2. Participatory Capacity Assessment
Notes
2.1 Introduction

Capacity assessment is the typical start of the capacity building process. Unfortunately Capacity Building might easily be misunderstood as training or staff development. Capacity building entails a wide variety of dimensions, at different levels of the organisation.

Therefore Capacity Assessment should focus on much more than human resources alone. Comprehensive assessment of NGO capacity can lead to meaningful and effective capacity building to counter weaknesses and build on strengths.

This tool for participatory capacity assessment tries to take away some misconceptions about capacity building. First of all capacity assessment and building is something that far and foremost should be employed by NGOs themselves, rather than by (relative) outsiders. Self-assessment or participatory assessment improves insights on the organisation to the people to whom it matters. It is a tool for team learning. Secondly, this Participatory Capacity Assessment tool for NGOs tries to be comprehensive in its approach and covers a wide variety of capacity areas, using organisational history as a reference.

In this Participatory Capacity Assessment Workshop the organisation discusses 7 capacity areas: Human Resource Management, Financial Resource Management, Equitable Participation, Sustainability of Program Benefits, Partnering, Organisational Learning and Strategic Management / Governance. These areas are broken down into some hundred different subjects allowing participants to thoroughly evaluate the capacity areas of the organisation and to attribute scores to different capacity items. During the workshop provisional assessment results may be presented. These results will later be analysed and interpreted in an assessment report (see Chapter 3.) and discussed with the organisation in the Feedback and Capacity Planning Workshop (see Chapter 4.).

We propose that a full Participatory Capacity Assessment should be repeated at the end of a Capacity Building Program (e.g. after 3 years). See Chapter 7. for more information on how to develop a system for Monitoring and Evaluation System of capacity building.

This assessment tool uses Participatory Organisational Evaluation Tool (POET), developed by UNDP. Though some of the original questions used in POET are changed, the general methodology was maintained. We owe gratitude to the first designers of POET.

Participatory Capacity Assessment is a one-day workshop to do with an assessment team of an NGO. This section presents the preparations for the workshop and the steps for each session. It uses some of the materials in the Appendices and files on the PCB cd-rom.
2.2 Preparations

Preparing the NGO

We assume considerable time was spent with the NGO to discuss the whole process of Participatory Capacity Building. At least we expect the NGO to know the steps they will go through.

An introduction to the capacity building process may be sent to the organisation on beforehand. See appendix A. and PCB cd-rom for more information.

An important aspect of the capacity assessment is the composition of the Assessment Team. Members of the team should be staff or board members of the organisation. The team should have both junior and senior staff (support staff, technical, managerial) and should have a reasonable gender balance. The assessment team should consist of 5 to 10 people, who must be available during the whole day of the assessment.

Practical Preparations

Make sure you have a sufficient number of copies of the following documents (see appendices and PCB cd-rom):
- Assessment Questionnaires (Appendix C., for all participants)
- Assessment Score sheets (Appendix D., for all participants)

Prepare the following flip charts to present during the workshop:
- Workshop overview
- Definition of Capacity and the Capacity Building Process
- Objectives and benefits of Participatory Capacity Assessment
- Facilitator’s role and ground rules
- Explanation of the scoring process
- Overview sheet to present the preliminary assessment results (optional)

Other needed materials for this workshop:
- Flip charts and markers to make notes
- Computer to calculate initial results (optional)

One (experienced) group facilitator can easily facilitate this workshop. However it is helpful to have an assistant who can co-facilitate parts and who makes notes of the group discussions.
2.3 Participatory Capacity Assessment

Program Overview

9.00 Welcome
9.05 Introduction
9.30 Assessment 1: Human Resource Management

10.30 Break
11.30 Assessment 3: Equitable Participation
12.15 Assessment 4: Sustainability of Program Benefits
12.45 Presentation of first results

13.00 Lunch
14.00 Assessment 5: Partnering
14.30 Assessment 6: Organisational Learning

15.30 Break
15.45 Assessment 7: Governance / Strategic Management
16.30 Presentation of second results
16.45 Next Steps and Closing Reflection

17.00 Closing
2.3.1 Introduction to Participatory Capacity Assessment

In this part, in 30 minutes, introduce to the group:
1. What is Capacity and Capacity Building
2. Capacity Assessment and PCA Process
3. Workshop Objectives and Assessment Benefits
4. Role of the Facilitator and Ground rules
5. Assessment Questionnaire and Scoring Sheets

1. Capacity and Capacity Building

(First: ask group what they think “capacity” means, then present:)

**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.

**Capacity areas** of NGOs that we can consider are:
- Human Resource Management: how you deal with staff
- Financial Resource Management: getting and dealing with money
- Equitable Participation: involvement of target groups
- Sustainability of Program Benefits: how your projects impact
- Partnering: effective liaisons with other stakeholders
- Organisational Learning: sharing and learning from information
- Strategic Management / Governance: looking at the bigger picture

**Capacity Building** is a process in 5 stages:
1. Setting the stage and formulating the ‘entry point’ of the process.
2. Capacity assessment
3. Strategic Capacity Planning and bench marking
4. Implementing capacity building strategies
5. Sustaining capacity by ongoing monitoring and bench marking

This capacity assessment workshop is just the beginning of the process.

2. Capacity Assessment

**Capacity Assessment** is the process of deliberately sharing information on different capacity areas of and processing this information into an organisational analysis that will help to create a capacity building plan.

Capacity Assessment involves:
- Collecting data by group discussions and individual ‘scoring’
- Documenting and analysing the data by a scoring team
- Reporting to the organisation and discussing the findings
- Planning the Capacity Building

The **Participatory Organisational Evaluation Tool (POET)** was developed in 1998 by the UNDP to assist NGOs in self-assessment for capacity building.

POET is build around the concept that NGOs are very able to assess their own capacity when they are sufficiently facilitated.

POET is a method that uses the “critical incident” technique to focus group discussions about organisational capacity. This assessment team is lead through a number of questions referring to incidents that have happened to their organisation in relation to capacity dimensions. Each member of the assessment team then ‘scores’ the level of capacity, based on discussions and their own views and experiences.

POET provides statistical information that can easily be administered and analysed also in comparison to other organisations. During the whole process anonymity of individual capacity scores and organisation scores (if shared with others) is guaranteed.
3. Objectives and Benefits

This assessment workshop has the following objectives:

- To discuss topics of the capacity of the organisation and share information and experiences of assessment team members.
- To create insight in capacity areas of the organisation by indicating the level of capacity on different dimensions.
- To create insight in the level of consensus that exists within the organisation about the present capacity.

By taking part in the NGO assessment process your organisation will gain the following benefits:

- The assessment creates a clear picture of your organisation’s strengths and weaknesses.
- It will allow the NGO to compare with other organisations from the same sector.
- It kicks off a focused plan for capacity building.
- It creates organisational learning, team building and understanding of different perspectives on topics of capacity.
- It forms the basis foundation for ongoing monitoring of your organisation’s capacity.

4. Facilitator’s role and Ground rules

Assessment facilitator

During this assessment the facilitator will lead some focused group discussions. The role of the facilitator is to:

- Guide the group during the discussions by asking questions and probing;
- Make some notes of the discussions on flip chart for quick reference;
- Allow full participation of all assessment team members;
- Keep time and stay focused on the topics at hand, and to
- Clarify the questions and process whenever needed.

The assessment facilitator is non-judgemental and is not contributing to the discussions. S/he only collects answers and creates a platform for sharing of ideas. Facilitator will also collect the scoring data and facilitate the analysis of the data.

Ground rules

In order for the capacity assessment to be successful the group needs to be open for discussion and sharing of ideas.

Some ground rules for participants we would like to propose:

- Participate in the discussions
- Leave space for others to contribute
- Be open and sincere about the organisation’s capacity
- Base your capacity scores on your own experiences, opinions and reflections of group discussions
- (add more ground rules from the group)

Everything that will be said during the discussions must be regarded as confidential. All capacity scores will be handled with strict anonymity.
5. Questionnaire

Each participant receives a list of questions that guide the group in the assessment. Make sure all participants have the copy of the questionnaire to refer to (see appendices B. and C.) and PCB cd-rom). Please note that the questionnaire for the Assessment Team Members is different from the one for the facilitator.

The facilitator will address questions that appear under the heading “discussion.” The group will spend about 5 to 10 minutes discussing each set of questions as a whole group.

During this discussion some notes on flip chart will be made for quick referral. Everybody is encouraged to contribute to the group discussion. Please try to stay focused to the specific topic at hand since other topics will probably be dealt with later.

After each set of questions the group will be asked to score the specific capacity area on their scoring sheets.

There are 7 areas of capacity that will be assessed. The assessment of each area will take 30-60 minutes, depending on the number of discussions.

6. Scoring Sheets

After each set of discussion questions we will answer the bold, numbered questions from the list of questions.

Use the Likert-scale which appears on the accompanying score sheet: 5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3=neutral; 2=disagree; 1=strongly disagree.

So, for Item No 1, if you feel staff training is routinely offered by the organisation, you might give this item a "4" on your scoring sheet:

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These scores are given individually and anonymously after each group discussion. The scoring team will calculate the group scores from the individual scores.
2.3.2 Capacity Assessment: Human Resource Management

The first capacity area in the assessment is Human Resource Management. When the assessment team is clear about the instructions and the process, the assessment can start. Begin with a short context to outline the process and time. Continue with the 6 sets of discussion questions with the scoring in between (refer to questionnaire in appendix C.).

**Context**

The assessment of the Human Resource Capacity will take us through 6 group discussions about different aspects of this area, like staff training, skills and numbers of staff, staff diversity, systems of staff retention and supervision. After each discussion you will be asked to answer 1 or more questions individually on the score sheet.

This exercise will take about 60 minutes. I will make some notes on a flip chart while we discuss the topics for your reference. Let’s begin with discussion 1, on page 2 of your questionnaire.

**Discussion 1: Staff training**

A) “When was our most recent staff training?” These could be in-house or other training that any of our staff went to.

B) “How often over the last 12 months have we held staff training events?” Which levels of staff received the training? Are these training part of a staff development plan?

**Individual scoring:**

1 We routinely offer staff training.

**Discussion 2: Staff training**

A) “For the three most recent staff training events, what evidence is there that they strengthened staff capacity and performance?” What change in quality or quantity of work did we actually see?

B) “To what degree did these training events prepare staff to respond to our organisational priorities?” Focusing on the present priorities of our organisation, projects, changes we face: why were these training events important to the organisation?

C) “To what extent is our staff training relevant to our human resource needs?” Focusing on the specific human resources needed, the skills and knowledge it added to the people, why were these training events important.

**Individual scoring:**

2 Our staff training directly contributes to the achievements of our organisation’s priorities.

Continue with discussions 3 to 6 (refer to questionnaire in appendix C.).

When finished, ask the participants to calculate the totals for this capacity area and write these on the scoring sheets as well as on a single piece of paper for the scoring team to calculate the quick capacity and consensus scores (see section 4).
2.3.3 Capacity Assessments: FRC, Equitable Participation and Sustainability

After a short break, continue with the next assessments: Financial Resource Management, Equitable Participation and Sustainability of Program Benefits. Again, start each assessment with a short context to outline the process and time. This should be easy when participants are familiar with the discussions and scoring procedures. Take about 3-5 minutes breaks in between the 3 assessments. This might be a good moment for a quick energiser to get people standing, stretching or moving. Energisers will also increase the level of participation.

After each assessment, ask the participants to calculate the totals for the capacity area to write these on the scoring sheets as well as on a single piece of paper for the scoring team to calculate the quick capacity and consensus scores (see next section).

II. Financial Resource Management

The assessment of Financial Resource Management Capacity is done by 7 group discussions about different aspects of this area, like financial and budgeting procedures, cash management, diversity of funding and the availability of resources. Again, after each discussion you will be asked to answer 1 or more questions individually on the score sheet.

You do not have to be a financial expert to be able to assess this capacity. Everybody has probably some experience with the finances of the organisation. You will all be asked to contribute to the discussions and make your individual scores on this topic.

This exercise will take about 45 minutes. I will make some notes on a flip chart while we discuss the topics for your reference. Let’s begin with discussion 1, on page 3 of your questionnaire.

III. Equitable Participation

Equitable Participation refers to the involvement of local knowledge and stakeholders related to project access and project benefits. You will be asked to relate this to representative projects that the organisation is currently running. We will have 6 sets of group discussion questions, each followed by the individual scoring.

Both input from field-based staff and supporting staff is valuable for these discussions since everybody might have different perspectives on the project reality.

Again, this assessment will take about 45 minutes. Let’s start with discussion 1 on page 4 of the questionnaire.

IV. Sustainability of Program Benefits

Sustainability of Program Benefits is an area of capacity that is quite complex. Basically it is about different aspects of the context of our projects like the physical environment, economy, politics, institutions and culture. We want to assess to what extent the organisation considers these aspects during the course of a project.

Some participants might be more knowledgeable about this subject than others. However, when discussing the subject everybody may equally contribute and everybody will be asked to make your individual scores.

This assessment will take about 30 minutes. Let’s start with discussion 1 on page 5 of the questionnaire.
2.3.4 Presentation of First Assessment Results

After each assessment collect the total scores of each assessment team member. Each member has written his or her total scores on a separate piece of paper to ensure anonymity of the scoring.

For Human Resource Management, Financial Resource Management, Equitable Participation and Sustainability of Program Benefits we can now make a quick calculation of the Capacity and Consensus Scores in MS Word (A computer with MS Word must be available).

Calculating the Capacity and Consensus Scores

1. Open the empty PCA Score Calculator in MS Word (see PCB cd-rom).
3. In the first table enter the number of respondents in cell L4:
4. Enter the total scores of each respondent for the HRM capacity in the second sheet (HRM) in row 12, columns B and further:
5. The Capacity and Consensus Scores will automatically be calculated in cells A5 and A6:
6. Repeat this exercise for the other 3 capacity areas in the respective tables by double-clicking on the table.

Presenting the Scores

Draw a flip chart to present the 4 capacity and consensus Scores.

Also provide a flip chart with the interpretation of the scores:
- 20-39: Far below average / acceptable level
- 40-59: Below average / acceptable level
- 60-70: Average / acceptable level
- 71-80: Above average / acceptable level
- 81-100: Far above average / acceptable level

Discuss results with the group:
- What surprises you about the results? What are some conclusions?
- These are preliminary results that will be refined by the scoring team, and may differ from the initial figures due to miscalculations.
2.3.5 Capacity Assessments: Partnering, Organisational Learning and Governance

After lunch, continue with the last assessments: Partnering, Organisational Learning and Governance / Strategic Management. Follow the same sequence: start with a short context followed by the discussions and the scoring. Again, take about 3-5 minutes breaks in between the 3 assessments, or allow for a tea break. Make sure the energy level stays high enough for people to discuss and resolve effectively. Throw in energisers at appropriate times to stimulate the group.

After each assessment, ask the participants to calculate the totals for the capacity area to write these on the scoring sheets as well as on a single piece of paper for the scoring team to calculate the quick capacity and consensus scores (see next section).

V. Partnering

Partnering obviously refers to relationships between the organisation, individuals and with other organisations. We will have 3 discussions on this topic. As before, after each discussion you will be asked to answer 1 or more questions individually on the score sheet.

Some participants might be more involved in partnerships or networking than others. However, everybody should be able to assess the effectiveness of these relations since effective partnerships are visible throughout the organisation.

This exercise will take about 30 minutes. I will make some notes on a flip chart while we discuss the topics for your reference. Let’s begin with discussion 1, on page 6 of your questionnaire.

VI. Organisational Learning

This capacity refers to the way the organisation collects information about projects, shares information effectively and solves problems through teamwork. It also concerns decision-making processes in the organisation.

Everybody is involved with organisational learning that means, everyone should be involved with it since it relates to all aspects and all levels of the organisation. We will have 8 sets of group discussion questions, each followed by the individual scoring.

This assessment will take about 60 minutes. Let’s start with discussion 1 on page 7 of the questionnaire.

VII. Governance / Strategic Management

Governance / Strategic Management has to do with the broader context of the organisation. Donor-relations, board practices and the mission, goals and philosophy of the organisation will be discussed.

Again, some participants might be more aware of strategic issues in the organisation. This is also a moment to share information about these issues and learn more about them. However, when discussing the subject everybody may equally contribute and everybody will be asked to make your individual scores.

This last assessment will take about 45 minutes. Let’s start with discussion 1 on page 8 of the questionnaire.
2.3.6 Presentation of Second Assessment Results

After each assessment collect the total scores of each assessment team member. Each member has written his or her total scores on a separate piece of paper to ensure anonymity of the scoring.

Based on the last result we can now calculate the final Capacity and Consensus Scores, as well as the average using the MS Word Score Calculator. (A computer with MS Word must be available).

Calculating the Capacity and Consensus Scores

1. In each table enter the number of respondents in cell L4.
2. Enter the total scores of each respondent for the Partnering capacity in that table in row 12, columns B and further.
3. The Capacity and Consensus Scores will automatically be calculated in cells A5 and A6.
4. Repeat this exercise for the other 3 capacity areas in the respective tables by double-clicking on the table.
5. Calculate the average scores by entering the capacity and consensus scores of the different capacity areas in the last table:

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Presenting the Scores

Draw a flip chart to present all the capacity and consensus Scores.

- What surprises you about the results?
- Which capacity areas reflect our strengths?
- Which are weaknesses?
- Where don’t we seem to agree?

These are preliminary results that will be refined by the scoring team. They may differ due to miscalculations.
2.3.7 Next Steps and Closing

After presenting the results of the assessment, discuss the next steps and conduct a closing reflection.

Next Steps

After this assessment all the scores will be collected and analysed using statistical methods. This will produce a comprehensive report including graphics and an analysis of all the different capacity areas. It will also show us the strengths and weaknesses within each capacity category.

We will perform a number of assessments with other NGOs. These data will also be analysed and compiled. The report for your organisation will also show you the results of other organisations to compare with.

After compiling these reports, we will conduct a feedback and planning workshop with your organisation to discuss and elaborate on the findings. This will allow the organisation to make a further analysis of the capacity, focusing on underlying causes of weaknesses.

In this meeting you will also prioritise on capacity needs and plan strategies for capacity building.

Also share the time planning of this exercise and the means of communication.

Closing Reflection

Let’s take some minutes to reflect on this day and to close the meeting.

Objective level questions
- What are some phrases or words you remember from the sessions?
- What were some activities you took part in?
- What else do you remember from today?

Reflective level questions:
- Where were you most involved?
- What was less interesting?
- What was a highlight of today?

Interpretive level questions
- What did you learn about your organisation?
- What was important about this assessment?
- How can this assessment be helpful for our organisation?

Decisional level questions
- Look at the workshop objectives: have they been achieved?
- What will you tell your colleagues about today?
- What will we do before the next session?

Thank you for participating in this Capacity Assessment. It has been a good experience for us, and I hope the results will be helpful for your organisation.