Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme: Understanding Social and Political Action

Nigeria: Country and Intervention Scoping Report

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1: Purpose

This report presents the findings of two scoping visits to Nigeria by John Gaventa and Angela Christie in June and Tade Aina and Femi Balogun in July, 2016. The purpose of the visits[1] was to determine whether Nigeria presents opportunities for operationally relevant, robust and contemporary research to understand:

- *the role of social and political action in fostering effective empowerment and accountability and*
- *the role of external actors in supporting these change processes*
- *as well as opportunities for research communication and uptake.*

The two scoping visits to Nigeria captured the perspectives of local activists, academics and practitioners on the actors, modalities and outcomes of social and political action (SPA) in addition to the perceptions of external actors and the interventions they support. This report is a synthesis of the ideas, sources, resources, references and themes drawn from interviews, informal conversations and site visits to programme managers, universities and think tanks as well as donor agencies. The empirical study has been complemented with some literature review. The report aims to provide a thorough scoping to inform the approach, sites and actors that will be the focus of the research.

2: Findings

2.1 Context

Nigeria has a population of about 187 million people and has a total urban population of over 91 million people (almost half the population). It is the largest country in Africa and accounts for 47 per cent of West Africa's population. Nigeria is made up of a wide array of different customs, languages, and traditions with more than 350 ethnic groups. The most numerous ethnic groups are the North Hausa/Fulani, the overwhelming majority of whom are Muslim. The Igbos, who are mainly Christians, constitute the majority in the South East. The Yoruba who are both Christians and Muslims in almost equal parts form the majority in the South West. The Middle Belt and South–South regions are home to a large number of the minority ethnic groups, although within them are larger groups such as the Edo, Ibibio, Efiks, Ijaws, Tivs, Idoma and Birom. These are mainly Christians but have pockets of Muslims amongst them. The diversity and plurality in Nigeria across ethnic and religious identities is important as it has become the key platform for cleavages and fractures in the country's politics and one of the serious challenges to building effective and engaged citizenry.

Nigeria is one of the leading petroleum oil exporters in Africa, and has the largest natural gas reserves on the continent. As of 2015, Nigeria was the world's 20th largest economy, worth more than $500 billion and $1 trillion in terms of nominal GDP and purchasing power parity respectively.

[1] In line with the A4EA Research Programme objectives.

But all these appear to be under threat following the hike in the price of petroleum products, the instability of the Naira against the US Dollar, the re-emergence of the separatist agitation for 'Biafra' in the South East, militancy in the Niger Delta, cattle rustling and rural banditry in parts of the Middle Belt and the Northern states, and the violent extremist Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, which has produced over two million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

Nigeria is at a critical juncture since its democracy is relatively nascent. Following the fifth consecutive national elections (since the restoration of electoral politics in 1999), held in March and April 2015, former Military Head of State, General Muhammadu Buhari, an opposition leader, won the elections. For many observers, these elections represented a strong example of social and political action, and the call for a change of government as the culmination of years of frustration. It is also notable that this was a relatively peaceful transition to a new President. Since the election, Buhari has been focusing on combating the scourge of corruption, while also confronting a rapidly declining economy as a result of dwindling global oil prices and unresolved conflicts in the North East region, Niger Delta and in the Middle Belt. While many Nigerians remain convinced by the prudent resume of President Buhari and his professed commitment to transform the socio-economic condition of the country, there is increasing restlessness and disillusionment by very many who continue to face severe economic hardships and are little convinced of the effectiveness of the government's "war on corruption". There is also a sense that the government has been slow to act, and has tended to be very closed in its approach, with little public consultation or access outside of the closed circle of the Presidency.

The new government also faces two major crises:

The first one is economic. The decline in the price of oil has left the government with little money, and across the country unemployment is rising, with growing frustrations among the burgeoning youth population. In this federal system, where funds flow from the centre to pool at state level with little passed on to local governments, this imposes serious limitations on the prospects for local employment creation and service improvement.

The second crisis emanates from the resurgence in violence and insecurity. The rise of Boko Haram in the north, as well as the seeming inability of the government to contain it, has been a growing source of concern, with estimates of some 20,000 people killed in six years. But violence is not contained there. In the Niger Delta, a new movement called the Avengers has threatened to cut oil and water lines to destabilise the economy further and so trigger civil unrest as the basis for political change. The Biafra secessionist movement is resurging, and 30 people were killed in pro-Biafra demonstrations during the first scoping visit. In addition to these regionally focused incidents, violence in the north also connects to the south – and there are powerful images being shared of Fulani herdsman herding cattle from north to south, now carrying AK 47s. In this difficult economic and political context, almost everyone we talked with in the two visits, including donor agencies, researchers in universities, think tanks and NGOs, described a significant shift in public attitude. The 'reality of the loot' is sinking in, as people realise how much money has been siphoned off from Nigeria's oil wealth, leaving little behind.

There is a strong sense of rights not being met, and at the same time a sense of fatigue at the failure of government to take responsibility. Some people referred to the regional variations in this, with people less likely to be 'told what to do' in the south, while the influence of traditional leaders in the north remains strong, reducing the space for civil unrest. Nevertheless, the scope for powerful elites to temper civil society voice is not what it was: as one person said, 'people are less willing to be bought-off, and there is less money to buy them.'

In response to these growing frustrations, there has been a rise in new forms of social action, especially through "flares" of intense social media campaigns, such as the 'enough is enough' and the 'bring back our girls' campaigns. There have also been autonomous grassroots mobilisation initially ostensibly around security in communities but leading more to new levels of local power such as neighbourhood associations, residents' groups and community development associations that mobilise their constituents and liaise with state agencies and politicians. An element of this "below the radar" organising is the formation of local vigilante groups which are often formed by communities, residents' associations and even some faith based organisations. These are groups of young people and some older citizens organised to provide security and civil defence work in their communities. They patrol the neighbourhoods day and night, some carry weapons, gather intelligence and often work for and/or liaise closely with government security agencies.

Another manifestation of new forms of social and political actions with implications for empowerment and accountability (E&A) is lodged in the organising and growth of faith based organisations. A recurring theme from our interactions is that faith based organisations (FBOs), particularly the new Pentecostal churches, various grassroots organisations such as women's groups and community based organisations (CBOs) have moved into the spaces vacated by government and politicians. Although these are predominantly Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians, the conventional denominations and emerging Moslem groups are actors in these new forms of social and political action as well. Much more needs to be understood about the role of these new groups, as we shall discuss further below.

While we thus see a lot of local mobilisation, there remain very limited spaces and mechanisms for engagement between citizens and the state. As heard a number of times, elections are very important in the Nigerian context, and yet in between elections there are few channels for representation or aggregation of voice either across states, or between levels of government (local, state and federal). Elected representatives rarely return to their constituencies, for fear of being 'shaken down' as people demand their share of the oil wealth they sense representatives have squandered. In this context, the questions of what forms of social and political action could create a more enduring social contract between state and citizens is a critical one.

But this is a huge challenge. In Nigeria, the old problem of what it is to be a Nigerian citizen remains. The law links citizenship identity back to one's village of origin, not to the nation, such that benefits from the state (educational subsidies, social security, etc.) are only received in one's home area. Earlier research by the Citizenship DRC programme showed the identity of national citizenship often ranks far below ethnic, religious, local and family identities.

Without succumbing to a Nigeria exceptionalism, we were also warned that it is important to nuance the notion of engagement in a complex and at times difficult context like Nigeria. According to our informants, engagement might not be unilineal, direct, or as visible as we see in other democracies. Engagement might be with different parts/factions of the state that are not so apparent to others, but at that particular moment constitutes a group's, community's or citizens' immediate priority. For example, the concerns of community groups might be the provision of increased security like more police presence around their areas in the case of rural banditry. In cases like this, elections or some basic service provision might come second. People want to be safe and their cattle not rustled or property stolen. Engagement might also involve mediation and transactions through third parties such as CBOs, FBOs or Native Authority heads and traditional rulers. The research questions then need to examine varieties and modalities of state-citizen engagement and what that means in a young and fragile democracy. It also needs to examine who benefits from such engagement.

All this creates large questions of what empowerment and accountability mean in such a context. For government, empowerment is often translated as giving programmes or funds to beneficiaries (for example through the new social protection fund). For civil society, empowerment is about 'voice', but in neither of these conceptions is there a strong sense of empowerment as agency and action. In such a complex context of economic and security crisis, the notion of holding governments to account may not appear to be an underpinning or significant issue to many, and people ask 'accountability for what? By whom?'

A recurring theme from our interactions is that FBOs, particularly the new Pentecostal churches, various grassroots organisations such as women's groups and CBOs, have moved into a vacuum created by the rupture in the state-citizen relations. As people have lost their trust in increasingly delegitimised leaders and institutions, they have embraced churches, mosques, neo-traditional and syncretic groups, CBOs, vigilantes, and others. How these organisations understand empowerment is an important question. Discussions so far show that the dominant understanding is economic and in a personal development sense.

An important element of the new "prosperity theology" of the Pentecostal and evangelical groups is the insertion of entrepreneurialism into their theology and world view. This is very present in some of these churches who encourage the growth of micro enterprises, build capacity through skills enhancement and training and at times provide seed loans or contacts for seed loans for enterprises. However, there is scarcely much discussion of collective citizen action, or of citizens making demands of their governments or holding them to account.

Informants point out that it is because these institutions themselves are not accountable institutions. As theocratic organisations, the FBOs are undemocratic and there are no internal accountability mechanisms in place. The interesting question therefore, is whether some of the new social and political actors are more committed to some forms of empowerment such as economic advancement and personal development rather than institutional or public accountability.

Another notion of empowerment for CBOs and communities in the context of high insecurity is the sense of communities and groups taking control of their own safety and security through setting up vigilante groups that patrol their neighbourhoods and areas not only to provide early warning

systems but also to enhance civil defence. This is a serious issue for both rural and urban communities that are subject to high degrees of criminal attacks and rural banditry. It is a very important question in the Middle Belt regions.

A further important element of empowerment and accountability in citizen-state relations is the emerging situation of ethnic groups who find themselves constituting a majority in professional, vocational or residential settings, yet are a minority in the overall political context. Nevertheless, they mobilise themselves politically to make demands that advance their economic and professional interests. This is happening, for instance, in Lagos state where there are concentrations of so-called non Lagos state indigenous people in businesses and certain neighbourhoods. It was shown in the 2015 general elections that the Igbo traders in Lagos voted en masse for the then ruling party the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). Although the PDP lost both in Lagos State and the centre, the election of an important cohort of members of parliament from Lagos State who are not indigenes into both the Lagos State House of Assembly and the National Assembly changed the accountability equation as these organised minority interests were now represented in parliament and had some sort of formal voice. The situation heightened the indigene versus settler-citizen tension both in terms of identity politics and competition for power and influence. In Lagos State, it was carried out through electoral politics while in other instances such as in Plateau State and other parts of the Middle Belt region, the citizen-settler-indigene tension and politics are expressed through ethnic clashes and violence. Some of our informants attribute the difference in approach to the fact that the Lagos State settlers are economically empowered and thus can mobilise themselves as groups with clear political goal orientation. The citizenship and indigeneity question and conflicts arising from it are becoming an important issue generating new forms of social and political action.

While empowerment and accountability thus seem to have a variety of meanings in the context of local actions, for donors the accountability theme has been an important one, driven largely by international discourses and debates in the field. As discussed more fully later, Nigeria has recently received one of the largest DFID governance programmes anywhere globally. Based on a renewed focus on outcomes (what is achieved) rather than process (how you achieve it), this £100m programme is to be delivered through an adaptive learning approach designed to enable implementers to set and revise delivery targets based on opportunities.

However, despite lasting commitment to empowerment and public sector reform plus a significant investment, traditional aid donors in Nigeria may find their role diminishing with the rise of new actors including the Chinese or Indian donors who are reported to be sometimes more flexible in their approach in terms of aid conditionality and relationships with governments over human rights and environmental issues.

Within Nigeria, new private foundations, such as the Awolowo Foundation, TY Danjuma Foundation, MTN Foundation, and the Yar'Adua Centre have emerged, serving as thought centres often with strong links to government. The entry of these new donor actors on to the scene also raises important research questions about their funding in relationship to empowerment and accountability. The general impression (which can be further investigated) is that they do not fund governance or rights related issues, but focus on service provision projects in education, nature conservation, environment and sanitation. Nor do they fund social science research or advocacy issues or groups. Again, empowerment is often framed in terms of economic empowerment, skills acquisition, entrepreneurship, personal development and in certain cases non-controversial aspects

of reproductive health. The point is that just as amongst the local action groups, meanings and practices around empowerment and accountability take different forms amongst different external actors, and therefore require further understanding, unpacking and nuancing.

This complex and volatile setting poses many questions relating to empowerment and accountability change and challenge. Yet there appear to be few organisations actively engaged in looking for the answers. Those that exist either in research or/and advocacy are predominantly funded by the US private foundations such as the Ford, Rockefeller and MacArthur Foundations and bilateral donors such as DFID (which perhaps provides the largest amount of funding on governance issues in Nigeria). A few German foundations such as the Frederich Ebert Foundation also fund advocacy and research in rights and governance.

2.2 Modes of social and political action around empowerment and accountability

From both parts of the of the scoping mission (the first focused on meeting largely donors and other external actors, while the second focused on university researchers and think tanks), we learned a great deal about their views of recent trends and changes related to social and political action. As we asked about the key actors and key spaces for social and political action in Nigeria, six overall themes emerged.

1. **The rise of social media-based forms of social and political action.** Several people remarked that Nigeria leads the way on the continent, if not globally, on the use of social media for mobilising and voice. A number of examples were given, including:
    - Mobilisation around the fuel subsidies in 2012, with a number of people raising questions as to why that movement had impact, whereas a recent attempt to mobilise (2016) failed.
    - Mobilisation around elections, especially in 2015.
    - A whole series of single issues 'hash tag' campaigns, including 'Bring back our girls', 'enough is enough', 'light up Nigeria', and more.

While these have shown at times large-scale effect in terms of mobilising, their real impact on accountability is less known. They tend to 'flare', to be seen as 'spontaneous' and have been described by our respondents as 'episodic and ephemeral accountability groups'. They contrast sharply with more ongoing, organised and institutional forms of participation which have characterised so many donor and NGO approaches in the past. Some of our informants raised important questions about the socio-economic composition of these actors, e.g. whether rural or urban, class, age and gender base. There is also the orientation of different groups to different forms of social media and the gendered nature of outlets and targets.

This raises important challenges and questions on how and whether these approaches are informed by or re-enforce each other, or whether they are distinctive and separate forms of action. The question also arises as to the ultimate beneficiaries of these new actions. For instance, we heard suggestions that conventional organisations such as established political parties, trade unions, NGOs and FBOs may 'hijack' or take over the actions initiated by individual, unattached and free flowing actors who initially start the SPAs, but who then lack the capacity to sustain or scale them up. Our interviews also revealed the dark side of social media – they can become spaces for hate speech, can

encourage violence and misogyny. Also, very interestingly, while they appear spontaneous, there were examples of how powerful interests can mobilise through 'robo-message' type approaches, paying large sums for professionals to flood social media with their messages.

2. **The challenges facing civil society organisations**. Nigeria has for many years had a vibrant organised civil society space, composed of NGOs and CSOs, as well as professional bodies, trade unions and others. We heard again and again about the challenges that many in this space are facing. This has several aspects:
    - While there are a number of national issue-based platforms, these are often seen to be very fragmented, and disconnected from what is going on at the base. Some of these groups have transformed over time into development 'businesses' and are struggling to connect with the public or with the more spontaneous issue based 'flares' discussed above.
    - For NGOs dependent on external financing to support their operations, the current competitive funding environment is making collaboration difficult, and encouraging struggles for 'ownership' and profile.
    - Having worked for many years with the model of mobilising from the outside to hold governments to account, many of these actors are now talking about how to engage with governments, to work with them in new ways, etc. Yet, the strategies for doing so remain unclear. One interesting positive example seems to have emerged from the gender movement, which has organised a national network, and now has established a gender technical unit within the national legislature. Another interesting approach is the USAID civil society programmes, which are working with the notion of 'clusters' of platforms, to build new, more vibrant coalitions.
    - While NGOS and formally organised CSOs, which tend to operate through projects, driven by donor funding, are struggling, Nigeria continues its strong history of membership based groups and voluntary associations. At the national level, these include groups like the National Labour Congress and a significant new actor, the National Association of Students, and other professional associations. At the local level, village based associations remain very strong, yet often remain disconnected from the larger, more formalised civil society organisations. Membership groups have strong traditions of internal accountability, but to some degree seem not to be playing a large role in the debates about holding government to account. Some observers believe the reduction of their role in the debates in recent times is due to the fragmentation and cleavages along ethnic, religious and regional lines that have been heightened by the activities of politicians and political parties in the run up to the 2015 elections.
    - As discussed earlier, problem-oriented community organisations formed around issues such as providing security through vigilante groups or securing basic services such as water, electricity connections and waste management are emerging in urban residential areas and peri-urban communities. They are also becoming increasingly engaged in local politics forming alliances with local politicians, liaising with the police and other security forces and mediating between the state and their communities on issues such as access and rights to land. These new CBOs are increasingly occupying the spaces vacated by the state in terms of its direct relationships with citizens.

- It was noted that while governments and donors have invested in women's empowerment and gender issues, over the past three decades concentrating mainly on different forms of economic empowerment and supporting women's organisations, such empowerment initiatives seem not to have yielded much in terms of the formal participation and presence of leading women's organisations that publicly speak to and for gender empowerment and women's issues. The relative insignificance of the National Council for Women's Societies was lamented, yet others pointed to the success of gender organisations in establishing a presence within the parliament.

3. **The growth of new actors.** We also see the growth of new actors, including from the private sector. These include new private foundations (discussed above). Another example which was mentioned several times is BudgIT (http://yourbudgit.com/), a group formed by bankers to inform the public of how the budget is being used. They have been very clever at presenting infographics, and using twitter and social media, and are seen by states and others as very knowledgeable on budget analysis. What needs to be understood about the new actors includes their motives, their socio-economic and gender compositions and who is funding them.

4. **The enduring importance of political action through formal political procedures.** While the above spaces and actors might be located in what is traditionally seen as civil society space in a broad sense, it is also clear that politicians, parties, elections and the more traditional forms of political engagement remain key in the Nigerian context. Yet, little is known about how to develop an ongoing sense of representation between elections, or how representatives serve to aggregate and scale up local voices. Political actors, particularly are also seen as being partly responsible for the growth of violent youth groups and militia that they support or even help to fund. Some of these groups may operate as political accountability or demand making groups but they also sometimes double as criminal and insurrectionary groups. Also, part of the actions of dominant political actors has been a systematic erosion and appropriation of the voice of other potentially powerful groups such CSOs, FBOs and communities. They have done this through a wide variety of activities that include incorporation of their leaders, occupying their spaces and/or buying them off.

5. **Creating reform from within the government.** A constant refrain amongst those we met, especially the donors, involved how to change government behaviours. Civil society organisations also saw that simply continuing to strengthen the demand side of politics, without finding ways for increased government responsiveness, was not enough. So while our focus has tended to be on social and political action from below, we need to also pay attention to how change happens from within government, in a way that creates new spaces for citizen engagement, as well as new norms and incentives for responsiveness. Several people pointed to what is now happening in Kaduna state, where a progressive governor seems to be bringing about significant reforms. The legacy of reform movements in Jigawa State might also be an interesting case.

6. **The growing influence of churches, mosques and FBOs**. Recent times have seen the rapid growth of new FBOs and new churches, mosques and modes of worship. Many of these are organisations that apart from their religious orientation are institutions arising from current

rapid transitions and uncertainties. In addition to spiritual and direct physical healing, they offer skills training, encourage entrepreneurial training and operate with more individual and economic empowerment notions. The churches operate farms, bakeries, small production workshops and other forms of services and small and medium enterprises.

All of the above point to a complex interplay of old and new actors and spaces that offer potential for empowerment and accountability. Modalities of engagement are rapidly changing, and in this environment constant questions were raised about who are now the real movers and shakers. As old actors struggle to adapt, and as new actors enter the terrain, a huge range of new innovations in the field of civil society – state relations is emerging, many of which lack documentation and research. Overall, the changing terrain of social and political action raises important challenges for external actors, as we shall discuss in the next section.

2.3 Role of external actors

Discussions during the first scoping visit were framed to help establish whether Nigeria presents a potentially fertile ground for exploring the role external actors can play in creating, supporting and influencing social and political action. There was insufficient time to map the external actors operating in Nigeria in terms of type (donor, private sector, NGO etc.), focus of interest (sector, region, population group) or effect (positive, negative, short/long-term change) so findings within this report are by no means comprehensive. DFID staff and DFID-funded programmes were a priority but not the exclusive focus of enquiry.

Our headline observations relate to external actor identity, priorities, funding, approach and learning:

1. **Identity**
    - Donors operate as influencers and advisers, overseeing a thematically broad range of development assistance largely delivered indirectly through other agencies rather than directly to government. The private sector now plays a major role as agents in the delivery of international aid. For example, 70 per cent of DFID funds are delivered through private companies and only 10 per cent through NGOs.
    - We heard of a near complete gulf between Nigerian researchers, universities and think tanks and the managers of more recent donor programmes, particularly the big bilateral funders. This gap at country level applies to even senior and competent researchers with clear international reputation and credentials. Some of these researchers have experience with foundations and some of the big funders but the problem is often about institutional memory in the donor organisations, continuity of programmes and insufficient interest in cumulative knowledge and learning among donors. Programmes end, are evaluated but the learning from them in terms of who previous players are, particularly human resources such as local front line workers and local researchers seems to be inadequately processed or used.
    - Within the community of development programme implementers (so not the donors themselves), organisational identity and operational strategy are vital to survival in what is perceived as an increasingly competitive and fast moving operating environment.

New development approaches (doing development differently, problem driven iterative adaptation) and other more technical innovations (real time monitoring using mobile technology) plus the requirement to operate at scale are creating a space for private sector companies to drive the agenda and demonstrate advantage and are re-locating smaller albeit more established development organisations (particularly NGOs) to lower on the funding spectrum and so potentially reducing their influence.

- Alongside this shift, approaches and methodologies are changing rapidly and deepening the distinctions between programmes and organisations and what may appear as either frontier or dated. Examples include:
    - traditional demand/supply distinctions and perspectives (rights holders/duty bearers) appear less current than the more recent search for shared spaces and collective action
    - gender programmes focused only on women risk being seen as closed and inward looking when compared to initiatives and campaigns which look more broadly at social norms as they affect women and men, girls and boys
    - periodic data gathering and established participatory methodologies (focus group discussions) may be seen as old style in the face of new commitments to and the growing attraction of mobile technology for real time monitoring and programme adaptation
- Despite these shifts, programme implementers remain largely aware that citizen connection is critical to legitimacy. This has particularly impacted on some NGOs who are recognising that without a constituency (membership) they are either talking to themselves or being perceived as donors and programme implementers rather than activists embedded in local realities. While recognising the importance of civil society engagement, however, donors and implementers also acknowledge that civil society is partisan. Dimensions of social and political identity (ethnicity, religion, party affiliation), plus the power of the elites, place donors in particular in a challenging position as they attempt to operate effectively while retaining neutrality. The appetite for taking the risks this entails appears to be growing and there is evidence of more overt recognition that development is inevitably political and must not only be based on political analysis but actually incorporate political aims within the list of development priorities.

2. **Priorities**

- The nationwide and almost unprecedented social action leading up to the 2015 elections has deepened interest (particularly within DFID) in the democratisation process. There is a general commitment to seeking ways to strengthen existing links between citizens and government particularly in the periods between elections. More specifically, there is an appetite to better understand the ways in which the political classes (elites) engage in and respond to social and political action. In particular, external actors are keen to determine if and how they can contribute to behavioural change among political elites.
- As a precursor to the above, DFID among other donors, is encouraging development practitioners to shift the emphasis of their political economy analyses from the macro to the micro level, making links by so doing to the problem driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) based approaches which are informing a refocus of their programmes on

outcomes rather than process (outputs). This shift relates closely to a growing emphasis on the importance of identifying and acting on political barriers to change as they arise rather than by programme design. These perspectives and interests in changing the behaviour of political elites has also led to a consideration by some donors of political cycles as the boundary limits to development opportunity. Given the *start again mentality* of new governments, DFID for example wants to get better at operating within political cycles.

- The lack of vertical integration (federal-state-local) within government (and specifically the nature of constituencies for civil society at the federal level able to connect with local citizenry) creates a challenging environment for donors and implementing partners. Some, but not all, implementing partners charged with exploring the disconnects between national, state and local level structures and processes, recognise the complexity and the challenge in identifying and strengthening vertical linkages without creating false architectures and grant-based unsustainable donor-led processes. The media, parliament, the private sector, unions and other associations offer new opportunities to find meaningful ways to support citizen focused linkages but supporting them introduces stronger political dimensions to donor programming.
- More obvious difficulties are presented by any attempt to support horizontal integration in a country where ethnic and political divides coincide with state identities. Given the entrenched nature of these divisions, it is likely that donors will operate at the state level in alignment with local reform minded leadership and to maximise their opportunities to demonstrate impact.

3. **Funding**
    - Although funded by traditional (bilateral) donors such as DFID, private sector consulting companies now play a major role in delivering external aid in Nigeria, operating in consortia alongside traditional (NGOs) and less traditional players (such as marketing companies). NGOs spoke to us about development now *following the money* and operating at a scale where they find it impossible to bid alone. They see that projects have become the vehicle for development financing, the shaper of development endeavour and the basis for organisational survival. We also hear with respect to the private sector consulting firms, serious questions about their commitment to the country given the weight and significance of the issues they are often contracted to work on. We hear that “so called dispassionate neutrality can often translate to distance and a lack of groundedness of analyses, recommendations and implementation”. Collaboration with local researchers and institutions is necessary for some degree of groundedness, continuity, institutionalisation and capacity building to tackle Nigeria’s issues by Nigerians.
    - This raises interesting questions in relation to how donors spend money and the extent to which this drives, defines and places limits on what partners are doing. The Engaged Citizens Pillar (ECP) component of the Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) programme (building on State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI) learning) is exploring alternatives to grant making as a model of donor support and dependency and in so doing building a greater local capacity to *do development differently* through an

approach which is more politically informed, opportunistic and flexible and more akin to a technical assistance style of delivery than a grant making one.

- Meanwhile there is growing recognition within the Government of Nigeria that there are new sources for development finance which reduce the need to reach out to the traditional donors for ideas and/or money. As yet, it is unclear what effect this is having in terms of donor ambition or development direction and impact.

4. **Approach**

- Donors make the case that creating new and permanent forms of engagement between external actors and civil society or government offers an unrealistic prospect, since the 'invited space' this creates is artificial and will not endure. Their experience is reported as suggesting that success is linked to places (states) where there are local champions for reform (previously Jigawa, now Kaduna). DFID's new flagship governance programme for example focuses on the three states of Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa. This represents an evolution of thinking for DFID who, in their last phase of programme revisions, expanded the work of their State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC) and SAVI programmes to ten states. The new programme (PERL) has three pillars: Accountable, Capable and Responsive Government (ARC), Engaged Citizens (ECP), and Learning, Evidence and Influencing (LEAP) – and is a £100m programme building on the work of SPARC (state supply), SAVI (federal) and FEPAR (Federal Public Administration Reform Programme) (state demand) and as referenced above is devised to accommodate new commitments to vertical integration and programme adaptation (PDIA).
- By the end of 2018, DFID may also be looking to develop a new local governance programme (probably in the north) to succeed Mobilising for Development (M4D) and build on other local governance initiatives (for example, V2P implemented by Christian Aid). The research findings from the A4EA programme might feed into that design process. In the meantime, there was an appetite expressed within DFID to a) look across the programmes to determine which approaches work, and b) to better articulate and operationalise the relationship between E&A objectives and the transformational change required within the delivery sectors if service delivery is to reach standards of quality and equity (health, education).
- Donors broadly are also interested in how their thematic priorities interconnect – e.g. violent extremism, youth unemployment, access to services, corruption. Questions are being asked by DFID for example about the links between social protection, livelihoods programming and empowerment. Exploring the links between social and political action and violent extremism is also high on the agenda – what is the link between this and poor governance and what are the entry points for bringing about change; political behaviour in the North is of course central to this enquiry.
- In recent years, development initiatives founded on a *best practice* perspective have been replaced by a more *what works in practice* thinking. The question of what works links clearly with questions relating to incentives and behavioural change. There is an appetite for innovation, particularly technological innovation; this is seen to be opening creative space for new ideas and attracting younger people. In particular, access to

information and the role of the media is an emerging area of interest which extends beyond the notion of whether transparency leads to accountability. There is very significant interest in social media (how and what works) and presentation/communication (BUDGIT, Buhari metre website) as an entry point. Many questions remain unanswered, including whether there is a new dynamic between empowerment and accountability in the social media space and what if any are the risks this introduces. There is currently little research to better understand how social media is being used, by whom and to what end or to distinguish between what is happening locally and what is being driven by external agents for change. There are some interesting comparisons to be made between the role of external actors in supporting the emergence of more formal structures and mechanisms for civil society engagement and the more spontaneous and temporary local social and political movements mobilising in response to immediate opportunities.

- There are a number of innovative but slightly more organised uses of social media through platforms supported by external actors - such as Buhari watch, Girls Hub programmes, and work on gender norms (www.Iampurple.ng.). The latter is part of the V4C programme which is one example of a DFID funded programme focusing on empowerment and accountability of citizens; the programme has adopted a marketing and social media approach using brands and campaigns to capture in particular the interest of young people. The programme seems to have traction in the south but there are outstanding questions on the space the programme is creating in the north. This might be an interesting option for accompaniment and comparison given the focus on social media.

5. **Learning**

- Development programme learning is embedded within programme delivery: mechanisms include (real-time) monitoring, reviews, knowledge management and evaluation processes. There is some research effort in support of programmes but these largely relate to the predefined programme design and so are often framed as baseline or impact studies. As a result the local research bodies employed tend to demonstrate strengths in relation to sampling and data gathering but are weaker in terms of research framing or critical analysis. National data seem to be rarely used and there is scepticism in relation to the quality of both national data and data systems. We were informed that it seems as if there is insufficient connection between previous donor investments and new ones in such areas as knowledge building and management, and learning. DFID is acknowledged and respected as one of the most important investors in the work on religion, democracy and development in Nigeria and yet there is insufficient evidence of connections between this vast work and new initiatives. Another important observation is that donor investments in broad thematic issues such as E&A in SPAs have utilised large pools of local frontline workers who have developed expertise, connections and wisdom in the field but who often are neither recognised, consulted nor used in new programmes. This leads often to new cycles of experimentation without the benefit of previous learning.

- Despite a heavy emphasis by donors on programme learning, everyone interviewed acknowledged that experience-sharing/learning opportunities are rare. Many fora have been disbanded – this is widely seen as a response to the stiffening competition for funds leading to the sharing of ideas being perceived as commercially sensitive and undesirable. Even one-off events are reported as dominated by show-casing styles of engagement. Given the minimal coordination across programmes duplication and over-claiming is likely. At the same time, outside of the largely donor driven spaces, there are multiple conversations going on around issues of democracy, constitutional reforms, and empowerment and accountability through social and political action. For instance, institutions such as the Centre for Development and Democracy (CDD) and the Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy (ISGPP) have convened fora on these themes. Other discussions are found in university seminars, workshops and conferences. The work to be done is to track, document and connect the wide range of fragmented conversations and debates, and to build stronger learning opportunities across them.

2.4 Emerging research themes

From scoping visits, it became clear that there would be multiple themes and research questions in the current Nigerian context that would be relevant to the A4EA programme. How we make these choices, whether we have the capacity to do them, etc. are important questions, to be discussed further, as we approach the next phase. For now, here are several areas which we believe would be of interest to explore:

1. **What are the dynamics, opportunities, and risks in the rise of social mobilisation for empowerment and accountability, and what are the implications for external actors seeking to strengthen empowerment and accountability?**
    a) Why have some social movements or campaigns worked (fuel subsidy protests 2012, elections 2015, bring back our girls 2016, enough is enough)?
        - What drives social and political activity – what shapes, controls and drives the agenda, membership and outcome?
        - Do these short-lived movements and campaigns for change work better than attempts to mechanise E&A through more formal and permanent structures and processes?
        - Do external actors play any part in framing, energising or facilitating these movements and pathways?
    b) How do recent social and political campaigns/movements relate to the democratisation process in Nigeria?
        - Are there new ways emerging to strengthen the link between citizens and government?
        - How does constituency and representation work during mobilisation episodes; what are the pathways between citizen and state and what do these look like for individuals, for associations and for coalitions?
        - Do such movements contribute to accountability and empowerment? How do varied perceptions on what empowerment means (benefits/voice/agency) influence engagement in local movements? What does accountability mean in these contexts?

c) What are the implications of these new forms of social actions for donors and external actors?
   - How do they engage in these spaces? What are they learning in doing so?
   - What are the limits? How do the more spontaneous and episodic forms of action link to operational realities of baselines, projects, log frames, and donor accountability?

2. **Linked to the above questions, how is the rapid rise of social media changing the dynamics of mobilisation and contestation in these movements? With what implications for empowerment and accountability?** As outlined earlier, the rise of social media based action is enormous – yet we found very little research or documentation in this field. A number of questions arise that link across the social and political action strand of our research and the external actors strand:
   a) For social and political action: What is the impact of these mobilisations on accountability? How do they sustain themselves? What are the links between online and off line action? Who are the actors? How spontaneous is the action? Who do they represent? What are the links of these movements and mobilisations to more ongoing, sustained CSOs, NGOs or other forms of social engagement? Why do some appear to take off and have impact, while others do not?
   b) Is a sharp contrast emerging between the platform of civil society organised and sponsored by donors and the platform of citizens in social media (disparate and spontaneous)? What evidence is there that social media can be used effectively by external agencies to facilitate change?

3. **What is the role of politics and political representation (and political classes) in movements for empowerment and accountability?** Here a number of questions could come together:
   a) How does representation really occur? Can it be a conduit for scaling up local voices to states and federal government?
   b) How are politicians incentivised to change behaviour? How do norms of accountability and responsiveness change within political and government leaders? How do the political classes respond to empowerment?
   c) Who are the movers and shakers and social innovators in local movements and how do they exert influence? Is a bridge between elites and the majority being established?
   d) Can 'top-down' governance reforms create new spaces for empowerment and accountability? What is the link to social and political action from below?
   e) What is the role of external actors in engaging in these political spaces? Are external actors engaged with the right agents of change and operating in the right spaces to build institutional capability to deal with ongoing challenges to reform?

4. **What is the role of gender and gender relations in empowerment and accountability in social and political actions in Nigeria?** Nigeria remains very much a patriarchal society. Gender inequality, discrimination and violence remain very much in the public space either through violent extremist actions or in the political culture and economic sphere. They have been the bases for mobilisation for various forms of SPAs, such as the 'Bring Back our Girls Movement'. Questions include:
   a) What are the new forms of SPAs occupying this terrain?

b) Who are their leaders and how are they organised?
c) What are their notions of E&A? Do they for instance begin with empowerment in reproductive health, enterprise and education before moving into governance and political action? Do they have a holistic notion of empowerment that guides incremental strategic actions?
d) What are their notions of accountability? Are they internally accountable themselves?

5. **Mapping and understanding theories of change and theories of action at work.** Within Nigeria, we can see a range of donor interventions, and INGO interventions, each of which has different theories of change and theories of action guiding their work. Without attempting to evaluate each one, how could we map these various approaches, bring together data on what is working and the challenges they face, and develop some typologies of what kinds of approaches seem to work for what purposes in which contexts?
    a) Looking across DFID programmes and others, what are their theories of change and how do they play out in practice? What contextual variables are important?
    b) How does collective action cut across supply and demand and does it work?
    c) Who owns the collective space and who finances participation?
    d) Can donor funding arrangements be adapted to support adaptive or quick responses to local episodes of SPA?
    e) Is E&A dated in that it perpetuates the notion of demand and supply within a development context which is increasingly focused on collective action and shared spaces?

6. **Violence, empowerment and accountability:** What is the relevance of work for accountability in contexts of violence? How have accountability deficits contributed to growing frustrations which then manifest themselves in violence? How does violence affect strategies for E&A? How can E&A strategies contribute to a reduction of violence? All of these questions are relevant to what is going on in the Northeast as well as in the Niger Delta.

7. **Empowerment and accountability in the economic sphere.** While we did not learn a great deal about this, it is clear that the economic crisis in Nigeria is deeply linked to questions of economic accountability. What success have work on extractives such as Publish What You Pay and other forms of holding economic actors to account had in the Nigerian context? How do these link to the more militant forms of SPA around the oil industry as found in the Niger Delta? In this area, we need to look further at work by DFID through its FOSTER programme (http://www.opml.co.uk/projects/facility-oil-sector-transparency-and-reform-nigeria-foster), work by Oxfam on extractives, etc. Work on tax justice and accountability might also be relevant in this area. How do programmes for economic empowerment (of women, through livelihoods, etc.) contribute to SPA for broader forms of E&A? We would clearly have to narrow this down!

3: Research modalities

In the first scoping study, led by John Gaventa and Angela Christie, our interviews were mainly with donors and INGOs. While we found no shortage of interesting research questions (as listed above),

when we asked who was currently engaged in research on these themes, or who was helping to analyse and document this changing context, we often drew blanks. There could be many reasons for this. The donors and INGOs with whom we met may have been unaware of work going on in other spheres. However, we sense there are more structural reasons around knowledge production and the gap between research and practitioners. Donors are investing vastly in information, in the form of project reports, evaluations and reviews, but there is little investment in separate independent research. Increasingly the field is dominated by private sector suppliers (constituting 70 per cent of DFID's providers), who have a great deal of knowledge, but little incentive to share it as a public good and to help build the field. There are very good individual researchers in Nigerian universities, but these settings are also underfunded, and there are few incentives for them to engage in collaborative research with social and political actors, except perhaps as paid consultants to the private suppliers. There is a growth of private sector information services, who can analyse trends, gather data and do polling, but again these are less strong on critical analysis.

Our second visit by the PASGR team explored these issues further, meeting primarily with Nigerian academics and researchers in universities and Nigerian research NGOs. They found a somewhat different perspective, including:

- A sense that there are a number of Nigerian researchers who have worked around various aspects of social and political action in relation to empowerment and accountability. They are based in universities and think tanks around the country and can constitute an inter-generational pool of researchers made up of more experienced seniors and a younger generation of new PhDs and post-docs in need of mentoring and guidance. There is also a growing body of literature and research around these issues. They may be found in donor commissioned studies, doctoral and other dissertations and in published materials. They are of varying quality but constitute front line local work and thinking on these issues. For instance, the University of Ibadan has a large collection of this through its PhD programme in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and CDD has some monographs, reports and other studies.
- The researchers, activists and practitioners we spoke to believe that the absence of research and systematic knowledge is a hindrance to effective practice and policies. They argue that they work too often in the dark and do not have knowledge, theories and comparative experience of what others are doing to inform practice. Research, but one that is rigorous, time conscious and accessible is needed.

If these impressions are correct, then one important goal of the Nigeria based research would be to contribute to creating a small network of Nigerian researchers, who are interested in deepening knowledge on these E&A themes, and in engaging with other actors – civil society, government, donors – to understand the implications for strategies and action. In doing so, we will need to work closely with a local anchor institution. Following the field visits, PASGR has recommended that we develop such as relationship with the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), a Nigerian NGO based in Abuja. While the possibility of links to local universities was considered, CDD was felt best qualified in terms of engagement, experience with donor funding, financial probity and the flexibility to effectively deploy resources and funds. Given the range of CDD's work, they could also operate as research partner as well as help to coordinate aspects of research uptake in close collaboration with and the guidance of PASGR, as well as IDS.

Even with a local partner, there are a number of questions we still need to address:

- How do we best identify the pool of Nigerian researchers who could work collaboratively with us in this programme? Do we go through an existing institution or do we do a call for expressions of interest?
- How can we better identify existing bodies of research and thinking in this field in Nigeria, and give it visibility as an important 'field' of inquiry? Our intuition is that the field of practice is running way ahead of the research in this area.

Once questions of partners and participants are answered, there are also questions of the forms of research. Compared to the funds available in the field for implementation of E&A programmes, our research funds are small. Based on the advice of several of those we interviewed, we will need to be focused, and small, but use the convening power and 'idea power' to have an influence. We could imagine several approaches, including:

- Case studies of various initiatives and actions that illuminate some of the questions above
- Trying to find partners with whom we can accompany the roll out of various programmes, in order to be a thought partner, to capture lessons, and give feedback. Interestingly, we did not get requests for this role from DFID, who seem to have their own suite of consultants
- Synthesis studies of existing materials – there are a huge number of consultancy reports, evaluations, etc. that could perhaps be brought together usefully, and analysed more critically
- Stakeholder and key/informant interviews – focusing more on some of these key issues and how they are perceived by a range of actors
- Data mining and analysis of social media, using new techniques that are emerging

In all of this work, we will need to position ourselves carefully, as we will often be dealing with powerful interests. In the competitive donor world, the fact that we are not an implementer, and do not have a particular programme at stake, should offer an advantage, but we will need to be careful to maintain that neutrality, while bringing to bear both a critical and constructive perspective, that can be usefully communicated and shared with others. We also need to carefully balance the research uptake in the countries of work with the international agendas and projects of partner global institutions and funders.

4: Research uptake

The A4EA programme is charged with ensuring that stakeholder engagement through research process and uptake facilitates the operational application of new evidence, including by DFID. This was anticipated in the terms of reference to require engagement with different targeted audiences, multiple formats to communicate research and engagement to improve the capacity of researchers and policy makers to access and use evidence. There was a sense from donors that research and evaluation often delivers too late. DFID in particular favours a learning model which accompanies implementation and there are few funds for research.

We believe that the A4EA programme could create the appetite and opportunity for new forms of engagement. To do this, the programme should create opportunities to bring people together from different sectors (and not only disciplines). There are a number of ways in which we might choose to proceed. For example, there may be something to learn from the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) model – a situation room which is monitoring parliament and work on policy advocacy. Or we could consider very carefully selecting a reference/leadership group who could commit to come together from time to time over the life of the project, to share learning or perspectives. Or we could promote a more open process of creating public fora and inviting people in, or some combination of the above. In particular, the programme has an opportunity to recreate a community of practice as well as a research-policy community around the subject in Nigeria, drawing upon PASGR's approach to policy uptake known as 'Utafiti Sera' (See Appendix 1). Whichever approach is used, it is clear that learning events which do not translate into action will not thrive; the A4EA programme must ask and answer the 'so-what' question at every stage. Success will depend on getting the audience right and delivering the message at the right time and in an appropriate format.

Appendix 1

UTAFITI SERA (RESEARCH-POLICY COMMUNITY)

PASGR is an independent, non-partisan pan-African not-for-profit organisation established in 2011 and located in Nairobi, Kenya. PASGR's vision is a 'vibrant African social science community addressing the continent's public policy issues'. In partnership with individual academics and researchers, higher education institutions, research think tanks, civil society organisations, business and policy communities both in the region and internationally, PASGR supports the production and dissemination of policy relevant research; designs and delivers suites of short professional development courses for researchers and policy actors; and facilitates the development of collaborative higher education programmes. PASGR's research aims at ensuring high quality publications in addition to informing and impacting policy and practice in countries where studies are conducted.

PASGR has developed Utafiti Sera to facilitate its research-policy engagement process. 'Utafiti Sera is 'process', place', 'forum', 'platform', or a 'vehicle' that facilitates and contributes to building a community of researchers and policy actors working together to ensure that appropriate and negotiated policy actions and uptake occur either through programmes, legislations, policies or administrative and other forms of civic actions around issues for which research has provided evidence or for which a synthesis of available evidence has been made.

How Utafiti Sera works

Utafiti Sera is a combination of many things. As a 'process' *Utafiti Sera* involves sequences of activities that enable the building of a community of interests and practice from where existing and new ideas and evidence flow from members of the community resulting in collective action and interventions to improve policy design and implementation.

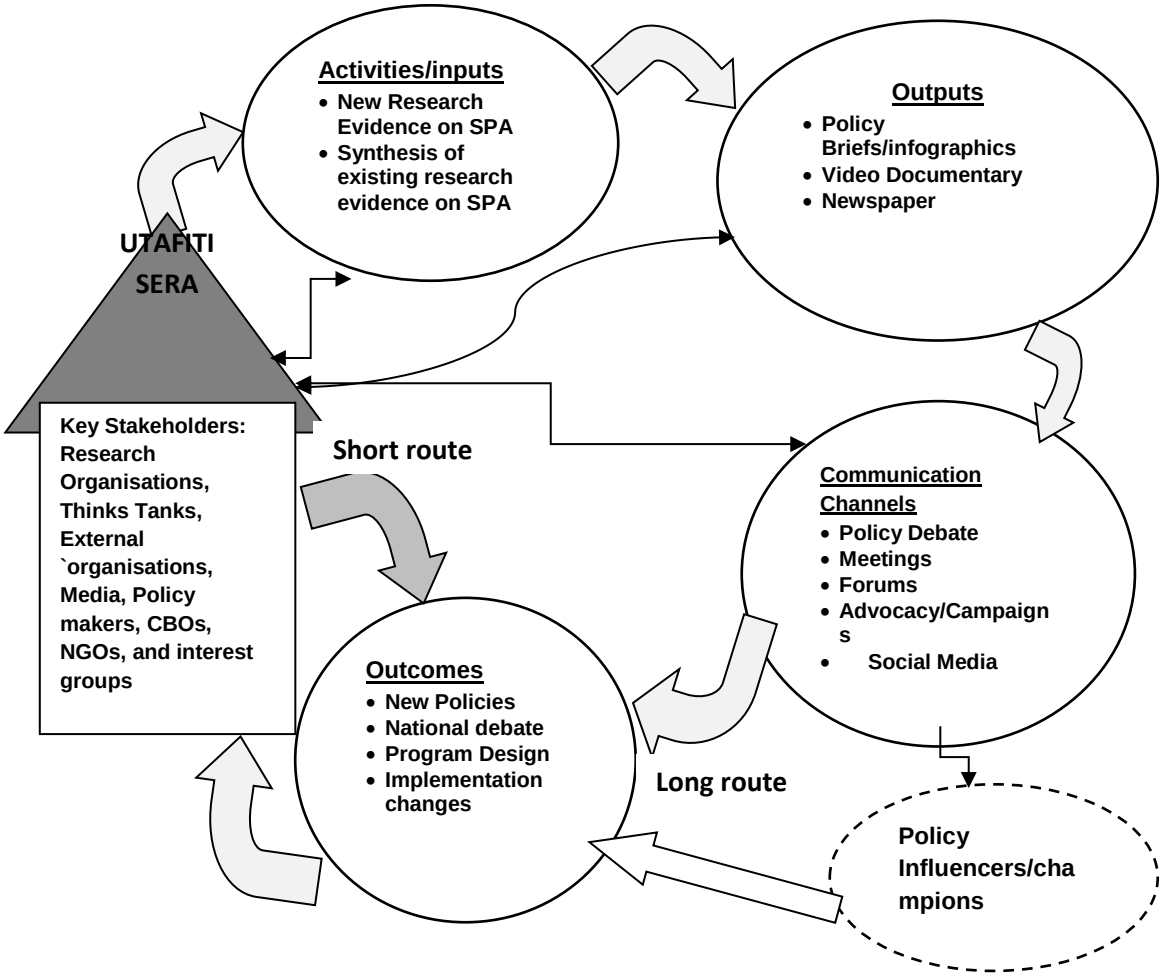
As a 'place', *Utafiti Sera* provides a space for key stakeholders with interest, power, capacity and motivation to act in diverse ways to ensure that research evidence becomes available and is used to make informed policy decisions and actions. As a 'forum', it provides a non-partisan platform for knowledge engagement, 'outreach' and 'in-reach' by different members of the community irrespective of theoretical and ideological differences, in order to build bridges and work together to establish common ground for the pursuit of agreed upon goals. And as a 'vehicle', *Utafiti Sera* constitutes motor and pathways, transmission belts or/and channels for shared knowledge (common areas on which there are agreements and consensus), and experiences to enhance policy uptake.

In short, *Utafiti Sera* is a phenomenon whose form is determined by the specific conjuncture or/and context in which it is expressed or put in place. It has no permanent form except that of community formation or action of a collective of researchers and policy actors in the pursuit of policy uptake.

Utafiti Sera at national, local and regional levels is an innovative mechanism to inform and positively advocate, proffer and contribute to appropriate and relevant policies and programmes. Given that policy formation is always and often a dynamic work in progress, there are other possible routes.

Where circumstances permit such as the presence of most of the actors and conditions, *Utafiti Sera* may take what can be termed a shorter route towards ensuring policy uptake. In contexts that require more preliminary work of bringing the different players and actors together, facilitating contacts, networks and identifying interests; it is more of what can be termed a longer route of communication, building bridges, working out advocacy plans, facilitating ownership, and identifying and mobilising collective and individual champions. This involves a more detailed set of incremental activities. There are therefore different time frames, starting points and steps in making *Utafiti Sera* work. The scheme below depicts possible short and long routes to pursue policy uptake. *Utafiti Sera* begins with building a community or an imaginary house (a space) where all stakeholders converge for building consensus (see the scheme):

Schematics of Utafiti Sera



Objectives of *'Utafiti Sera'*

i. Establish and sustain a vibrant research-policy community on specific issues in this case E&A stakeholders in Nigeria (federal/state/LG through well planned programme activities);
ii. Generate new research evidence and synthesise existing ones on SPA that leads to E&A and make them available to policy actors and practitioners using policy briefs, newspaper articles, social media, among other forms of communication; and
iii. Engage key policy actors and practitioners through direct contact, policy advocacy and the use of issue champions during breakfast meetings, policy debates and workshops.

Outcomes

The overarching long-term outcome of the activities of *Utafiti Sera* is uptake of research evidence as seen in the design of national policies, setting agenda for national debates, and changes in policies and programme design and implementation.

Outputs

- Development of a community of practice (Utafiti Sera) on Empowerment & Accountability with identifiable members and institutions;
- Policy makers and practitioners in the area of E&A informed by making available to them new and existing research evidence on different paths to E&A in the form of policy briefs; info-graphics; newspaper reports; forums and breakfast meetings.
- Provide a platform for researchers, policy makers and practitioners to exchange ideas and learning (in-reach & outreach) on different SPA/pathways to E&A
- Shared E&A evidence with all members of the Utafiti Sera house and further post on websites and social media platforms.
- Dedicated social media platforms in the form of twitter accounts on E&A developed.

Activities

- Mapping and constituting the 'Utafiti House': (network of stakeholders of E&A)
    - This involves identification and assessment of key stakeholders/institutions in terms of their powers, interest, motivation and capacity to influence E&A issues and programmes in Nigeria through SPA
    - Hold individual meetings with the key stakeholders and invite them to the 'house'
- Mapping of existing studies on SPA and translating them to easily readable formats
- Using research evidence to organise series of SPA forums.
- Multiple media platforms, including YouTube, Facebook and other social platforms
- Policy Briefs & Info-graphics
- Newspaper Articles/Opeds
- Breakfast Meeting with Key stakeholders & Practitioners