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Mapping and Building Organizational Capacity for Stronger Local Institutions

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Abstract:

Local CSOs have been concerned about increasing their project success rates as well as in ensuring that their capacities facilitate the delivery of their strategic mandates. However, few of them have been able to effectively address the capacity gaps they encounter during periods of massive growth experienced as community needs and project management requirements increase. Capacity building seeks to understand what exists, to utilize and strengthen existing capacities and therefore does not mean starting from scratch. It is evidence driven process to improve the ability and performance of the organization and its employees. However, in some situations radical and extensive organizational changes may be needed to build the competence of the organizations. This article highlights the importance of designing capacity building interventions that are context specific and guided by evidence collected from individual organizations. The aim of the capacity assessment exercise was to identify the existing capacity of the selected organizations so as to improve systems and technical capacity that is required to support project implementation. The exercise revealed that eighty (80) percent of the organizations had a functional governance structure in place; most of the organizations had relevant organizational policies in place, staff job descriptions and contracts were in place; some of the organizations had strong networks and linkages with the government and other stakeholders. However, gaps observed related to insufficient governance structures and management processes that were barriers to sustaining the growth of the organizations. A recommended approach to facilitate and enhance CSOs' organizational capacity was the establishment of a proactive system that encourages learning and empowers the organizations to initiate relevant changes to enhance its capacity within the operating context.

Keywords: Capacity building, CSOs, localization, local NGOs, organizational capacity assessments

1. Introduction

A shift in the development landscape has resulted in a dynamic expansion in the size and scope of project and community interventions around the globe. This shift requires CSOs to identify and adopt different capabilities and competencies for them to increase their effectiveness.

Due to the change in the dynamics of the humanitarian sector, country and the community context, oval) states that an organization needs to be flexible and responsive to internal and external changes to improve its competitiveness and effectiveness.

Organizations that seek to design and implement projects at community level have to possess a certain level of capacity if they are to be considered competitive. The effectiveness of an organization is seen in its ability to fulfill its mission and the presence robust governance and management practices.

Organizations have to ensure there is an alignment of the mission with organizational strategies, services and resources. Local NGOs must address a host of challenges, both internally and externally if they are to effectively undertake development projects(Batti, 2015).

The strengthening of organizational strategy, structures, management and governance practices, and overall staff capacity has been shown to enhance organizational, team and individual performance. According to Monahan, et al (2016) seventy percent (70%) of change initiatives often fail. An organization's ability to appreciate and strengthen its capacity is determined by the willingness to embrace new ways of doing things both at individual and organizational level.

Many organizational capacity building interventions have faced great difficulties, as CSOs, donors and other stakeholder have understood capacity and its development from different perspectives that sometimes affect its intended impact. Despite some NGOs having knowledge on good organizational development (OD) practices yet they face significant challenges in translating OD principles into good practice(Batti, 2014).

How capacity is defined determines what kind of strategies and actions should be taken to build capacity. Presence of appropriate capacity and competencies is linked with the overall performance of the organization and its employees. Improvement or development of capacities drives the strategic management of available resources to ensure that performance directly reflects the mandates of the organization.

A fundamental aspect in capacity building is how it is defined: what is it that organizations are trying to build and for what purpose. Organizations vary greatly in their mandates, operations, human resources, strategies and structures.

Unfortunately structures or systems that seemed to function well in the past become outdated and inefficient (Jayawickrama,etal 2010).

Therefore, undertaking institutional capacity assessments provides an opportunity for the organization and its project teams to analyze capacity exists, where there is a gap and what changes are required to alter or introduce new operations to support its existing or future projects.

2. CSO Capacity Building Perspectives

Today's organizations must adapt constantly in order to retain their license to operate. Although some aspects of capacity have been acquired over years, CSOs in developing countries suffer numerous organizational, and technical capacity deficiencies. In fact, the available governance and management skills have been acquired progressively through trial-and-error practices.

CSOs in developing countries encounter diverse challenges that affect their performance and sustainability. Challenges faced relate to inadequate capacities in organizational, governance, financial, leadership and project management systems. Inadequate project management capacities, low accountability levels and insufficient reporting of project outcomes initiated at community levels hamper their efforts for effective partnerships and access to resources. Unfortunately, sometimes existing organizational management, leadership, project management and advocacy skills or practices are outdated when compared to the operating context.

The definition by the UNDP (1997) and the OECD Development Assistance Committee defines capacity development as the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to: perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives and understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner(Kanni, et al., 2009).

CSO's internal capacity is critical for the overall performance of the organization and during the design and implementation of development projects. The existence of technical capacities in terms of appropriate sector expertise, capacity to change, conducting of project assessments and compilation of evidence-based project reports is wanting in some organizations.

Presence of consistent accountability systems evidenced by sound financial and management systems, personnel management and safe guarding policies, robust community participatory engagement structures, knowledge sharing and learning systems, strategic planning, and regular project reviews tend to be weak or non-existence.

Despite the leadership capacity being high in some CSOs, the leadership commitment required to sustain the growth of organizational capacities of is lacking. A good leader understands the importance and value of systems (Adair, 2007).Once a leader understands the value of systems and processes it means the CSO will remain compliant with government and national/local CSO regulations, for example registration of organization, having a board and this builds a CSO's reputation.

For decades, capacity building was seen as assistance to local organizations primarily by providing funding and equipment, increasing financial accountability and strengthening technical skills. However, there has been a growing recognition amongst international and national organizations that while technical and financial inputs are often critical for improving performance, they alone are not sufficient to help organizations design effective strategies to adapt to dynamic environment.

The concept of localization of aid has been present in the humanitarian sector for decades in the form of 'building on local capacities'(Van Brabant & Patel, 2018).According to Decorby-Watson et al., (2018) capacity-building interventions enhance knowledge, skill, self-efficacy, changes in practice or policies, behaviour change, application, and system-level capacity.

Capacity development is a long-term commitment, however adequate time is rarely allocated for the process (Hagelsteen & Becker, 2019).For example, when organizational assessments are conducted in the right way at the right time they provide in-depth information about an organization's capacity and this information can be used to inform and design appropriate organizational capacity development strategies. Therefore, assessments should be viewed as a tool for capacity-strengthening rather than solely as funding mechanisms or performance evaluation.

Capacity development is context-specific and requires an understanding of the current situation before developing actions to address it(Hagelsteen & Becker, 2019).Assessments enable organizations focus on discovering internal strengths and builds on successes to improve organizational effectiveness. Assessment should be context specific as this helps the organization develop its own appreciation and awareness of its capacity, the assessment results should enable a CSO chart its growth based on its particular socio-cultural context, local environment, role in the sector of operation, and organizational vision.

Capacity assessments provide an opportunity for internal reflection among staff members and leadership to reflect and create a shared vision for the future. Doing this reflection exercise strengthens internal collaboration across functions and creates joint commitment goals.

Assessments also support the implementation of demand-driven interventions, this view concurs with that of Van Brabant & Patel ,(2018) who state that capacity-strengthening efforts should be purpose and need-driven, not supply-driven. For institutional strengthening to be useful and effective, the organization should be willing and proactive in identifying and introducing the required changes to enhance the capacity areas.

Strong capacity that is locally generated and sustained, is critical to the success of any development enterprise. However, without strong capacity, the integrity of development achievements may be compromised and progress may remain rootless and illusory, separated from the capacities that already exist and vulnerable to the increasingly severe and complex global challenges faced (Kanni et al., 2009).

Organizational capacity is not static and can grow or diminish during an organization's development phase or when leaders do not consistently provide the appropriate resources. Hayes, (2002) states that organizational change initiatives are undertaken to improve effectiveness. However, if the capacity change process is not well managed it is most likely to lead to unintended effects that may lower an organizational performance or its sustainability. Therefore, the need for undertaking periodic assessments and ensuring a mentorship process exists to facilitate the changes required within a clearly stipulated time frame.

2. Purpose and Design

2.1. Purpose and Objectives of Assessment

The purpose of the exercise was to encourage a reflective self-assessment among civil society organizations (CSOs). The assessment was designed to help organizations reflect through various organizational management functions, to help identify areas where the organization have appropriate capacity and identify areas where improvements could be undertaken.

2.1.1. Objectives

- To conduct a mapping of local CSOs capacity to determine the institutional and programmatic strengths and gaps.
- To identify and propose areas of interventions to support the process of capacity building.
- To develop a capacity building plan, to support change initiatives

2.1.2. Assessment Design and Methodology

The assessment was undertaken between 2018 and 2019 and was based on a participatory and consultative learning approach using group interviews in the form of FGDs and a desk review of available secondary information. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to collect the data.

The exercise was undertaken in two regions in Tanzania where the CSOs were implementing community development and health projects in collaboration with other stakeholders. Ten CSOs were purposively selected who comprised of local NGOs and FBOs who were involved in implementing a community project within the selected regions, a total of 60 participants were invited to participate in the discussions.

The respondents were purposively selected based on their role in implementing projects within the organization and their contributions in the development of organizational structures and processes. They included project officers, program/ project managers, administrators, finance representatives, accountants, M/E personnel, board representatives and directors.

The assessment team visited the field offices of the identified CSOs to assess their capacity through document reviews, on-site discussions using focus groups and observations were conducted using a structured tool. The six assessment areas were: governance and leadership, organizational management; human resource, project management, collaboration and financial management.

On-site the assessment team were involved in joint discussions and verification of the information that related to governance and leadership through examining documents to ascertain the legal existence of the organization; functioning of the boards and the extent to which the oversight body was able to ensure accountability. Organizational management component was assessed by reviewing presence of strategic plans and organizational policies.

Previous capacity assessments were also reviewed to understand previous findings and this also assisted in the development of the institutional strengthening plans. Human resource management aspects assessed were such as staffing levels, capacity, availability of staff documentation, reporting structures, and supervision.

Project management capacity was assessed by reviewing project documents and existing monitoring, evaluation and reporting structures to understand the mechanisms for implementing and reporting project activities and to establish the organization's capacity to implement projects, develop coherent work plans and undertake proposed activities effectively. Project evaluation reports were also reviewed to validate how prior projects were designed, impact that resulted and to verify that the relevant findings were used to design future projects. The extent of collaboration was assessed through review of documents and discussion on the existing collaborators, nature of collaborations and the resources available to support projects undertaken by the organization.

Financial management areas assessed included aspects of finance staffing, available systems for financial controls and accounting and finally financial budgeting monitoring and reporting. All these documents were reviewed jointly with the teams using a checklist of questions developed to guide the discussion. Once the assessment exercise was completed the organizations were assisted in developing capacity building plans that addressed the gaps identified.

3. Presentation of Assessment Findings

This section discusses and highlights the key findings and analysis from the assessment. Each of the assessment area was given a weighted score and the overall total for all the sections calculated to arrive at a numerical weighted average. Any CSO falling in the range of 29-42 was categorized as being in the expanding phase (growing capacity with minor gaps); 15-28 were categorized as being in the developing phase (reasonable capacity available but may require short term capacity building support) and finally 0-14 as being in the embryonic phase (emerging capacity and require consistent capacity building support).

The selected CSOs had between 5 to 20 staff, they had been operation between 5 to 25 years, sixty (60) percent of the organizations were registered as national organizations so could have other offices in other regions. Fifty (50) percent of the organizations has some affiliation to religious organizations.

3.1. CSO Capacity Results

3.1.1. Overall Capacity and Performance

Based on the overall assessment, sixty (60) percent of the CSOs were in the expanding phase, thirty (30) percent were in the developing phase, and ten (10) percent were in the embryonic phase.

The results also showed that the most organization's capacity were in the expanding phase and this could be attributed to past assessments and capacity building provided by other donors as most of the organizations had interacted with the OCA process through other organizations.

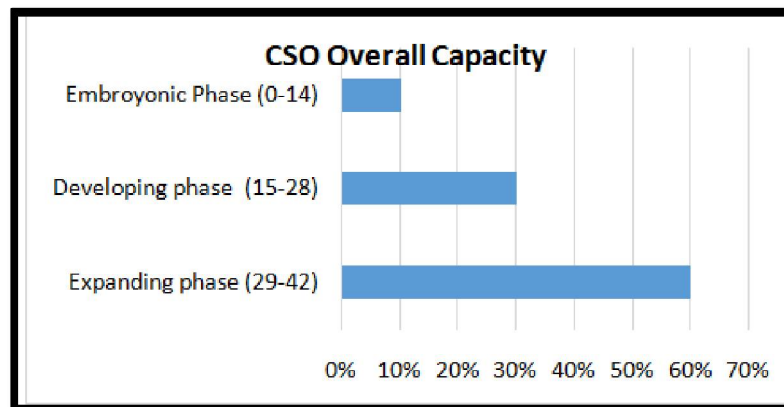


Figure 1: Overall CSOs Capacity

The scores and ranking of six categories that were assessed were; governance (67%), financial management (66%) and human resource (65%) scores were reasonably high and then followed by project management (64%), organizational management aspects (61%) and collaboration (58 %).

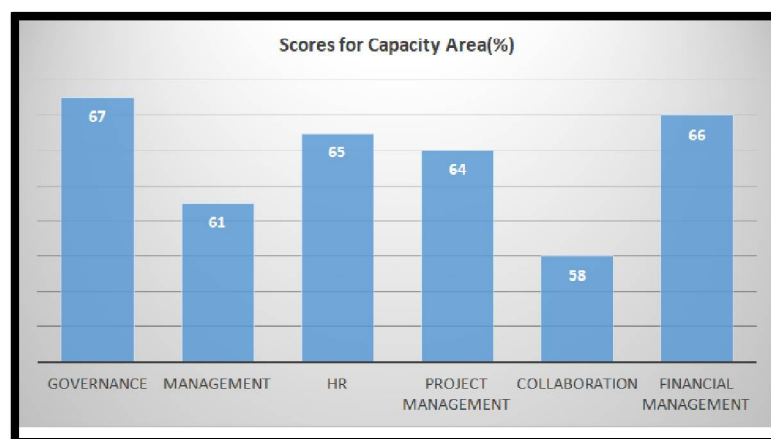


Figure 2: Ranking and Performance of the Six Capacity Areas

The score in the governance and leadership aspect could be attributed to the fact that every organization is required to have a governance structure in place and some of the CSOs because of the sector of operation they are required by the government law to ensure that a governing board is in place while others have been existence for more than 15 years and this practice has been established for a while. The other reason for this score was that some CSOs mentioned during the interviews that a national NGO had received donor funding that was targeted for building the leadership capacity of the boards for selected CSOs in that region for a period of one year.

The score in the financial and human resource could be attributed to support provided by international organizations that funded these organizations before the assessment exercise. All the organizations were required to comply with financial standards set by the donors and government for them to receive the funds. In the area of HR, the score could be attributed to support from donors and the local government to in terms of staffing for the various projects and also training received from the different stakeholders.

Yet one interesting observation was that most of the CSOs did not have a specific person with a role of a human resource officer, but an example of the FBOs assessed they had an administrator who was appointed by the respective church to oversee the running of the institution and who received training at one point in time during engagement.

The project management area, ranking is based on the fact that many of the organizations received training for the staff in the area of technical capacity that related to the project but not necessarily in the project management functions. Despite, there being support on the technical aspects, the project management aspects like reporting, monitoring outcomes seemed to lag behind.

Collaboration is a desired competency for the scalability and replicability of project outcomes, yet it still not fully embraced among the CSOs. A review of the strategic plans developed revealed that none had included a specific objective related to the collaboration aspect. Only 30% of the organizations had collaboration or partnership mentioned in their strategic plan and went further to highlight activities to achieve the objective.

In the area of management, the low score could be attributed to changes in leadership, ability and knowledge on how to manage an organization especially in putting in place structures and polices could be wanting and especially in the area of strategic visioning and planning. Only about 20% of the organizations had a comprehensive and functional strategic plan in place with measurements to assess progress included.

3.1.2. Summary of Findings from Individual Capacity Areas

Eighty percent (80) of the CSOs visited had a functional governance structure in place, however some gaps that may have resulted to the low score in the governance aspect included; no evidence of a documented board development plan or charter, replacement or election of board members was done erratically; board meetings or orientation sessions done were not supported with evidence such as minutes or reports; attendance of the board members to meetings was irregular and induction of board members not done and finally there was no clear separation of roles between the board and management.

Organizational management assessment results showed that all the ten CSOs were registered with the appropriate sector and therefore, legally compliant. Yet many did not perform with high scores in this section due to gaps such as outdated or poorly elaborated strategic plans; and where the strategic plans existed the work plans derived from the strategic plan were not comprehensive or absent and the objectives and targets not well stated. Finally, most of the CSOs did not have a budget that clearly showed the resources required to implement the plan. 80% of the organizations had organizational policies and manuals, however some of the documents did not reflect the existing practices or were outdated.

The human resource area had an overall score of 65% and this capacity area was perceived as developing. This score could be attributed to the fact that most of the organizations received donor support that required them to recruit the right personnel and also because government regulations also required certain staff documentation and structures to be available. Despite, all organizations reporting the existence of a personnel policy and job descriptions however some of the documentation did not align the ongoing practices and to the specified staff role.

Some gaps noted that contributed to the moderate score were; no evidence that the HR policies were reviewed periodically, supervision and coaching of the staff was minimal and staff appraisals were inconsistently done. In some organizations tools to support staff appraisals were in existence but were not used regularly. Staff inductions were either done in an adhoc manner or did not happen despite the process being highlighted in the personnel manual. It was also observed that what was documented in the personnel manuals was often not consistent with the actual practice.

In the project management aspect, most CSOs had good grasp of the project implementation aspects with engagement with communities being well coordinated and implementation of project activities was reported through the beneficiaries' records available. However, gaps were noted in consistency in reporting of the project indicators and documentation of the envisioned impact at the community level.

Adequate monitoring and evaluation skills and personnel was a major capacity gap. Very few organizations had structured monitoring tools and many rarely conducted project evaluations citing lack of funds for this aspect. Other gaps observed under project management included: delayed reporting or inadequate record keeping; unavailability of an organizational project manual or M&E policies; inconsistent monitoring of activities at site level.

Documentation and replication of best practices across projects was lacking. Capacity and tools for organizational learning were non-existent in some of the organizations and this resulted in duplication of resources. The transfer of knowledge or innovative practices from one project to another proved challenging because of the silo-mentality that existed among the different project teams. Existing staff allocated the responsibility as M&E officers lacked the knowledge and skills for coordination and/ or oversight of project activities.

In finance management area, the overall score in this area was 66% and ranked among the top three aspects where the performance was perceived as developing. This score could be due to the requirements set out by the donors on financial process required to be present and also how funds need to be used and hence the organizations had to comply.

Around 60% of the CSOs had income generating activities that supplemented resources received externally. In most organization a computerized financial system existed. For example, in one organization the donor was providing funds to install a computerized financial system and was in the process of training the staff on how to use the system. Such support meant that financial budgeting and reporting practices were upgraded.

Areas where gaps were observed in the financial aspect included: inadequate segregation of roles. In most of the organizations assessed audits were not done consistently; project cash flow projections were not done regularly; procurement processes were unclear and many of the procurement process did not comply with what was stated in the finance or procurement manual.

In the area of collaboration, eighty (80) percent of the organizations assessed received about 90% of their resources from implementing donor projects and hence reliance on donor funding was very high; collaboration initiatives with other stakeholders was done in ad hoc manner and close to 80% of the organizations did not have a collaboration

strategy in place. Most of the organizations were collaborating with the government in different areas and therefore received support in implementing some of the project initiatives.

Some gaps observed in the area of collaboration or partnership engagement were; many organizations lacked the skills required to facilitate fruitful engagements with other CSOs or the capacity to seek new funding opportunities. Often the understanding of collaborations was distorted as it is always conceptualized and viewed from funding perspective. In summary, the following factors were perceived to hinder institutional and programmatic capacity; minimal board orientation on their leadership and governance roles, absence of effective systems, procedures and manuals. CSOs lacked adequate skills and resources for conducting comprehensive strategic planning processes and some would therefore have the old strategy existing that did not align to the new vision. Allocation of resources to projects also suffered due to political agendas or impacted by the 'grease' syndrome used by certain individuals or groups within the organizations. The funds provided by the donor were sometimes too restrictive for the organization to include other aspects like project evaluations or learning events. The resources provided were also not adequate to enable the organization build its own internal capacity, very few donors were willing to invest in building the overall leadership and management capacity of the organization and most funding focused on the technical capacity of some key staff.

It was therefore very interesting when some of the organizations acknowledged institutional capacity building support provided by stakeholders like the government, national CSOs, international donors like USAID through its implementing partners and others as a complementing package to those implementing the development projects, and this support enabled the CSOs grow in some of the management capacities.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The facilitated self-assessments methodology used, constituted a hybrid approach. The facilitator's role was to guide the organization in self-reflection, stimulate analysis, and ensure equitable participation. While the members of the organization used the opportunity to discuss the different organizational aspects identifying the strides made and areas where gaps still existed.

The process therefore relied on staff sharing their experiences and the willingness of the leadership to share their perspectives and together to build a joint understanding of how and why the organization functions the way it does. A productive organizational assessment exercise will have four main objectives; establish a baseline of the organization's capacity in key management areas; promote organizational dialogue, learning, and standard setting; inform capacity-strengthening plans and serve as reference point for follow-up assessments.

One critical aspect of conducting a participatory assessment is fostering a safe space where staff can freely discuss an organization's issues and priorities, without the fear of consequence when highlighting organizational weaknesses, challenges, and areas for improvement.

Van Brabant & Patel, (2018) highlight seven dimensions of localization as funding, partnerships, capacity, participation revolution, coordination mechanisms, visibility and policy. In this framework institutional capacity building is seen as key in the localization agenda and the authors advocate for the development of the individual and organizational competencies so that CSOs can play an 'effective and trusted supporting role'.

Conducting an effective organizational capacity assessment exercise and the resulting institutional improvement plan is a little bit art and a little bit science. It's about facilitating understanding of the existing capacities of the organization, and then providing insight and the right tools to facilitate the change.

4.1. Conclusion

An institutionally based OCA sets the foundation for a capacity-mentoring approach. The results ideally should be used to prioritize actions and interventions to achieve an organization's objectives and ultimately contribute to improved systems and organizational outcomes. According to Van Brabant & Patel, (2018) organizational or network capacity-strengthening should be viewed as an ongoing process, not an event.

In spite of the generally challenges with capacities, some organizations demonstrated relatively good strengths and reasonable competencies. These capacities enabled them implement projects that resulted in changing and empowering the lives of communities. Key among the strengths were the knowledge of the context, coverage of remote geographical locations, diverse range of constituencies and the demonstrated potential for undertaking replicable projects. Some organizations also demonstrated remarkable resilience over time despite experiencing reduction in donor funding over the years.

A lesson learnt is not to assume that CSOs (even among the same entity type) have the same capacity challenges or strengths. Despite the willingness of many CSOs to undertake community interventions to address the community needs identified, some of the existing capacities and competencies of the CSOs remain at the embryonic phase. Therefore, these capacities are not adequate to deliver effective and sustainable community driven processes over an extended period due to changes in the development context, donor and country policies.

Few organizations receive the required capacity development support to strengthen their internal organizational components (Batti, 2014). The focus normally is to support the CSOs in building the technical capacity of the staff who undertake the projects or undertaking generic trainings that have not factored the organization's perceived needs or context.

Periodic capacity assessments and developing a capacity building plan are important for successful implementation of community development projects and funds management. Unfortunately, many assessments are done but no follow-up is done once the funding is released.

Very few national or international organizations working with local CSOs have personnel or funds to conduct the assessment or to undertake monitoring of progress. In other instances, a consultant is hired to undertake the assessment but once it is done no follow-up initiatives are planned.

This dilemma leads to the challenge of recurring capacity gaps within the same aspects despite every effort being made to assess the CSOs during funding engagements. This observation concurs with findings of a study conducted by Hagelsteen & Becker, (2019) that highlighted the need for utilization and retention of capacity and not only focusing on the creation of capacity and this was perceived to go a long way in ensuring capacity building interventions are sustainable.

An effective capacity building engagement requires robust leadership that is proactive in learning and leading CB initiatives once an assessment exercise is conducted. Ultimately, the results of the assessment belong to the organization and should ideally support the leadership and management implement the desired changes to improve capacity.

4.2. Recommendations

Human and institutional capabilities are both needed for enhancing the performance of the CSOs and the individual staff. If an organization has major weaknesses such as no clear vision, inadequate management structures, weak internal systems, practices and management, no incentives or a dysfunctional culture, then it goes without saying that the staff are not likely to perform well regardless of knowledge and skills they possess.

An institutional strengthening initiative must be evidence-based, appropriate to the situation, and clearly articulated so that organizations understand their choices and are empowered to make decisions.

A recommended approach to facilitate and enhance organizational and project management capacity among the CSOs is the establishment of a proactive system that support capacity growth and change management interventions. Organizational capacity assessments should be undertaken not just for purposes of 'funding' or to meet the due diligence requirements but should be undertaken periodically to support growth and change in key areas that require further development.

Developing capacity involves human beings, and is a complex, iterative process that does not follow a neat linear path. It requires constant adaptation and flexibility. It requires innovative approaches where old approaches no longer work. Many of the organizations assessed were in agreement that periodic assessments were key and also alluded to the fact that with good facilitation they were able to identify gaps, strengths and later identify clear strategies that they implemented on their own.

For example, after the capacity assessment exercise was undertaken each CSO was supported to develop a plan to address the aspects where gaps were noted and a monitoring plan was developed to support tracking and monitoring of progress for a period of between six (6) to fifteen (15) months depending on the overall capacity score.

An internal organizational capacity tracking system should be developed jointly with CSOs to track the CB interventions introduced at various points, documentation of the learnings and outcome of the interventions is critical. A tracking system will monitor progress and identify persistent and new gaps to improve the CSO's organizational and project capacity. For example, the assessment teams involved in this exercise was able to make follow-up after four months and found that some of the planned actions were implemented and where the activity was not done then follow-up discussions were done with the management to understand the challenge experienced and to replan for the aspect again using a different approach.

On the other hand, CSOs should be proactive and include CB within their strategic plan and resources mobilized for this endeavor. Organizations that seek to develop their organizational capacity should can to undertake periodic assessments and engage the services of a competent external facilitator to support the assessment and change process. Often time organizations overlook the importance and role of an external facilitator in providing support during implementation of the capacity building plan.

Organizational assessments and the overall capacity building process can be intensive and time consuming. Since the assessment process is only as meaningful as the quality of staff participation. Ensuring active participation is a responsibility shared by participants, management and the facilitator. If an organization does not have adequate time to commit to completing all the steps in the exercise and following up, and/or is already fully engaged in other organizational development processes (such as overhauling the finance system), the additional burden may not be beneficial.

Many organizations that work with international organizations suffer from 'assessment fatigue,' as a result of having been assessed multiple times to meet donor expectations and funding requirements. This scenario unfortunately has led to the disregard of the role and impact of the organizational CB process among the CSOs. The question often raised is what happens when you discover the CSO does not have the capacity?

Assessment fatigue is real and many CSOs have become wary of this valuable exercise because of their experiences. Any new assessment should add value to what was done previously and that can only be achieved through development of a CB plan and making follow-up once the plans are in place. This will go a long way in ensuring the CSOs and their teams gain momentum and remain excited about the CB process as they see the progress made.

The other way to address assessment fatigue especially where donor agencies are involved is to set aside some funding to support some of the areas where gaps have been identified. One of the observations made and lessons learned through the assessment exercise undertaken is that not all CB interventions require funds to be done, they just need the right facilitator/facilitation exercise to enable the CSO do it on their own. This approach concurs with Kanni et al., (2009) who emphasize that countries should own, design, direct, implement and sustain the CB process themselves through making use of local resources that includes local institutions.

If an assessment team discovers that an organization has had a previous negative experience with a capacity building process, it is crucial to discuss what went wrong and what can be done differently. Getting feedback from the organization's members and leaders is key to facilitate acceptance of any future CB interventions.

CSO's leadership and management commitment is required for successful implementation of CB interventions. Leaders are champions and they build the required momentum for any CB undertaking. Research has established that leaders play an important role in the workplace and in developing work place practices and systems (Orazi, 2014). In this exercise, leadership was observed to be key in the successful implementation of both the assessment exercise and planned CB interventions. In many of the CSOs where the leaders were present from the board to the management level and appreciative of the process, the exercise yielded very good results in a very short period.

Building project management capacity requires clustering of a number of organizations based on their specific mandates while aligning them to the existing project focus. This can be done through undertaking co-design sessions as a means for building CSOs capacity in project design, planning, implementation and monitoring instead of only focusing on training. This is critical for successful project implementation and funds management.

CSOs and international organizations who are interested in the localization agenda need to factor a budget to initiate a capacity building (CB) intervention as part of the process of strategy development. Many at times CSOs, international organizations or government ministries that desire to engage CSOs shy away from the CB approach citing that it is expensive yet if it is done well and the right personnel with the right skills and experience are utilized it can be less costly. However, if quality and sustainable yields are desired then it comes with a price.

Finally, there is need to foster partnerships and linkages between the various CSOs with other actors for purposes of knowledge sharing and learning in areas where competencies and capacities have been identified as low or inadequate. According to Van Brabant & Patel, (2018) support should be provided to pre-existing local and national networks to avoid establishing multiple new platforms. Enhancing multi-sectoral coordination through deliberate collaboration forums among various stakeholder groups can help leverage knowledge, expertise, reach, and resources, and each local CSO will benefit from their combined and varied strengths.

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