



## CASE STUDY 14

### THE STATE ACCOUNTABILITY AND VOICE INITIATIVE IN NIGERIA

**Country:** Nigeria

**Focus:** Civil society and state accountability

**Donor(s):** DFID

**Organisation(s):** Palladium / Social  
Development Direct / Itad

**Budget:** GBP44 m<sup>1</sup>

**Timeframe:** 2008-2016 (SAVI), 2016- (ECP)



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#### KEY POINTS

- SAVI shows how gender-aware and politically informed approaches can be complementary
- Embedding gender equality within a program is key: e.g. incentivising gender awareness in all the activities of staff and partners, through the contract and performance measures, plus a recruitment strategy which contributes to a culture of gender equality among staff
- Strategically, using male advocates and power

brokers as gender equality champions has made for effective working. SAVI has used the phrase: *'let the men in'*

- Context is key. To build support the program used moderate language that didn't explicitly mention gender, and policy goals which were in accordance with Sharia Law. SAVI also maintains a low program profile and works behind the scenes. This mitigates political risks and ensures that local partners lead processes of change and are given credit

#### OVERVIEW

The State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI) is a demand-side governance program that has operated across ten states in Nigeria since 2008, working alongside SPARC, a supply side governance program. In 2016, the program evolved into the Engaged Citizens Pillar (ECP), part of a larger governance reform program, PERL, which incorporates both demand and supply side elements. SAVI/ECP has focused on supporting citizens, civil society, media houses and elected state politicians to become "informed, credible and effective agents of citizen voice and accountability".<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, SAVI/ECP aims to improve service delivery from state government; citizens' access to, use of and satisfaction with these services; and to ensure that citizens are empowered to influence and hold the state government to account.

## POLITICALLY INFORMED

Being politically informed is a way of working that recognises that development outcomes are determined by the dynamics of power and politics. It is not about formal governance reforms, such as elections or civil service reforms. It involves analysing stakeholder interests and incentives to understand what is politically feasible.

## GENDER AWARE WAYS OF WORKING

SAVI/ECP stands out as a strong example of a program which is not primarily focused on gender, but which is making considerable efforts to mainstream gender and successfully addressing links between gender, citizen voice and state accountability. A range of measures have been employed to ensure this. Firstly, the program explicitly incentivises gender awareness in all the activities of staff and partners. As one source noted, this is in contrast to other programs: "Many sector-focused, donor-funded development programs in Nigeria engage in some form of gender mainstreaming but implementation tends to be weak unless built into the contract and incentivised by performance measures."<sup>3</sup> Within SAVI "attention to gender and inclusion is explicit across all levels of the results framework, and enshrined in the program's operations manual and all staff terms of reference".<sup>4</sup> For example, the program's results framework assesses "citizens' satisfaction with their ability to hold government to account", specifically referring to the satisfaction of "women and other socially excluded groups".<sup>5</sup>

*"... what is politically relevant in one place might not be relevant somewhere else."*

## GENDER AWARE

Being gender aware is a way of working that analyses how women and men, girls and boys, experience an issue differently and/or unequally, and the power relations that sustain these inequalities. A robust analysis also looks at how gender intersects with other forms of diversity, such as race, religion, ethnicity, class and disability, and non-binary gender identities or diverse sexual preferences.

These aims have been bolstered by a recruitment strategy which has contributed to a culture of promoting gender equity among staff. SAVI teams have been gender balanced across all ten states in which the program has operated. This has been achieved in part by providing staff with terms and conditions which are favourable to those with caring responsibilities, including crèches at meetings and leave for parents. The importance of gender balanced teams lies not only in having women at the table, but also (perhaps counter-intuitively) in having high status male and female leads motivated to champion gender equity, regardless of the program's primary aims. Creating a culture of promoting gender equality has also been achieved by recruitment procedures which prioritise *values*. Since 2012 the approach to recruitment, appraisal and staff bonuses has employed a competency based system focused on core values and agreed behaviours (such as respect and inclusion) rather than technical skills. Sources confirm that this strategy has been highly effective.

SAVI's approach to integrating gender has also been informed by local advisors and staff with extensive experience of working in and with Nigerian women's organisations. This has helped SAVI state teams to identify and engage partners within the sector to implement a range of

women-specific initiatives. In addition to targeting relevant organisations and the spaces in which they can affect change, using the phrase, '*let the men in*' SAVI has also prioritised motivating male advocates and power brokers as gender equality champions. This has been fundamental to the success of endeavours in more conservative local contexts. For example, gender reform in Jigawa State<sup>6</sup> was achieved via the combination of a male SAVI state team leader and male SPARC state team leader, both committed to challenging gender inequities, a male state governor who was open to change, and a culturally sensitive approach that used moderate language that didn't explicitly mention gender, and policy goals which were in accordance with Sharia Law. As a result, in July 2013 Jigawa became the first northern sharia state to draft and approve a state gender policy: "The interests aligned, the champions where there, people in power were able to push things forward [...] That then becomes an icon or a standard for gender work in the rest of northern Nigeria."<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, a SAVI-supported Gender Working Group in Kaduna State "established a very effective working relationship with the Kaduna State Government, mainstreaming gender into health, education, water and agriculture sector strategies, driving and shaping the state's ability to meet the needs of women".<sup>8</sup> Both are excellent examples of incorporating gender into a wider program, and of working in politically informed ways to achieve specific gendered aims.

SAVI's approach has also aimed to link gender to additional sources of inequity. Program documentation notes: "Other forms of exclusion, based for example on religion, ethnicity, indigeneity and disability, are themselves experienced differently and unequally by women and men, with women and girls frequently at the bottom of all variables."<sup>9</sup> In practice, the political context (as well as the expertise and comfort zone of staff, advisors and partners) has led to greater ease in working on links between gender and disability than,

for example, likes between gender, ethnicity and religion. However, this has been recognised during the transition to ECP. The new program will seek to focus more closely on the links between gender and a wide range of factors contributing to social exclusion.

## POLITICALLY INFORMED WAYS OF WORKING

A politically informed approach has been “fundamental to the success”<sup>10</sup> of SAVI/ECP. This approach has been made possible by senior technical staff who have a good understanding of regional political contexts, and fully recognise the importance of all staff and partners thinking and working politically to effect change.

SAVI/ECP’s politically informed approach was based on training and supporting state staff to conduct their own political economy analysis of their context, and then supporting staff and partners to use this in their decision-making and action.

One aspect of encouraging local partners to work politically has been to support ‘demand side’ stakeholders and partnerships to remove themselves from fixed adversarial positions, as the Jigawa and Kaduna State cases demonstrate. Another aspect has been a consistent focus on partners’ accountability to *citizens* rather than to SAVI as a program. Staff and partners are encouraged to experiment with what works on the ground. Regular reflection and feedback loops between partners and state staff, and between state staff and national technical staff have also aided iterative and adaptive thinking and practice.<sup>11</sup>

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*“Context. Context. Context. That’s the crucial thing.”*

As a *program*, SAVI works politically in a number of ways. The vast majority of State Team staff are local to the state in which they are supporting reform. This has ensured that staff have a strong understanding of local political contexts. Furthermore, it has put them in a good position to identify resources, spaces, individuals and critical junctures which present opportunities to achieve SAVI/ECP goals, as well as successful tactics to do so. Expatriate staff have been kept to a minimum.

SAVI maintains a low program profile and works behind the scenes. This low profile serves to mitigate political risks for the program, but also ensures that local partners lead processes of change and are accorded public credit for their actions, thereby building their capacities and working relationships

SAVI tries to ensure that donor money does not act as an incentive/driver for partners’ actions - departing from the traditional approach of distributing competitive grants to NGOs and CSOs for pre-determined goals. Instead, SAVI supports existing momentum in locally led processes of change, encouraging partners to draw on locally available resources to support and sustain their actions.

## CONVERGENCE OR TENSION?

The evidence from the case of SAVI/ECP shows that, to a substantial degree, gender aware and politically informed approaches are complementary. This is indicated by the program’s success in incorporating gender into explicit aims as well as focusing on the culture and values of partner organisations; ensuring that among partners and stakeholders, both men and women are engaged in the process of securing gender equity; and capitalising on the knowledge and skills of key actors who are able to engage networks and identify spaces in which they can effect change. Furthermore, a politically informed approach which takes money off the table - while not appropriate or feasible in all contexts - can help to

promote sustainable reform processes not dependent on donor money, and facilitate cooperation between CSOs whose relationships are often placed under strain by competition for funding.

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*“There was also a lot of iterative learning - for example, states learning from each other. Not many programs would give you flexibility.”*

However, one source has also indicated that although tapping into existing networks of gender-focussed CSOs has been beneficial, reliance on such networks can result in “patchy coverage”<sup>12</sup> depending on where prior relationships are strongest. Secondly, while identifying political opportunities or ‘low hanging fruit’ is an undeniably pragmatic response to the local political context, this can mean that more difficult challenges are left unaddressed. For example, those teams across the ten states which were highly motivated to pursue gender equity received full support and encouragement, but not as much effort was spent on incentivising teams which were less focused on gender from the outset. One source has suggested that the incorporation of gender within SAVI became somewhat reactive as a result. A balance must therefore be struck between *consistent* attention to gender and simultaneously choosing which battles to fight—capitalising on opportunities, spaces and critical junctures where they arise.

## EFFECTIVENESS: CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Nigeria is characterised by major cleavages which result in extreme differences in the political contexts in which SAVI/ECP teams work at the state level. However, some of the program’s most noticeable successes on gender equity have occurred in the most rural, conservative areas where civil society is least well established: “The structure of the

1. <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-114230>
2. <http://savi-nigeria.org>
3. Key informant, 15.12.2016
4. <http://savi-nigeria.org/approach/savi-approach-paper-7-promoting-gender-equality-and-social-inclusion>
5. <http://savi-nigeria.org/resource/savi-logframe-summary>
6. <http://savi-nigeria.org/casestudy/genderreformjigawa/>
7. Key informant, 05.04.2017
8. <http://savi-nigeria.org/casestudy/genderreformkaduna/>
9. [http://savi-nigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/SAVI-ApproachPaper7\\_2015\\_FINAL.pdf](http://savi-nigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/SAVI-ApproachPaper7_2015_FINAL.pdf)
10. Key informant, 15.12.2016
11. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9203.pdf>
12. Key informant, 15.12.2016
13. Key informant, 05.04.2017

program itself was crucial to its success. The state teams were allowed to be almost autonomous, take their own positions and work independently to a certain degree, and respond to their specific environments. When things are just run from the centre, that stifles programs in Nigeria.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore these challenging political contexts do not necessarily represent an insurmountable hurdle to change. Instead, the quality of local leadership and ability to read the local political climate, coupled with the flexibility and autonomy to identify opportunities and modify tactics accordingly appear to have been far more crucial factors for success in this case.

## METHODS

A rapid review of select program documentation, combined with confidential interviews with at least two key informants per case. Informants include project staff, independent reviewers, donors and other stakeholders. Identifying and listening to local and/or female informants has been prioritised. Interviews for this case took place on 15.12.2016 and 05.04.2017.

## SELECTED RESOURCES

<http://savi-nigeria.org>

This case study was written by **Orlanda Siow** of UCL as part of the Gender and Politics in Practice (GAPP) research project. It is one of 14 short case studies focusing on development programs that aim to be both politically informed and gender aware. See *From Silos to Synergy* for a synthesis of the lessons that emerge. Explore all GAPP publications at [dlprog.org/gapp](http://dlprog.org/gapp).

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Developmental Leadership Program  
International Development Department  
College of Social Sciences  
University of Birmingham  
Birmingham, B15 2TT  
United Kingdom

[dlprog.org/gapp](http://dlprog.org/gapp)

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