

# Participatory Capacity Building

*A Facilitator's Toolbox for Assessment  
and Strategic Planning of NGO Capacity*

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Developed in collaboration with the  
National Association of NGOs (NANGO) in Zimbabwe  
with the support of  
ICCO-PSa and PSO, the Netherlands

Published by Jouwert van Geene  
for The Institute of Cultural Affairs – Zimbabwe

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ISBN 90 809071 1 7 (book)  
ISBN 90 809071 2 5 (cd-rom)

*Design & Page layouts: Jouwert van Geene  
Covers printed by Brilprint, Mutare, Zimbabwe  
Book printed in Zimbabwe and the Netherlands*

## *Preface*

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Participatory Capacity Building is a practical toolbox for internal or external facilitators of capacity building of NGOs. The tools can be used to assess an organisation's capacity and plan for strategic and innovative directions for organisational improvement.

### **Dangers of the Toolbox**

As with all facilitation methods the methodology presented in this toolbox should be used with care, as it must be adapted to every situation to use in. As much as we have tried to be specific and detailed on the facilitation steps, this Toolbox should not be taken as a blueprint for facilitation. Facilitating Participatory Capacity Building needs a lot of creativity, courage and involvement both from the facilitator and the participating organisation(s). We hope it provides a meaningful vehicle for sustainable improvement of NGO capacity.

### **Skilled Facilitators**

We want to encourage all practitioners to build their facilitation skills. Especially courses in Group Facilitation Methods and Participatory Strategic Planning, offered by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) all over the world, will provide helpful skills and knowledge to facilitate Participatory Capacity Building processes. See Section 1.4 for more information.

### **Acknowledgements**

Participatory Capacity Building uses the Participatory Organisational Assessment Tool (POET), developed by UNDP and is based on Technology of Participation<sup>®</sup> (ToP<sup>®</sup>) Methods developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), as they apply to capacity building situations. We owe special gratitude to the developers of POET and ToP<sup>®</sup>. We also want to thank co-financing organisations ICCO-PSa and PSO for their support to the NANGO Capacity Building Program, which laid the foundation for this toolbox.

### **Use of the materials**

We want to encourage everyone to apply the processes from this toolbox using all available materials. Please feel free to photocopy or print what you need from the toolbox or cd-rom and distribute the information widely, if the original text is properly acknowledged and the objective is not for profit or gain. The toolbox and cd-rom were designed for facilitation purposes only. Large-scale reproduction, widespread distribution, or inclusion of any materials in publications for sale or third party training is prohibited without prior written permission of the publisher. Please send requests to:

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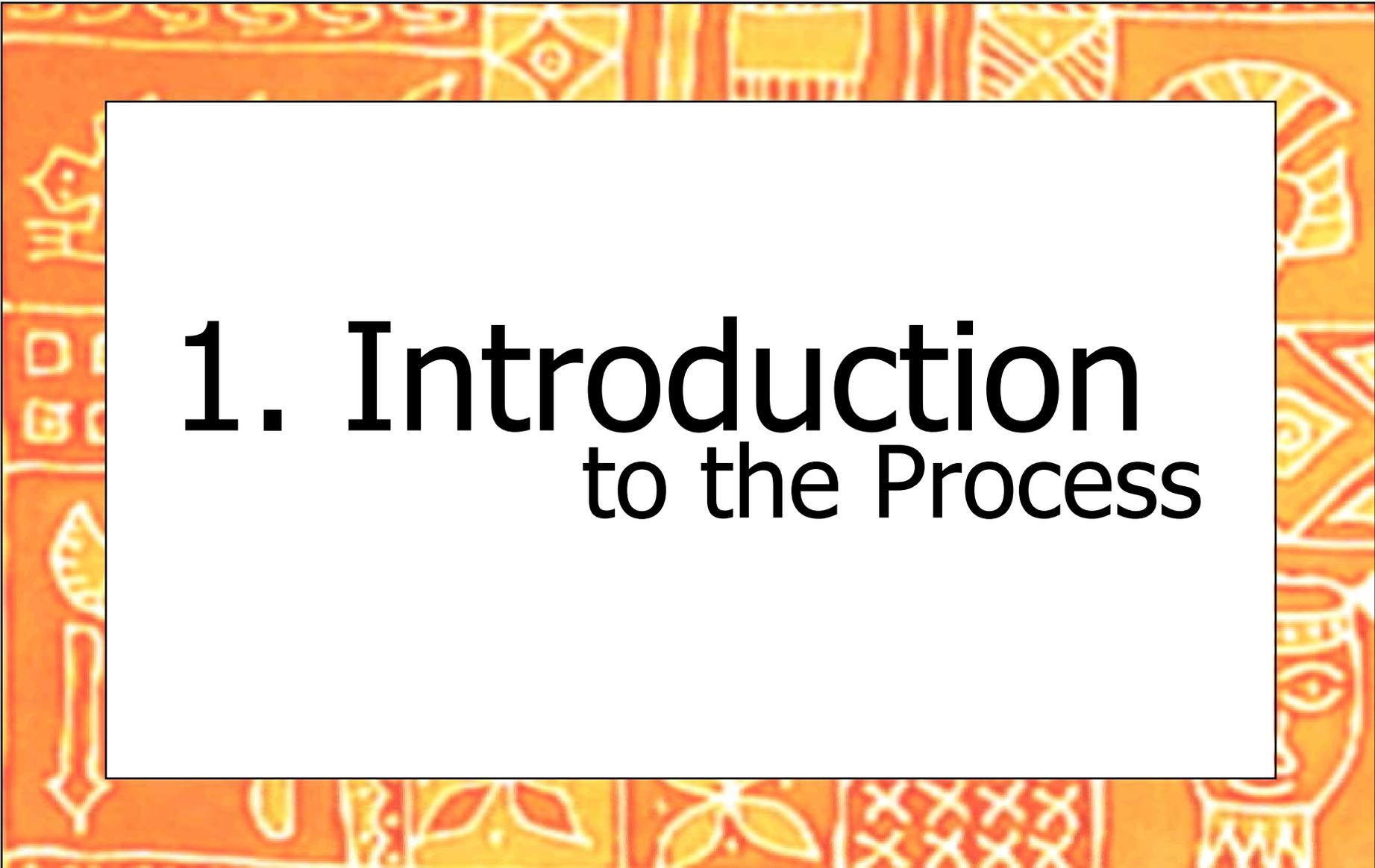
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# *Notes*

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# 1. Introduction to the Process

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## 1.1 *Introduction to the Toolbox*

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In this first Chapter we introduce the process of Participatory Capacity Building starting off with a paper on Capacity Building for NGOs, which puts this Toolbox in a broader perspective. Then two 'methodologies' will be introduced: Participatory Organisational Evaluation Tool (POET) and Technology of Participation® (ToP)®. This Toolbox builds on both of them. This introduction continues with a section on the role of the facilitator in Participatory Capacity Building. Finally we share experiences with this toolbox as it was developed for and applied with NGOs in Zimbabwe.

After the introduction to the process the Toolbox continues with 6 Chapters containing the actual tools for Participatory Capacity Building:

2. *Participatory Capacity Assessment*: the process to facilitate self-assessment of NGO Capacity;
3. *Analysing and Reporting Participatory Capacity Assessment Scores*: the frameworks to reflect on the assessment results;
4. *Feedback and Capacity Planning Workshop*: the process to facilitate reflection on results and strategic capacity planning;
5. *Implementation Planning*: tools for putting wheels under the capacity building plan;
6. *NGO Capacity Building Co-ordination Workshop*: the processes for collaborative action of NGOs;
7. *Monitoring and Evaluation of Capacity Building*: the frameworks and processes to keep track of progress of capacity building efforts.

## 1.2 Capacity Building for Non Governmental Organisations

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*A process approach to build effective learning development organisations*

### **Introduction**

It has been widely acknowledged that insufficient capacity of development organisations hinders sustainable development. This problem however cannot simply be defined in terms of gaps in human resources, financial resources or training. The issue is a function of several aspects: limited sense of local ownership of the development processes; excessive dependency on external resources and technical assistance; inadequate considerations of broader environmental or systems factors; and poor integration and co-ordination of multiple development initiatives.

In the past decade there has been much debate and research on the efficacy of technical co-operation and the issue of capacity building. It led to better understanding of development processes and the changes necessary to make development initiatives more successful and sustainable.

This paper will introduce the concept of capacity building for Non Governmental Organisations focusing on an approach that capacitates organisations from within, rather than from the outside. Just as we want to create sustainable change from within the community, capacity building should start from where organisations are, creating change from within.

### **Introduction to Capacity Building**

Capacity is defined as the ability of individuals and organisations to perform functions effectively, efficiently and sustainably. Capacity is the power of something (a system, an organisation, a person) to perform or to produce.

To clarify capacity in its context it is necessary to answer the question: capacity for what? Here we narrow down capacity as the ability to solve a problem, to achieve or sustain a mission, to reach a set of objectives. Non governmental organisations need capacity to achieve their planned objectives, to have an impact and to fulfil their organisational purpose.

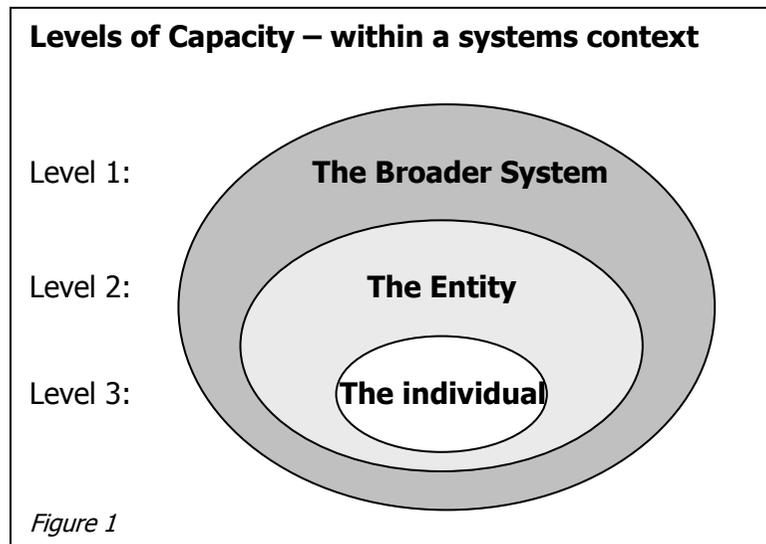
Capacity building is broader than organisational development, since it includes the overall system, environment or context in which individuals, organisations and societies operate and interact. It is the process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to: (1) perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives; and (2) understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner.

Capacity building is closely linked to the concept of learning organisations. A learning organisation is one that constantly changes and experiments by using feedback of its results to change its form and processes in ways that make it more successful. Capacity building can be seen as transforming the culture and structural designs of organisations to become real learning organisations.

Capacity building is a continuous and reciprocal process of adjusting people's attitudes, values and organisational practises while building up appropriate knowledge and skills among various stakeholders in a partnership – to strengthen each partner's ability to make effective decisions about their own lives and to take full responsibility of the consequences of such decisions.

## Dimensions of Capacity in a systems context

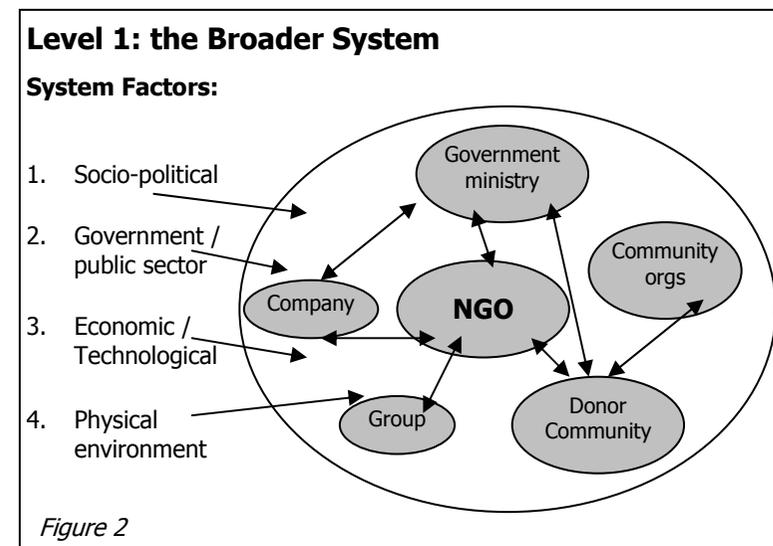
Capacity issues can be analysed at three levels (figure 1). Often capacity building is only addressed at the individual and organisational level. However, capacity should be understood at the systems level as well. The system is a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole. All three levels must be included when assessing and planning capacity to create meaningful change.



### 1. The System

The highest level of capacity is the broader system or enabling environment level. For some national NGOs this level covers the entire country or region they work in and all the sub-components that are involved. For other NGOs that work more sectoral (eg. health) the system would only include those relevant components.

The systems level includes both formal and informal organisations. Only the key organisations or stakeholder within the context of the NGO are relevant, looking at the nature of the relationships between the entities. (See figure 2)



### Dimensions of capacity at the Systems Level:

- **Policy Dimension:** systems have a purpose to meet certain needs in society, including value systems.
- **Legal/Regulatory Dimension:** includes rules, laws, norms, standards which govern the system, and which sets boundaries for an NGO.
- **Management or Accountability Dimension:** defines who 'manages' the system, or who is responsible for potential design, management and implementation, co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation etc. of development initiatives in the system of the NGO.
- **Resource Dimension:** (human, financial, information) that may be available within the system to develop and implement the NGO initiatives.
- **Process Dimension:** the inter-relationships, interdependencies and interactions amongst the entities, including flow of resources and information, formal and informal networks of people and supporting communications infrastructures.

### 2. The Entity or Organisation

There are typical dimensions that need to be assessed and developed at the organisational level. (see figure 3)

Unlike traditional capacity development and organisational strengthening which focuses on human resources, processes and organisational structures, a more comprehensive approach examines all dimensions of capacity at entity level, including its interactions within the system.

This also applies to organisational sub-units within the entity, such as project teams, work-groups etc.

- Partnering: collaboration with other NGOs, donors, policy makers, and private sector entities.
- Organisational Learning: teamwork, information-sharing and capacity for generating information that leads to improvement of current practice.
- Strategic Management / Governance: board practices, planning, commitment to goals, mission and philosophy or culture.

### *3. The Individual*

The individual level is a major dimension of capacity – people, including small interpersonal networks of individuals. The individual level includes the involved management, professionals, support staff but also those who are beneficiaries or are otherwise impacted by the NGOs work (specific client groups, segments of society, etc.).

This level addresses the individual's capacity to function efficiently and effectively within the entity and within the broader system.

Often, capacity building focuses on individual skills and knowledge needed to perform job descriptions or positions. Increasingly, the dimensions of accountability, performance, values and ethics, incentives and security are becoming more important at this level.

### **Capacity Building Processes**

Capacity building must be regarded as an organisation-wide process, involving many dimensions of the organisation and its environment. Human Resource development is critical within this process, but it is not just limited to skills and knowledge development (e.g. through training). The process of 'skilling-up' involves expressing thoughts and voicing opinions – the essence of meaningful contributions to capacity building from within.

There are some stages to define in capacity building:

1. Setting the stage and formulating the 'entry point' of the process
2. Capacity assessment
3. Strategic capacity planning and bench marking

### Dimensions of Capacity at the Entity Level:

- Human Resource Management: the most valuable of the entity's resources and upon which change, capacity and development primarily depend.
- Financial Resource Management: both operating and capital, required for the efficient and effective functioning of the NGO, including fund-raising.
- Equitable Participation: involvement of local knowledge and stakeholders related to project access and project benefit.
- Sustainability of Program Benefits: impact of the NGOs work looking at different aspects like environmental, economic, political, institutional and cultural factors.