

# STAAC

Strengthening Action Against Corruption

## Building an adaptive anti-corruption programme

Lessons from STAAC-Ghana

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## 1. Introduction to STAAC

There is a widespread sense amongst Ghanaians that corruption is endemic in their country. Surveys consistently register a third of respondents admitting to paying a bribe, and there is an overwhelming perception among citizens that most public institutions, and many private ones, are corrupt to some extent<sup>1</sup>. Unsurprisingly, Ghanaians don't have high expectations about their government's willingness or ability to carry out anti-corruption activities: 54% of Afrobarometer respondents ranked government action in 2013 as fairly or very bad, with negative ratings increasing by 31 points since 2002<sup>2</sup>. Other studies also find that most respondents ranked government performance in tackling corruption low<sup>3</sup>. Overall, there is a public narrative of failure by public institutions in the fight against corruption, which record translates into low citizen support.

Strengthening Action Against Corruption in Ghana (STAAC) is a programme funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID). It has a budget of almost £10 million for the period 2016-2020, and its intended impact is "more effective implementation of anti-corruption measures, from scrutiny to punitive action, increasing the risks for those engaging in corrupt activities"<sup>4</sup>. The programme offers technical capacity support to state organizations along the anti-corruption chain, from detection all the way to adjudication, as well as to key

actors in civil society who can scrutinize public performance and provide sustained demand-side pressure for enforcement.

STAAC was designed by DFID to operate within a complex political economy of reform. It was built to work across the state-society divide in a way that mirrored the difficult trajectory of anti-corruption activity in Ghana, seeking to reap the benefits of the country's "democratic dividend". On the state side, the programme's chain-linked approach was essential for avoiding a focus on isolated islands of effectiveness that could still be neutered by political interference. On the civil society side, STAAC was designed to provide an alternative way of working with donor funds, providing a more creative and responsive funding mechanism with an agenda set jointly by funder and CSOs. The DFID design recognised that there are many strong CSOs working on corruption-related issues in Ghana, but that they could be stronger if they were able to speak and act collectively and were supported by flexible funding and technical assistance.

Recognizing that previous approaches had not delivered, STAAC was designed to work in an adaptive and politically smart way. In that sense, it was part of an ongoing intellectual shift within the anti-corruption community<sup>5</sup>. But the invocation of principles and buzzwords during the programme's design stage did not automatically translate into a workable model that could deliver results. Instead, it was up to the programme team set up by implementer Adam Smith International to scan what peers and other adaptive programmes were doing and try to develop a bespoke approach that fitted the needs of STAAC.

This paper outlines some of the key lessons learned by the STAAC team in the

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Brierley & Elif Ozdemir (2018). "Social Norms and Petty Corruption in Ghana". Mimeo.

<sup>2</sup> Richmond & Alpin (2013). "Governments Falter in Fight to Curb Corruption". Afrobarometer, Round 5, Policy Paper 4, 13 November 2013

<sup>3</sup> Armah-Attoh (2014). "Perceived corruption escalates, trust in institutions drops: A call for ordinary Ghanaians to get involved in the fight". Afrobarometer Round 6, Dispatch 6, 2 December 2014

<sup>4</sup> STAAC Business Case, July 2015. Available at: [http://iati.dfid.gov.uk/iati\\_documents/4890818.odt](http://iati.dfid.gov.uk/iati_documents/4890818.odt).

<sup>5</sup> Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, *The Quest for Good Governance: How Societies Develop Control of Corruption* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

journey from business case in mid-2015, through a long inception phase, and into its first two years of implementation in 2017-18. It draws upon actual events and decisions to capture how the programme evolved from first principles to tangible systems and practices.

The paper is split into five main sections:

- Section 2 introduces the general principles involved in making anti-corruption programming flexible and politically-smart. It presents the basics of problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) and political-economy analysis (PEA) and the challenges of translating them into a coherent programming approach.
  - Section 3 summarizes how the STAAC team used political-economy analysis during the development of the programme. It outlines the fundamental changes in the design raised by the inception-phase PEA, and how the same analytical logic was then translated into tools for ongoing political analysis by the technical team.
  - Section 4 delves into the challenges of working adaptively with local partners accustomed to more conventional modalities of assistance. It presents the expectations of state partners to focus on technical fixes and the effort to bring them around to a more transformational approach, as well as the difficulties involved in getting civil society partners to work together.
  - Section 5 focuses on one of the most important elements of adaptive programming, monitoring and evaluation. It outlines the basic challenges of reconciling flexibility with more traditional monitoring demands, as well as the theory of change and logical framework that ended up bringing together all strands of STAAC work.
- Finally, the conclusion summarizes some key lessons learned by the team in the first three years of STAAC, hoping that they can provide some guidance to colleagues working in adaptive programming.

## 2. Building a flexible and politically-smart programme

STAAC's original design was developed just as the Doing Development Differently (DDD) movement was beginning to take shape across the development community<sup>6</sup>. This movement built upon a growing recognition that adaptability, context-sensitivity, and risk-taking were essential to successful development interventions in complex reform spaces. However, at the time there was a dearth of guidance on what these principles looked like in practice. All that STAAC had available, during its inception phase, was a few working papers from programmes attempting a similar approach (such as SAVI and LASER<sup>7</sup>) and some inchoate adaptive management tools. There were few templates for strategy, management, contracts, or reporting. This meant that the STAAC approach had to be developed from scratch, responding to the specific needs of the programme as they arose, and over time this approach had to be matched to the M&E, VfM and accountability expectations of DFID as a funder.

### *From PDIA and PEA principles to STAAC practice*

Problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA), as formulated by Harvard's Matt Andrews and his colleagues, was a key element of the embryonic STAAC approach<sup>8</sup>. The concept was born out of a

realization that many developing countries tend to copy "best practice" institutional templates from more developed countries without having the capacity to implement those changes: this leads to "capability traps" in which form is copied without function and governments engage in "premature load-bearing"<sup>9</sup>. Andrews proposed PDIA as an alternative method to mere institutional replication, one that could succeed where so many public sector reform interventions had previously failed<sup>10</sup>. PDIA is essentially a recipe for generating solutions that translate into real change in government: reformers should facilitate problem-driven learning, launch incremental and iterative interventions that allow for purposive muddling and learning, and engage a broad group of stakeholders to enhance the feasibility and buy-in of reforms.

During STAAC's inception phase in 2016, the programme team struggled with the idea of PDIA. Team members were unclear whether it was an approach to design through iterative problem-identification, a specific set of reflexive programming tools, or even a reform philosophy. In isolation, the methods suggested by Andrews and his colleagues appeared too abstract and detached from the programming and reporting requirements that STAAC faced as a DFID-funded programme. In the ensuing process of deliberation and learning, the team eventually settled on PDIA as a shorthand for what was in reality a broader set of adaptive programming principles: working with partners to define problems in a collaborative and creative manner, identifying entry points and "small bets" with measurable results, and using

<sup>6</sup> "Doing Development Differently | The DDD Manifesto Community," accessed December 15, 2017, <http://doingdevelopmentdifferently.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://savi-nigeria.org/>; <http://dfidlaser.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Matt Andrews, *The Limits of Institutional Reform in Development: Changing Rules for Realistic Solutions* (Cambridge, Mas.: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock, *Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock, and Matt Andrews, "Capability Traps? The Mechanisms of Persistent Implementation Failure," Working Paper (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Andrews, *The Limits of Institutional Reform in Development*.

ongoing monitoring and learning to enable iteration, scaling up, and learning.

Over time these disparate ideas began to coalesce and morph into a “STAAC Approach” combining high-level principles that incorporated PDIA but went beyond it. The four pillars of this approach were:

- building partnerships;
- thinking politically;
- working adaptively and iteratively;
- learning and knowledge sharing.

In a sense, the programme evolved in line with the more comprehensive recommendations from the broader adaptive development agenda, where it was argued that flexibility and iteration cannot happen without working with local brokers and developing a solid understanding of the political-economy environment<sup>11</sup>.

One of the achievements of the STAAC approach was linking PDIA with the other big principle informing its design: sensitivity to the local context for reform through the use of political-economy analysis (PEA). PEA is a politically-smart method for enhancing the impact of aid interventions<sup>12</sup>, and as such it has been used by aid agencies to overcome some of the traditional stumbling blocks of reform programmes, such as trusting too much in political commitment or neglecting dominant incentives. Most donors have some kind of PEA framework, even if the development of such frameworks has seldom translated into sustained changes

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<sup>11</sup> David Booth and Sue Unsworth, “Politically Smart, Locally Led Development” (London: ODI, September 2014); Leni Wild et al., “Adapting Development: Improving Services to the Poor” (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2015); Kathy Bain, David Booth, and Leni Wild, “Doing Development Differently at the World Bank: Updating the Plumbing to Fit the Architecture” (London: ODI, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Carothers and Diane de Gramont, *Development Aid Confronts Politics: The Almost Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013).

in organizational behaviour<sup>13</sup>. All too often PEAs have been relegated to one-off exercises by external consultants, when in fact they should become processes that happen alongside programming<sup>14</sup>. This has led the community to shift from PEA proper to a broader sense of Thinking and Working Politically<sup>15</sup>.

STAAC falls squarely within this latter trend. Already the inception-phase PEA, which followed the conventional model of a report authored by consultants, was intended to lead into an approach to PEA during implementation. A PEA adviser joined the core team to carry out this task, and this led to the development of an approach to internal information gathering and analysis that is outlined in Section 3 below. But the principles of Thinking and Working Politically were also integrated into the broader STAAC adaptive approach, making PEA into a constituent element of design, strategy, monitoring, and learning.

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<sup>13</sup> Pablo Yanguas and David Hulme, “Barriers to Political Analysis in Aid Bureaucracies: From Principle to Practice in DFID and the World Bank,” *World Development* 74 (October 2015): 209–19, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.05.009>.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Fisher and Heather Marquette, “Donors Doing Political Economy Analysis™: From Process to Product (and Back Again?),” Research Paper (Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program, 2014); David Hudson, Heather Marquette, and Sam Waldock, “Everyday Political Analysis” (Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Fisher and Marquette, “Donors Doing Political Economy Analysis™: From Process to Product (and Back Again?)”; Alina Rocha Menocal, “Getting Real about Politics: From Thinking Politically to Working Differently” (London: ODI, March 2014); Niheer Dasandi, Heather Marquette, and Mark Robinson, “Thinking and Working Politically: From Theory Building to Building an Evidence Base,” Research Paper (Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program, 2016).

## ***Translating the approach into tools and team***

As the STAAC Approach began to take shape, the team still faced two major external and internal challenges: first, developing tools that would allow it to work flexibly whilst meeting DFID's requirements; and second, recruiting team members open to working in an unconventional manner.

Designing a workable results framework that could comply with DFID's expectations whilst retaining the principles of flexibility and adaptability remained a major headache for the programme during its inception phase and into implementation. Successive iterations of the logframe struggled with the conceptual dilemma that a fully adaptive and iterative programme cannot possibly foresee how far its activities will progress, which ones will be scaled up, and which ones phased out. Uncertainty about the future is intrinsic to PDIA: PDIA is a logic, an algorithm, not a map or workplan. Likewise, the politically-smart approach to anti-corruption in Ghana precluded wedding STAAC to individual partners for the duration of the programme: in such a risky environment, institutions can quickly gain political support and visibility, only to lose them just as quickly.

This left the programme with two major constraints, were it to live up to its core principles: first, the M&E framework could never actually predict the number and length of adaptive, iterative activities; second, it had to be compatible with the need to protect STAAC from politicisation and worsening partnerships. Section 5 below presents the programme's response to these constraints in greater detail. Overall, the core team had to go through multiple revisions of the original logframe, work for some time without a clear theory of change, and develop its adaptive programming tools as activities were already beginning to unfold. In other words, it was not until the team began

internalizing the STAAC approach that it became clear what tools were necessary for connecting principle and practice, as well as monitoring the results that were achieved by doing so.

The only way STAAC could endure a co-evolution of principles and practice was because of the composition of the team. From the beginning, the programme faced a crucial internal challenge in its search of adaptable and politically-smart technical assistance: the need to recruit open-minded and risk-taking experts who were willing to work in a more uncertain and demanding environment. This resulted in some hard choices, as some original team members who demonstrated an instinctive reluctance to work in unconventional ways had to be replaced. But it also forced STAAC's management team to work extra hard in its screening of potential candidates for adviser roles. Insofar as the programme did not have a ready-made approach or off-the-shelf training resources, it needed to find individuals who were already pre-disposed to working in a politically-smart, adaptive manner.

The intrinsically difficult selection procedure was complicated by a dearth at the time of training materials on PDIA for technical advisers brought into the programme. A flexible and astute mindset correlated in many instances with not having much experience working in the aid industry, which then created the secondary challenge of developing the STAAC approach in an organic and incremental way that would not generate backlash from technical advisers unaccustomed to evolving tools and reporting requirements. After several attempts to introduce PDIA exercises or tools as part of team workshops, it was decided to abandon the acronyms and focus instead on the unique features of STAAC's own approach: building partnerships, thinking politically, working adaptively and iteratively, learning and knowledge sharing. This shift from buzzwords to intuitive terms made the

approach much more accessible to the technical advisers, and over time brought the entire team together around shared principles and goals.

### 3. Using PEA to navigate a shifting reform space

For the last two decades, proponents of more politically-smart aid have worked tirelessly within donor organizations to promote the adoption of some form of political-economy analysis (PEA). Over the years practitioners have been offered a cornucopia of approaches: Drivers of Change, Problem-Driven PEA, Power Analysis, Strategic Governance and Anti-Corruption Analysis, and more<sup>16</sup>. But at the end of the day the promise of PEA boils down to the following: analysing the institutional environment, understanding the motivations and power relations of actors, and identifying the dynamics and entry points of change, so as to enable a more impactful design and implementation of assistance<sup>17</sup>. With this goal in mind, and mindful of the challenge to not let PEA be a one-off external activity, STAAC set out from the beginning to develop its own approach to ongoing, everyday political analysis<sup>18</sup>.

#### *Inception-phase political analysis*

As part of its inception-phase activities, STAAC commissioned an in-depth political

economy analysis of anti-corruption in Ghana since 2000<sup>19</sup>. Starting with the assumption that coalition-building would be at the core of anti-corruption activities in Ghana, the study adopted a tailored analytical framework comprising five elements<sup>20</sup>:

- Institutional environment;
- Actors fields;
- Coordinated action;
- Issue framing;
- Policy windows.

The PEA found a political-economy context for anti-corruption in Ghana that was rife with challenges as well as opportunities. The previous fifteen years of reform efforts had to be understood through the lens of the country's competitive-clientelist political settlement: a balance of power between two competing factions who are more likely to sustain themselves through patronage and nepotism than through programmatic appeal and impersonal application of the law. This settlement was responsible for the inconsistency and weakness of many Ghanaian public organizations, whose centrality and effectiveness in anti-corruption efforts was tied to the political calendar. Both previous political transitions (2000 and 2008) had ushered in regimes ostensibly committed to corruption and all too ready to prosecute former incumbents who – rather conveniently – tended to be members of the opposite faction. As the early commitment to anti-corruption waned it was up to other, non-partisan actors to sustain reform and push for enforcement. Whilst the legacy of these anti-corruption efforts may have been unsustainable, there was no denying that there was a political space for ad hoc coalitions to form around key scandals and salient issues.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Dahl-Østergaard et al., “Lessons Learned on the Use of Power and Drivers of Change Analyses in Development Co-Operation” (Paris: OECD, September 20, 2005); SIDA, “Power Analysis” (Stockholm, 2006); Sue Unsworth and Conflict Research Unit, “Framework for Strategic Governance and Corruption Analysis (SGACA): Designing Strategic Responses Towards Good Governance” (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008); Verena Fritz, Brian Levy, and Rachel Ort, eds., *Problem-Driven Political Economy Analysis: The World Bank’s Experience* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Yanguas, *Why We Lie About Aid: Development and the Messy Politics of Change* (London: Zed Books, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Fisher and Marquette, “Donors Doing Political Economy Analysis™: From Process to Product (and Back Again?)”; Hudson, Marquette, and Waldock, “Everyday Political Analysis.”

<sup>19</sup> Pablo Yanguas, Kojo Asante, and Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai, “The Political-Economy of Anti-Corruption in Ghana” (Accra: STAAC, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Yanguas, Asante, and Abdulai.

The cast of characters involved in anti-corruption efforts had been as diverse as it was contradictory. On the state side, independent organizations like the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice and the Ghana Audit Service tended to display – subject to leadership – a clear willingness to investigate corrupt practices and challenge the sitting government, especially when buttressed by civil society efforts to investigate and denounce particular cases. However, their political independence made them clear thorns in the regime’s side, which means they tended to be starved for technical, human and financial capacity. In contrast, non-independent law enforcement agencies tended to have the resources to carry out their mandates, but their lack of political autonomy limited both their willingness to intervene and to liaise with civil society.

The split between these different kinds of public organisations painted a picture of lack of coordination which, interestingly, was mirrored among both civil society and donors. Ghana had a small number of CSOs working directly on corruption, but there were broader issues around natural resources, social accountability or service delivery that provided entry points for anti-corruption activities. The PEA found that Ghanaian CSOs had a tendency to work independently and even see each other as competitors for external funding; when coalitions had emerged, they were temporary and informal. Donors were partly to blame for a “project mentality” that fostered civil society competition, even when funding initiatives like STAR-Ghana had tried to build a higher level of civil society coordination. Donor themselves were uncoordinated, subject as they were to the intrinsic collective action problem of different goals, modalities, reporting requirements, and disbursement calendars.

This political-economy analysis of anti-corruption efforts in Ghana yielded several key operational implications:

- First, given the diverse array of actors inhabiting the fluid anti-corruption space, it would be self-defeating for STAAC to become wedded to a short list of privileged partners; a wider if lighter footprint may be a better guarantee of responsiveness to a shifting political context.
- Second, the lack of any one actor with convening power across state and society meant there was an unoccupied niche for STAAC to facilitate exchanges, information sharing, and relationship building.
- Third, the complexity inherent in building an anti-corruption coalition in Ghana may require that STAAC adopt a multi-layered identity that enabled it to act as funder, facilitator and knowledge broker.
- Fourth, the unforeseeable nature of potential policy windows called for a programming approach that merged a proactive and continued investment in coalition-building with the capacity to react to ongoing events in a flexible and rapid manner.

The Inception Phase Political Economy Analysis thus supplied analytical and empirical justifications for STAAC’s politically-smart and context-sensitive approach: a focus on functions, which may involve shifting and evolving partners, and an emphasis on trust building and brokering relationships between disparate actors, in order to plant the seeds of self-sustaining anti-corruption coalitions.

### ***Embedding PEA in programming***

The Inception Phase PEA provided some useful recommendations as STAAC prepared to transition from inception into implementation at the beginning of 2017. However, it relied on a mostly retrospective analysis conducted right before the December 2016 elections, in which the National Patriotic Party soundly

defeated the incumbent National Democratic Congress. This meant that STAAC's political-economy environment would change significantly when the new government took office, and that, whilst lessons based on a general analysis were bound to remain relevant, it was imperative to establish some sort of rolling analysis of the specific dynamics of coalition-building in the new administration.

STAAC was already in a good position to do so due to the creation of a PEA & Research Adviser role as part of the core team, going against the conventional practice of commissioning periodic PEA updates by external consultants. In early 2018, a Ghanaian Political Officer was recruited into the core team to provide ongoing monitoring of the operating context, and to support the technical team on a demand basis. On the civil society side, for instance, both advisers were part of the review process for CSO proposals, helping to ensure that activities were fully grounded in PEA.

Beyond dedicated PEA staff, the heavy emphasis on relationship- and trust-building by technical advisers yielded a treasure trove of primary data on behaviour, commitments, and relationships among all counterparts. Since technical advisers were already embedded in the local context to such a degree, they themselves became the best observers and commentators of the political-economy environment. This allowed the STAAC team to begin experimenting with tools that would capture this information and synthesize it into strategically significant lessons.

STAAC's Programme Diaries were designed as forms to be submitted by all technical advisers on a monthly basis. The specific format and composition of the form was trialled and refined throughout the first half of 2017. In essence, the diaries followed the same assumptions of the analytical framework used in the

Inception Phase PEA, but with almost no PEA terminology, aiming instead for intuitiveness and accessibility. The revised tool consisted of six themes followed up by specific prompts:

1. Institutional environment. *Have there been any legal or regulatory changes affecting your activity stream? Have any new reforms, strategies or policies been proposed or introduced? Are there any new issues?*
2. Relationships. *Has there been any change in the key players in your activity stream? Has there been any change in partner knowledge, attitudes, or practices? How is STAAC's relationship with key counterparts evolving?*
3. Interventions. *How has implementation advanced in your interventions? Are there new interventions in the horizon? Were any decision points reached for scaling up, revising or abandoning STAAC activities?*
4. Results. *What progress did you make this month relative to your workplan? What results were achieved at the intervention level? Were any results achieved towards the logframe outputs? Were there any unexpected instances of impact?*
5. Risks & opportunities. *Have any new issues or relevant information come up? Are there any new developments that increase the risk for STAAC activities? Have any windows of opportunity for change come up, or are any likely to come up?*
6. Recommendations. *Is there a need to revise strategic priorities or ways of working? Are there any risks that we need to prioritise right now? What can STAAC do to exploit new opportunities?*

As can be seen from this structure, during the trial period the programme diaries

morphed into a joint PEA/M&E tool, further cementing the integration of all programming components under the same approach. This was done to avoid duplication of efforts, and it set the stage for direct support from an M&E officer to technical advisers in the process of filling in and submitting their diaries. Different team members took to the diaries with varying degrees of thoroughness and enthusiasm, but the overall pool of primary data proved a crucial ingredient of STAAC's approach to PEA. The PEA adviser began compiling lessons from the diaries into a strategic reflections document that fed into discussions by programme leadership, as well as into the quarterly reports submitted to DFID, where PEA updates also incorporated more thematic analysis. In 2018, the process flow for PEA was further refined by turning monthly team meetings into PEA/strategy meetings led by the PEA Officer and PEA & Research Adviser.

The benefit of this approach to Thinking and Working Politically is that there was no underlying intellectual disconnect between more strategic team members and more technical ones. They all became accustomed to keeping track of relevant changes in the political environment, and the aggregation of lower-level observations into higher-level reflections led to collective discussions with minimal overhead and friction, as most of the data collection and a good part of the analysis was carried out by the entire team in a distributed manner.

## 4. Working adaptively with reluctant partners

The logic of adaptive development calls for reform programmes to work with local actors, and specifically with brokers and champions who can build coalitions and generate momentum<sup>21</sup>. For STAAC, this was easier said than done, as local partners expected it to be a traditional technical assistance programme and, above all, a straightforward source of funding. State actors preferred equipment or training to iterative problem-solving, and pre-identified civil society partners were more comfortable with a project mentality that ensured financial survival than with creativity and risk-taking. This resistance forced STAAC to tread a fine line between promising tangible support and building the right kind of attitude and thinking for making best use of that support. Therefore, a large part of the inception phase was devoted to relationship-building.

### *State actors: From fixes to transformations*

The initial engagement with state-side counterparts was overshadowed by a protracted and confounding procurement process. The programme was designed in September 2014, tendered in May 2015, awarded in August 2015, and then started in January 2016. And the original design initially included a funding modality specifying a commitment of funds to three pre-selected state partners. In combination, this led to a mixture of high expectations surrounding the funding “promised” by DFID, impatience over the

lengthy period of engagement from design to start of the programme, and ultimately partial disengagement from those original partners. Effectively, the six-month inception phase became a second design stage during which STAAC determined whom to work with and how. The political-economy analysis and early functional reviews undermined the logic of pre-selected of partners, and this resulted in a shift to STAAC being functionally focused, with a different funding mechanism to support the new model. Only in this way could the programme fully realise the original vision of the Business Case to work across the anti-corruption chain rather than be tied to specific institutions. Due to the combined impact of these factors, implementation activity on the state side only began towards the end of 2016.

Two key lessons had come out of conversations with other programmes. The first lesson was that the team should not talk about PDIA or the STAAC approach in its engagement with state partners. Rather it should focus on what STAAC could offer: technical assistance, mentoring, limited amounts of training, strategic support, etc. The second lesson was that it takes time to build the types of relationships necessary to guide counterparts towards effective problem-solving and the search for more innovative solutions. Part of this relationship building might require pursuing “quick wins” or easy entry points such as training in order to gain access and trust.

STAAC’s work with the Economic and Organized Crime Office (EOCO) provides a case illustration of how a more static and recognisable kind of support was used as a springboard for more responsive, problem-oriented, and collaborative interventions. From the outset, EOCO was the least engaged counterpart and the most persistent one in its requests for direct funding. But over the course of the first year of implementation two significant shifts occurred. In the run-up to the 2016

<sup>21</sup> Jaime Faustino and David Booth, “Development Entrepreneurship: How Donors and Leaders Can Foster Institutional Change” (London: ODI and Asia Foundation, 2014); Wild et al., “Adapting Development: Improving Services to the Poor”; Bain, Booth, and Wild, “Doing Development Differently at the World Bank: Updating the Plumbing to Fit the Architecture.”

elections, the head of EOCO became concerned with his legacy were he to be replaced, and gave clear indications that he wanted STAAC to support case tracking, asset management and investigations training. The programme was able to respond quickly to this opportunity and used it to strengthen the relationship. Following the election, a new head was put in place in February 2017 who focused on institutional reform to make his mark quickly on EOCO. STAAC was now better placed to adapt and respond to this agenda. The STAAC adviser worked with the senior leadership team whom he had engaged as part of case tracking to convince the new head to keep the momentum with support already begun instead of shifting to an entirely new direction.

STAAC's work with the Financial Intelligence Center (FIC) illustrates the lengthy process of shifting from requests for purely technical solutions to a shared strategic approach to improving organisational effectiveness. From the outset, the FIC CEO was the most ambitious and committed of the state-side counterparts. However, his initial focus was on STAAC procuring expensive enterprise software for the centre, believing that the absence of this software and the attendant reliance on paper records was the root of all its performance problems. Over time and with consistent messaging from advisers and programme leadership, the CEO began to recognise that technology was only one part of the problem, and that it required further capacity enhancements to be fully utilised. Gradually, this led to an increasingly open and forward-thinking internal discussion of the wider problems the FIC faced. Demonstrating consistent commitment but also a consistent challenge to the FIC to think about the wider issues eventually led to a comprehensive change management process that overhauled the FIC's management and strategy to lay the groundwork for rolling out a new digital

platform that would enable it to collect transaction reports from banks and process them into intelligence products for investigators.

### ***Civil society: From competition to collaboration***

A protracted procurement process and misunderstanding over the form STAAC would take was also an issue in the initial engagement with civil society partners. A key stumbling block of this early period was the selection of pre-identified partners on the basis of perceived capacity to work differently instead of a strict sectoral focus. At the time there were only two CSOs in Ghana that worked specifically on anti-corruption – Ghana Anti-corruption Coalition (GACC) and Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII) – and they were largely focused on civic education and raising awareness. Other CSOs tackled corruption-related issues by focusing on social accountability and transparency, particularly in basic services and at the local level. However, the DFID business case had pre-selected three civil society partners that were ostensibly removed from anti-corruption issues: CDD-Ghana (democracy promotion), Africa Centre on Economic Policy (natural resources), and Penplusbytes (new media). The notable absences of GACC and GII from the STAAC partnership caused confusion with all stakeholders from the outset, prompting challenges from civil society and donors.

Perhaps naively, it was assumed by the programme team that working with civil society would be easier than with state partners. This assumption was proven false, forcing the STAAC team to devote its first year largely to building relationships and laying down the foundation for a new way of working.

Once more, there was very little guidance available to STAAC on how to get CSOs to work collectively, with flexible donor funding, breaking down the barriers between donor and recipient. Inspiration

was taken from the SAVI programme in Nigeria, from which some principles were borrowed, such as focusing on building trust and using locally led PEA; but the vastly different scale and context and the contrast with their model of not providing direct funding meant that STAAC had to craft its own style. This led to some false starts in the first nine months as STAAC attempted to get things moving through learn-by-doing. The programme kept trying to encourage a more collective way of working without having defined the roles and what the collective itself looked like, how it worked, how much time it would take for everyone involved, and how the funding would be managed. This resulted in mounting frustration and confusion: the partners were unclear on the distinctions between STAAC, Adam Smith International and DFID, and continued to expect a typical proposal and funding approval process.

achieved the involvement of private sector groups in anti-corruption lobbying.

The turning point came during a retreat workshop in November 2016 that brought together DFID, the STAAC team, and the civil society partners. An external facilitator helped to generate space for frustrations to be aired, sources of confusion addressed, and a productive way forward found collectively. Participants brainstormed the key corruption issues facing Ghana at the time and started to discuss areas of work that the group could tackle together. The discussion also covered funding, and who was supposed to hold decision-making power over it, and this led to the creation of a monthly Accountability Working Group which would have shared decision-making on the interventions pursued by all the partners and on how to spend the funds available.

In time, and despite some challenges, the working group members adopted this governance model underpinned by problem solving and collective action. They decided to welcome GACC and GII into the Group, trialled innovative interventions that involved collaboration with media or state agencies, and even

## 5. Imagining the right results framework

As STAAC's funder, DFID was a source of cognitive dissonance whereby the PDIA rhetoric of some parts of the organisation clashed with more conventional expectations from other parts. The programme team did not enjoy the luxury of a ready-made set of M&E tools that could reconcile the principles of PDIA with the practical requirements of implementing a DFID programme. This forced STAAC to invest a significant amount of effort into developing a programming and reporting approach that would allow for flexibility and context-sensitivity whilst being sufficiently rigorous to comply with reporting requirements.

STAAC's M&E strategy and results frameworks evolved organically, in fits and starts, in response to DFID needs, but also because of internal debate about how best to capture what the team was beginning to work on. During the first two years of the programme, the DFID requirement that attracted the most attention was the logical framework. The vast conceptual distance between STAAC's initial logframe and its late-2017 adaptive one is reflective of a long and arduous journey involving significant feedback, challenge, and support from DFID, which acknowledged the difficulty intrinsic in matching a PDIA logic to a tangible set of indicators in the conventional impact-outcome-output structure.

### *Theory of change*

STAAC's inception-phase work had revealed three types of major obstacles in the fight against corruption in Ghana. First, there was widespread lack of knowledge about the incidence of corruption, its legal definition, the mandates of public institutions along the chain, and the tools available in country and elsewhere for enhancing it. Such knowledge gaps were

perpetuated by the inconsistent participation of different state and society actors in anti-corruption efforts, and particularly by a political system that privileged partisan control over technocratic neutrality. Second, there was a major lack of coordination between anti-corruption actors, across the official chain, across CSOs, and between state and civil society. This was not due to the absence of forums for exchange and joint strategy, as indeed the advisory boards of public institutions and organizations like GACC were designed precisely for that purpose. Instead, lack of knowledge and suspicions of politicisation had created mutual distrust between potential partners. Third, the country's anti-corruption systems – starting from basic legislation and going all the way to basic operational procedures – for the most part suffered from either regulatory gaps and overlaps or neglect by key actors.

STAAC's theory of change was developed around the assumption that knowledge, collaboration and systems issues were partially responsible for the lacklustre performance of the anti-corruption chain in Ghana's recent past, as evidenced by lack of prosecutions, asset seizure on a significant scale, and public engagement. STAAC's political-economy analysis work had revealed that these challenges could be tackled with a more strategic and purposeful set of interventions that nudged key actors and institutions towards incrementally more constructive behaviours. By addressing these gaps and inefficiencies at a technical and strategic level, STAAC aimed to support a process of behavioural change towards a higher equilibrium of anti-corruption effectiveness in the country.

The causal impact of addressing knowledge, collaboration and systems issues was understood to be felt both in parallel and in a mutually supporting fashion. Individually, knowledge transfers could enhance partner capacity, collaboration brokering could lead to

greater synergy across the chain, and systems support could improve mandates and the ability to execute them. Jointly, STAAC operated under the assumption that more knowledgeable partners were more likely to realize the benefits of collaboration, and that greater collaboration would create broader coalitions for organizational or regulatory change. Instead of merely disseminating best practices as supplied by international anti-corruption actors, STAAC worked to develop the organizational and political foundations that would generate buy-in for those practices, which was likely to enhance their sustainability beyond the timeframe of this programme.

### ***Logframe and results framework***

The development of this theory required the revision of key assumptions from the original logframe:

- transitioning from outputs centred around partners to outputs centred around functions;
- formulating sufficiently broad indicator categories for issues of knowledge, collaboration and systems; and
- developing a central logic that could take an undefined number of issues and interventions and aggregate their results into a reliable results framework.

STAAC's adaptive logframe and results framework were designed to combine a context-sensitive and adaptive approach to programming with an overarching conceptual framework directly linked to the theory of change. They needed to allow for each individual intervention to set its own targets, whilst ensuring enough consistency to aggregate results across outputs and over time. And they had to contribute to the integration of monitoring & evaluation with programme management, strategy, and learning.

The revised STAAC logframe was built around two units of analysis: interventions and issues. Interventions were the main way in which the STAAC portfolio was organized: coherent sets of activities within each work stream that arose from STAAC's problem-driven, iterative approach. Issues were the main way in which STAAC's impact was organized: specific high-level goals against which progress could be measured with tangible indicators. Issues arose from the problem identification and definition process that occurred before any STAAC intervention was designed. The STAAC logframe then distinguished between the three types of issues identified by the theory of change.

When determining what issues to address, advisers working on designing each intervention also defined the most relevant and achievable indicators and sources of evidence for measuring the intended impact. However, STAAC's results framework needed to be able to aggregate progress beyond the intervention level and into output indicators. Comparability was achieved by having all issue indicators follow a five-point scale of progress against observable targets, which were then given a percentage value, with 0% representing no progress, 75% representing output-level success (results as intended), and 100% representing outcome-level success (beyond designed activities, partners and/or timeframe). In that way STAAC could track and capture the incremental results that over time and in combination would lead to sustainable outcome-level success. This also allowed for the monitoring of the high-risk, high-reward nature of adaptive management in anti-corruption on a more real-time basis.

In the process of revising the logframe, STAAC also developed a set of principles and tools that incorporated M&E into programming and strategy more closely than had originally been anticipated. The trade-off was that of designing and implementing the right tools to capture the right information, without stifling

implementation by imposing undue administrative costs for technical advisors and partners. Over time, the team settled on two core tools: the aforementioned programme diaries, and intervention documents.

STAAC's intervention documents were introduced to enable the creation of a paper trail of decisions and rationales at different stages of the adaptive management cycle, from problem definition all the way to evaluation, in order to facilitate internal knowledge, generate strategic insights, and facilitate learning. Part 1 of the intervention document focused on problem identification, encompassing a range of PDIA- and PEA-related questions. Part 2 focused on the business case, including objectives, workplan and budgets. Later, when the results framework was developed, issues and indicators were incorporated into all intervention documents to ensure that they fed directly into ongoing monitoring. Lastly, part 3 of the document focused on evaluation, including an implementation narrative and self-assessment from partners.

By following the intervention document template, all advisers and civil society partners had to define issues and indicators for their activities. This both strengthened their design and ensured that M&E was built into implementation from the start, taking into account ambition levels, attribution challenges, and sources of evidence. This approach also provided a more robust and up-to-date source of valuable information for programme management and strategy, highlighting challenges related to the scope of particular interventions and issues, as well as decision points for scaling up or down.

## 6. Conclusion

Success for a programme like STAAC does not come from transplanting institutional blueprints, but from building capable coalitions that can find the best solutions to Ghana's problems. That is why the programme focused on building meaningful relationships with partners and deploying a team of adaptive- and context-sensitive technical advisers who were willing to listen to counterparts, earn their trust, and in time challenge them to think differently. In its first three years, STAAC focused on building the requisite foundation of trusting relationships with partners that would allow it to move more quickly in its pursuit of behavioural change.

By the end of 2018, the heads of law enforcement agencies working with STAAC had realised the benefits of working together and were making more requests to conduct joint activity. The foundation of trust that the programme team had developed across state partners, and the lessons learned that could be used to improve new engagements, put STAAC in a position to fully capitalise on the chain-linked approach outlined in DFID's business case. The programme was starting to create linkages across the functions of the anti-corruption chain and identifying opportunities to improve coordination. Going forward, the key challenge would be moving from strategic to operational collaboration that would have a tangible impact on prosecutions and asset recovery.

Meanwhile, the Accountability Working Group developed to a point where CSO partners, DFID, and STAAC could collectively reflect on ongoing interventions and explore new opportunities. The Group's governance and funding model enabled STAAC's partners to think more strategically about the future. New partners had been

incorporated meaningfully, and the Accountability Working Group had matured to the point of identifying common areas of work and discussing openly how key partners might tackle new problems together in a more sustained way, rather than as competing organisations.

In this lengthy and sometimes fraught journey the STAAC team learned a few lessons that can hopefully be useful to other teams working on adaptive programming.

### *Lessons for adaptive programming*

#### **Focus on an adaptive logic and ongoing analysis instead of acronyms:**

In STAAC, over a period of two years of iterating with tools, the logic of experimentation and learning was built into the DNA of the programme, bringing together programme management, strategy, learning, and M&E. While STAAC's inception-phase PEA did influence the design and philosophy of the programme, it was the introduction of programme diaries, targeted reports, and review exercises facilitated by an international PEA Adviser and Ghanaian PEA Officer that guaranteed the programme did not lose sight of its political environment.

#### **Find the right technical team and give them the right tools:**

By growing in a gradual and self-aware manner, STAAC was able to recruit team members who had never heard of PDIA but who nevertheless had a disposition to engage, experiment, and learn. The programme also incorporated full-time staff to manage the various layers of PEA, PDIA, M&E and learning. This core adaptive management team provided strategic and analytical guidance to technical staff, ensuring delivery in a difficult context.

#### **Ensure that learning is facilitated by every element of the approach:**

In STAAC, M&E became an essential

component of programming, informing all stages of interventions, from concept to proposal to implementation to evaluation. Moreover, M&E tools were directly linked with other aspects of the programme, like PDIA, PEA, strategy or research. A key lesson is ensuring that staff and partner expectations and familiarity with the adaptive and context-sensitive approach are clear from the beginning. This includes making a more systematic use of tools, and ensuring that the skills of the core MEL team can help technical advisers and partners design the most effective interventions.

**Match ambition and expectations to context:** The journey from Business Case to tender to inception phase was one of revising assumptions and expectations to bring them more in line with the reality of anti-corruption in Ghana. But the design of a programme such as STAAC never really ends, and the team and key partners need to reflect strategically and collectively on current and new interventions to ensure that they respond to actual problems within realistic parameters.

**Invest in meaningful relationships and linkages:** Given the entrenched institutional and organisational obstacles to anti-corruption, a donor programme can only pursue lasting impact by establishing trusting, meaningful relationships with partners. This involves first openness and a certain humility, and over time a willingness to have difficult conversations and develop joint visions. To ensure that partners do not act in isolation, STAAC had to use the trust gained to incentivize greater collaboration and synergies between stakeholders who may not see eye to eye. In time, those linkages may well prove to be the programme's longest lasting impact.

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