerian elections of 2011, for example, Head of Office Richard Montgomery and Senior Governance Advisor Julius Court were struck by the very modest use candidates had been making of the examples of progress in service delivery that had been highlighted by DFID-induced ‘demonstration’ initiatives. Once again, they concluded, Nigerian politics was showing a puzzling resistance to change. One response to this concern was the commissioning of a training course in applied political economy analysis for advisors and programme staff. Another was a relatively high level of tolerance that was shown for any innovative efforts to improve the functioning of the political system, even if, in the language of the time, ‘results’ could not be guaranteed. Although we have been arguing that SAVI should not be encouraged to rest on its governance laurels, the space this provided for SAVI to find its feet in the states was important at the time.

3.2 Programme management

DFID’s willingness to accept what was being done by SAVI was enhanced by several factors that were more within the programme’s control. Together with the elements of good luck described above, these must be considered significant enabling factors – favourable circumstances that would not automatically be enjoyed by any attempt to replicate the experience in another time and place.

Leadership

These circumstances begin with the programme leadership. Among the factors giving SAVI space to map out a new path was the quality of the team assembled by GRM and the confidence it inspired in the DFID office. The Programme Director assigned by GRM, Dr Audu Grema, a Nigerian national, had been the DFID Advisor in Kaduna, northern Nigeria, where he had been one of the sponsors of the JWL project and its successors. National Team Leader Kevin Gager also had a track record and local knowledge that must have inspired confidence. Another former DFID staff member and longstanding Nigeria resident, he was well placed to know what level of reassurance senior management would require, and could, if necessary, challenge DFID on points of legality and history. The contribution of former DFID staffers to creating the space for innovation in programme management is something we have observed in other Nigerian and international contexts.

The make-up of the central technical team was no doubt also critical. Steve Fraser, Ishaya Bajama, Julian Barr and Adam Suleiman brought to SAVI not just generic experience and qualifications, but also a clear idea of what they wanted to do with the programme, based on a specific model that had been tried and tested in the natural resources field. This background helped, at least initially, to convince DFID that it should give the team time to adapt the model and persuade the rest of the programme staff of its main lessons.

Monitoring and evaluation

SAVI has been heavily monitored and reviewed. Since its establishment, the SLP suite's IMEP has provided not only Annual Reviews meeting DFID basic requirements (including the formal scoring of outputs, results and value for money for inputting to the ARIES system) but quite detailed, and often helpful, sets of comments on programme progress. This scheme and the way it is managed have contributed significantly to the enabling environment for SAVI.

It seems important, for example, that SAVI has been served by just two lead reviewers since its inception phase. From the Inception Review (DFID, 2009b) through the Mid-Term Review (IMEP, 2012) and successive Annual Reviews (for the latest, see Williams et al., 2014), they have provided broadly supportive, though often critical, reports that have served both to reassure DFID and to steer the management in helpful ways within the spirit of the approach. In recent years, the interaction between the programme management and its regular reviewers has generated, among other things, systematic efforts to collect data retrospectively on demonstrable changes in state government policies or implementation that are attributable to the SAVI approach. Indicators in the full logframe have been amended accordingly.

On the side of the programme, the ITAD-appointed Technical Director, Julian Barr, and the national management team were purposeful from the outset in negotiating their way through DFID reporting requirements. ITAD has been influential in the development of DFID approaches to logframes, so it has dwelt in the belly of the monster, so to speak. This helped with, among other things, getting acceptance from DFID for a results framework that was realistic about the pace of likely change and was susceptible to frequent updating. We are told that there have been at least a dozen working versions of the SAVI logframe.

In the absence of conventional means of tracking progress, the team took the initiative of turning the self-assessment tools for strengthening organisations and constructing issue-based partnerships into instruments for monitoring progress and reporting to the funder, with numbers attached. The decisions on this issue were taken before DFID's 2011 revised guidance on business cases and logframes, with its heavy emphasis on pre-established targets and 'milestones'. However, even in the pre-2011 framework, it was important that SAVI was not obliged to specify in advance the 'tangible' changes in government budgets or laws that would be delivered, leaving these to be tracked as retrospective stories of change.

Although completely rational, these procedures might have been accepted less easily if the decisions had been taken in 2014 or if the programme managers had been less astute. In these and other respects, efforts invested in managing relationships with the funder were clearly worthwhile. They kept open the space that SAVI needed to discover, and document, a fresh approach.

3.3 What has been demonstrated about enabling conditions

The SAVI experience has demonstrated that a politically smart, locally led programme can survive in a DFID and a Nigerian context. But it also adds to the grounds for believing that quite special conditions are required – conditions that are by no means assured and have been quite rare in recent years. This suggests the potential of SAVI's way of working is more likely to be realised (and replicated outside Nigeria) if five conditions are satisfied:

- If the funding organisation is prepared to protect the politically smart, locally led approaches from the effects of unduly mechanical forms of expenditure planning and output monitoring;
- If advisors inside the funding organisation are prepared to act as 'intrepreneurs' – innovators who purposely stretch the bureaucratic constraints to the limit, so as to create space for others to design and deliver a way of working that approximates to a 'development entrepreneurship';
- If advisors inside the funding organisation are able to draw on the evidence, learning and human resources from previously successful (and failed) initiatives to justify the risk of investing in a less conventional approach;
- If the operating environment provided by a suite of DFID programmes, the other components of which take a different approach, does not spoil the pitch for the ability of the intervention to tackle 'tangible' change objectives in its own way;

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- If there is room to describe and promote the success formula as it really is, rather than representing it, inaccurately, as a demand-side governance intervention or accountability programme.

4 Conclusions

The authors set out on their study of SAVI with significant doubts about how innovative, interesting and replicable the experience would prove to be. Despite the encouraging description of the programme contained in the paper by Derbyshire and Mwamba (2013), we had questions about the degree to which SAVI was a departure from the tradition of trying to buy ‘good governance’ with aid. It was clear that SAVI was providing an alternative to the most common type of civil society funding for governance work, but not that it was being ‘smart’ about its initiatives – that is, discovering productive ways of working with political or social actors to achieve shared objectives, rather than getting those actors to conform to preconceived models of proper behaviour.

In particular, we were sceptical of the attention being given to SHoAs, given the lack of results from parliamentary-strengthening initiatives across Africa. The strongly ideological message conveyed by the programme’s formal title – State Accountability and Voice Initiative – as well as the restrictions implied by being defined as a ‘demand-side’ intervention did not suggest an innovative approach. Was this really an intervention that was supporting Nigerians to find solutions to problems, ‘going with the grain’ where necessary to achieve results that donor-funded NGOs have often failed to achieve?¹⁶

On all of these counts, our findings have been reassuring, but they also make clear that, if SAVI has proven a good example of innovative programming, it has done this despite several aspects of its initial design and enduring constraints arising from the way the wider DFID portfolio is constructed. It has arrived at promising ways of working for development progress in Nigerian states through an extended, often difficult and continuing learning process. The mark of SAVI’s success is the clear pointers it offers to how different any successor programme should be. The experience has shown that Nigeria does not need donors to support the ‘demand side’ of governance, based on some simplified notion of how democratic polities ought to work. There may, on the other hand, be benefits from facilitating efforts to improve how governance relationships actually work. There may, in addition, be reasons for presenting future initiatives not as programmes to improve governance but as politically smart, locally led interventions to assist reforms that improve development results – human development outcomes and a more inclusive pattern of economic growth.

Our findings have also supported the conclusions of Booth and Unsworth (2014) regarding the enabling conditions for the type of innovative programming SAVI represents. On the positive side, the SAVI case adds to the evidence that an official bilateral donor can be supportive of innovation of the desired kind. On the other side, most of the support predated the current phase in DFID policy on how to ensure sound use of the aid budget, whose inspiration has very little to do with what experienced practitioners know about achieving development results. It also depended on a series of favourable circumstances, in terms of the personnel who influenced the programme on both sides of the relationship between the funder and the programme management. As it was, the programme staff had to work hard at providing a cushion or buffer between the funder’s reporting and monitoring demands and the partnerships they support.

At the time of writing, there are signs that the DFID tide may be about to turn, moving back to a style of contracting that is ‘smarter’ in that it gives implementing partners at least the amount of space for innovation that SAVI enjoyed. It is very much to be hoped that this is the case, and that the elaborate apparatus of logframe milestones and value-for-money scoring that has been adopted along with raised DFID spending targets will soon be replaced with something more rational. In this context, the SAVI experience also seems consistent with proposals we have made elsewhere (Booth, 2013; 2014) about the advantages of channelling funding for institutional change initiatives through well-selected intermediary organisations and, in this sense, providing aid

¹⁶ As formulated by Kingsley (2014).

at arm's length. Experience is suggesting ways official bilateral agencies can maximise their chances of doing good and avoiding harm with development assistance, and it is time for this experience to be adopted into policy.

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