

Keynote Address delivered by Margarita Aswani, Senior Knowledge Management Advisor, DFID - State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC) on 19th of April, 2016 during the PFM Suite Training held at Reitz Continental Hotel, Abuja

DFID has been actively engaged in supporting good governance in Nigeria since 2000, following the return of democratic rule. The State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability has been an integral part of this effort since 2008.

And, today, all over Nigeria, reforms are being delivered.

“Being delivered” is the key phrase. **Delivery equals money and people.** Money means annual budgets that are relatively well executed. People equals reform of civil service structures that are now better fit for purpose. Altogether, the goal is to make the money work for the people.

1. SPARC’s partnership with the Nigeria Governors’ Forum (NGF) has been a long standing one which began in 2009, when the NGF restructured to better focus on delivery of its core objectives. The first ever Strategic Plan was developed (2010-2012) which provided the strategic direction to all NGF activities, followed by technical assistance, to support the transformation of the Secretariat into a policy hub. States are now able to reach out to the Secretariat for tools and other information that can help them perform their daily tasks more effectively, while Governors are also better informed to engage on issues of national interest.

2. As a learning institution, one of NGF’s strategic objectives is the improvement of development outcomes through the mechanism of peer learning and experience sharing – as they say around the world, there is no better book in the world than the person sitting next to you with a story to tell about themselves.

The Secretariat with SPARC support initiated a series of Regional governance **Share fairs** that provided a neutral platform for States to share innovative practices.

The **State Peer Review Mechanism**, NGF's flagship program, is another initiative that aims to accelerate development in States through peer learning and sharing of innovative practices among Governors on one hand, and State officials on the other hand.

After all, it is not merely theoretical models that count, but also the encouragement of peers to try a new approach—peers who will listen to stories of false starts, cheer successes, and offer to help when governments ask. When you can put a human face on agency bureaucrats, it becomes less daunting to take on a challenge you have never faced before.

Another example of knowledge sharing is the recently organized IGR peer learning event, where 34 states plus federal bodies gathered in a room to throw around new ideas to an old problem – Dwindling resources.

3. SPARC is coming to a successful end in 11 days. For us, it is a bittersweet moment, an opportunity to celebrate our success, to do reforms differently in the new programme, and a concern for what would happen to initiatives such as the Access for Sharing Knowledge, or what we call ASK, help desk.

4. The ASK help desk, launched in September 2013, was designed to rapidly replicate governance reform across Nigeria based on SPARC's locally-developed tools. This platform has proven to be quick and cost effective. Government capability has been built, planning capacity improved, and there is evidence of improved budget credibility in States that received support through ASK help desk. Two such states include Abia and Ebonyi, where both governments demonstrated commitment towards reform. Through the help desk, support was provided on:

Credible Budget Setting, Management and execution;

Public Financial Analysis and Information;

And Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA)

SPARC estimates that the support in Abia may have led to an approximate reduction of 23% on the 2016 budget over the 2015 budget. (The 2016 budget is N96.7 billion compared to N127.5 billion in 2015.)

We've had similar successes in Ebonyi State. As Mr. Chidi is here, he's in a better position to tell you the Ebonyi State Story. But basically, one of Nigeria's youngest states, which had never received development assistance, in just a few months, now has 10 Medium Term Sector Strategies, to which the State Budget is aligned, and the first ever state development plan.

We were delighted when NGF, as a legacy partner with established systems and a good track record for promoting and replicating reforms in States, expressed interest to carry on the good work through the establishment and the management of the NGF Help Desk, modeled after ASK.

As you can imagine, I am extremely proud of the work undertaken through the help desk. Overall, over 700 civil servants have been directly trained in practical reform tools fostering increased awareness and capacity to deliver better services and think in strategic terms.

Currently, requests have been received from 13 States and these will be attended to through the NGF Help Desk. Of those 13, seven inquiries were made during the IGR event are all related to PFM reforms. These have come from Imo, Nasarawa, Osun, Plateau, Kwara and Sokoto States. You have work waiting for you.

5. Discussions have also been held with the Gates Foundation and they have agreed to resource the Help Desk for two years.

6. SPARC officially handed over the ASK DESK portfolio to the NGF during the SPARC learning event on the 12th of April. Over the last few months, NGF staff have been trained, and SPARC is currently rebranding its tools to the NGF brand which will be used for training States officials going forward. The SPARCNET which is

SPARC's database of experienced consultants is also being collated to help the NGF effectively manage the NGF Help Desk.

All this amazing work brings us to this week.

7. At SPARC, we thought that rather than just handing over the tools, more value will be added if NGF staff were also trained on their use. In addition, considering the current fiscal crisis facing the nation and the high probability of receiving more requests in PFM related areas, **SPARC considered it was equally important to expand the pool of PFM consultants trained at the same time on the use of SPARC PFM tools so that the Help Desk will have enough hands to handle requests from States.**

8. The NGF was specifically selected as an institutional home for the helpdesk because of its long established quest to improve development outcomes in States through the promotion and replication of reforms across the States. The Help Desk will only serve to strengthen the NGF's potential to achieve its quest. **With the structures and systems in place including the authorizing environment and established networks with State officials, the diverse support being provided by SPARC and funding from the Gates Foundation, we believe the NGF is ready and able to respond rapidly to demands for support from all 36 states across the Federation.**

I wish you success over the next four days of training, and on behalf of SPARC, could not be more proud to support the effort.