From the Roots Up
Strengthening Organizational Capacity through Guided Self-Assessment

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World Neighbors

World Neighbors Field Guide
Capacity Building
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1.1 TRENDS IN DEVELOPMENT

The number and size of local non-government organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) involved in development work has rapidly increased over the last 15 years. At the same time, local government structures in many parts of the world have assumed more responsibility for promoting community development in response to trends towards government decentralization and democratization. These trends have not always been accompanied by an improvement in program performance at the community or district levels. In many countries there are signs that a rapid expansion of local NGOs/CBOs and the increasing role of local government may actually be lowering the quality of community development programs overall, partly because local organizations have limited capacity and experience in participatory approaches to community development.

Recently there has also been a shift in the donor community towards a “performance culture” emphasizing effectiveness, impact, cost-efficiency and accountability. However, evaluations of local development programs typically only measure results in terms of outcomes and benefits (i.e., clean water, increased income, etc.). Often, they do not assess the process dimensions of the program (the way these outcomes were achieved), although there is a growing realization that poor performance may be linked to internal organizational problems.

In response to this realization, the emerging trend in impact assessment and evaluation is to include management and capacity issues. This is designed to increase the effectiveness and viability of local organizations as organizations, rather than only focusing on what they do (i.e., the projects they and their community partners implement). This more holistic approach recognizes that project assessment cannot be divorced from the assessment of the organizations that plan, implement, support or fund them. Assessing the organizational capacity of intermediary NGOs, CBOs and local governments has become an essential competency area.

This shift to capacity building and institutional strengthening is also linked to the notion of “sustainability” and “strengthening civil society,” with the recognition that community capacity requires supportive local organizational structures and processes. It is leading donor agencies away from micro-management and towards transferring the responsibilities of assessment and improvement onto the local organizations themselves.
1.2 Two Perspectives on Capacity Assessment

Capacity assessment is currently being approached from two perspectives. First, many Northern agencies are concerned about appraising the capacity of their partners and of new organizations they are considering funding. These agencies are developing tools and procedures to enable their staff to carry out assessments in order to make funding decisions and provide advice. (Some agencies have even developed computer software programs to assess NGO capacity!)

Initially, therefore, demand for assessing organizational capacity has come from Northern donor agencies seeking an approach that can assist them as they move away from a “project” model towards program or partner-based funding.

More recently, many donor agencies have started supporting a second approach that helps local NGOs, CBOs and government structures carry out their own self-assessments. This approach is based on the principle that ongoing self-assessment and learning is integral to being a healthy organization. It arose partly in response to the criticisms, voiced by Southern organizations, that Northern systems for assessing capacity were too culturally biased, too rigid and too quantitative. In addition, many development organizations want the values of participation that are promoted in program work to be reflected in the way capacity assessment is carried out.

However, while participatory tools and methods have become widespread in development work, surprisingly little use has yet been made of their potential to strengthen the capacity of local organizations. Relatively little is written about how to use participatory tools to enable intermediary and community organizations assess their strengths and weaknesses, reflect on their performance, learn from experience, identify priorities for program development and strengthen their organizational capacity.

1.3 Developing These Tools & Methods

World Neighbors’ purpose is to strengthen the capacity of marginalized communities to meet their basic needs, and to determine and sustain an equitable and inclusive development process. The issue of community and organizational capacity is therefore central to our work. Working in partnership with individuals and organizations at the local level, World Neighbors is recognized as a leader in participatory, people-centered approaches to community development.
In order to engage in an inter-institutional learning process, a team of World Neighbors’ experienced field staff came together in 1995 to form the Action Learning Group (ALG). One of its goals was to analyze, document and promote effective strategies for strengthening the capacities of community-level organizations and local institutions. Since its inception, the ALG has conceived, field-tested and adapted participatory action learning methods to understand, assess and document change in community and organizational capacity.

Field experience in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, Nepal, Nigeria and the USA indicates that the methods developed through this ongoing process of “learning by doing” can be a powerful way to enable community groups and organizations to assess and improve their performance and viability.

1.4 The Cycle & Actors of the Development Process

This self-assessment process was designed to be used within a broader approach of sustainable development which seeks to increase the level of self-reliance and effectiveness of local organizations. There are as many ways to strengthen local groups and organizations as there are development programs; even different World Neighbors programs around the world use a variety of development approaches based on the local context and needs.

Voisins Mondiaux (World Neighbors-West Africa), with whom the tools and methods presented in this guide were first developed and tested, works with isolated, rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa. The programs begin where the people are and help them to find solutions to the problems that they face with regard to food security, health and environmental degradation. From the beginning, there is a capacity building component to the work, with efforts to strengthen the capacities of community members to organize themselves, access needed resources and eventually take over full responsibility for their development program.

The following diagrams illustrate how this gradual capacity building process takes place in the West African communities with whom Voisins Mondiaux works.
1. **Initiation:** In the rural and marginalized areas where World Neighbors-West Africa works, local organizational structures are often non-existent, weak, divided and/or not able to adapt to the rapidly changing forces that influence communities’ ability to meet their basic needs. Therefore, most of the initiative to implement a development program initially comes from WN staff members, all of whom are nationals of the countries where they work. These staff members hire and train local resource people to work directly with community leaders and groups to identify and respond to community needs. WN works with different villages in the same area, although initially there may be little cooperation or interaction among villages. WN staff also serve as the primary link with external funding agencies, while working with community members to mobilize local resources.

2. **Co-Management:** As local program staff and villagers work together on projects that respond to the expressed needs of the communities, such as water systems or communal grain banks, other more intangible accomplishments are also taking place. Village participants are pooling their resources, discussing their shared problems, and strengthening the abilities of local leaders to mobilize the community to undertake development activities. At the same time, WN local staff members are developing their own skills, their understanding of local concerns and resources, and their relationship with community members. As the program supported by World Neighbors-West Africa becomes stronger, it begins to take on its own identity. Program staff may decide to move towards forming their own local NGO, and they begin to build more direct relationships with external donors. Also at this stage, villages may officially form Village Development Committees, although they are still largely dependent on the intermediary NGO for funding and management of the development initiatives.
3. **Accompaniment**: The role of local program staff gradually shifts from an operational one to a more supportive one, helping the Village Development Committees strengthen their capacity to implement and evaluate development efforts, access financial resources and eventually take over responsibility for all facets of the process at the village level. Neighboring villages may join together to form an Intervillage Association to address larger issues and to strengthen the communities’ ability to further their common interests. This Intervillage Association also begins to form direct relationships with external partners, including donors and local government agencies. Program staff are also taking on more responsibility for accessing their funding and for administering the larger development program, while working with the communities on forming strong organizational structures. Depending on the context, local staff may transform themselves into an autonomous, local NGO, working in partnership with World Neighbors-West Africa.

4. **Partnership**: At this stage, the gradual shift of responsibility at both the community and program levels is largely completed. The Intervillage Association takes over implementation, management and evaluation of the community’s development activities. As the support needs of the active villages diminish, the newly formed local NGO will begin to organize other villages. The relationship between WN and the local NGO has evolved into a partnership. Likewise, the NGO and the Intervillage Association may work together to strengthen the capacity of newly formed local organizations. World Neighbors may continue to provide technical support to the NGO, but it is the NGO that initiates this exchange. Similarly, the local NGO will continue to work with the Intervillage Association at their request.
The ALG has also learned that, while applying capacity assessment methods is a fundamental component of an effective development strategy, these tools are not sufficient in and of themselves to strengthen capacity. Organizational capacity is a complex and context specific phenomenon. Due to these complexities, enhancing organizational capacity takes time to achieve and requires a coherent, long-term strategy that goes far beyond tools.

### Overview: Looking at the Big Picture

1. An increase in the number of local NGOs and CBOs, along with widespread decentralization, has resulted in a shift towards local organizations taking on more responsibility for development programs. However, this shift has not always resulted in improvements in program performance, partly due to a lack of local organizational capacity.

2. The emerging trend in impact assessment and evaluation is to include management and capacity issues, recognizing that project assessment cannot be divorced from organizational assessment.

3. Capacity assessment is currently being approached from two perspectives. One is primarily externally driven and is used for making funding decisions, and the other is more internally driven and is based on the principle that ongoing self-assessment is integral to being a healthy organization.

4. This self-assessment process is designed to be used within a broader approach of sustainable development aimed towards increasing the level of self-reliance and effectiveness of local organizations.

5. Capacity assessment tools are not in and of themselves sufficient to strengthen organizational capacity. Strengthening capacity takes time to achieve and requires a coherent, long-term strategy that goes far beyond tools.
3.1 **WHAT IS GUIDED SELF-ASSESSMENT?**

The self-assessment process presented in this field guide is designed to help organizations recognize their own potential and decide for themselves how to best address the challenges they face. This process provides organizations with the tools and perspectives necessary to regularly reflect on their performance, and to improve and adapt their plans and activities according to their purpose, context and resources.

A critical component of community and local organizational capacity building is to place a flexible and practical self-assessment method in the hands of community and organization members. This enables participants to identify the priority capacity areas to be strengthened in order to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of their program activities. For each of these capacities, participants formulate their own indicators to be used to evaluate the organization’s current capacity and to monitor progress over time.

3.2 **WHY DO GUIDED SELF-ASSESSMENT?**

As more organizations and donors realize that the effectiveness and sustainability of their development efforts are linked to strong organizational capacity, organizational assessment is increasingly being included as a part of monitoring and evaluation. They are finding that evaluation of projects cannot be divorced from the assessment of the organizations that plan, implement, support or fund them. This is leading away from evaluations that focus exclusively on what organizations do, and toward more holistic assessments that take into account other organizational issues such as identity, relationships with others, and decision-making.

Stakeholders may be involved, to varying degrees, in the planning, implementation, analysis and communication stages of an organizational assessment, depending on the objectives and methods used. Participatory approaches to organizational assessment, such as the those presented in this guide, are emerging partially in response to the critique of Southern NGOs that northern systems for assessment are too culturally biased, too rigid, and too quantitative. In addition, Southern NGOs express a desire to have the values of participation they promote in their program work be reflected in the way assessment is carried out. Guided self-assessment offers several other important advantages over assessment approaches that rely more heavily on outside evaluators or predetermined methods.
Guided self-assessment is based on the principle that ongoing self-assessment and learning is integral to being a healthy organisation. The process can strengthen participants’ analytical skills and contribute to creating a culture of learning within the organization. In order to bring lasting change, an organizational assessment cannot be a one-time activity, but must build the foundation for ongoing reflection, learning and growth. When organization members are actively involved (and not just consulted) in all stages of the assessment, they will be able to continue to learn and improve with little or no outside support. While the results and insights that emerge from an assessment are important, the true value of guided self-assessment is its potential to foster more systematic and ongoing organizational reflection and development.

The results from a guided self-assessment emerge from the participants’ own analytical processes. It is therefore less likely that the implications and recommendations will be dismissed as irrelevant or unrealistic. While reports prepared by outside evaluators may sit unopened on shelves, organization members are less likely to ignore findings that they themselves generated and articulated. A key challenge, however, is moving from these findings to taking actions to improve effectiveness and viability. This movement from learning towards action depends greatly on the organization’s leaders and their ability to foster a strong commitment to change.

This is not to say that other organizational evaluation approaches are not useful or effective. What is important is that the methods used are appropriate to the overall objectives of the assessment. Guided self-assessment is an effective approach when the objectives are to promote organizational reflection and learning, and when the motivation for improvement and change comes from the organization members themselves.

### 3.3 Understanding Organizational Development

When seeking to measure organizational capacity, it is critical to remember that all organizations go through various stages of development. No organization comes into existence fully mature with all its capacities strong. On the other hand, not all organizations consistently move forward in their development. Some get “stuck” in one stage, or may even regress depending on internal and external factors (i.e., the departure of a key leader or the discontinuation of funding).

The guided self-assessment process seeks to help organization members identify at what developmental stage they are currently and what actions they can take to evolve, improve performance and become
more viable. This concept of evolutionary development can take the negative judgement out of assessment. For example, an organization is not “poor” at raising funds and “good” at mobilizing volunteers, but rather has a more fully developed capacity, at this stage in its development, to mobilize people than to raise financial resources.

World Neighbors has found using the analogy of a tree to be an effective way to help participants identify these stages. A tree, when it first emerges from the ground, is particularly vulnerable and requires nurturing and protection to survive. As a tree matures, its roots grow deeper and it becomes more capable of fending for itself. The more mature the tree becomes, the more fruit it can bear. Likewise, an organization gradually grows into a viable and self-sustaining entity that becomes less vulnerable to threats, less dependent on outside support and more effective in its performance. [NOTE: See the A Common Understanding of Organizational Development exercise (pg. 97) for how to present these concepts to workshop participants.]

### Five Stages of Organizational Development

**Stage 1 Embryonic**

At the Embryonic stage, the tree is a vulnerable seed trying to penetrate the soil. At this stage, an organization is just beginning to form and to define itself.

**Stage 2 Emerging**

At the Emerging stage, the tree has broken through the soil to benefit from the sunlight. However, it is still vulnerable, and its roots are not deep.

**Stage 3 Growing**

At the Growing stage, the tree is becoming stronger and develops deeper roots. An organization at this stage can protect itself from many threats, although it is still vulnerable to significant negative forces.

**Stage 4 Well Developed**

When a tree (or an organization) is in the Well Developed stage, its roots (capacities) are strong and deep, fruit (results) starts being produced, and it can withstand all but the most extreme threats.

**Stage 5 Mature**

A Mature tree (or organization) is able to continually bear large quantities of fruits (or results). Due to its capacity building efforts, an organization at this stage has become a viable and permanent local institution.
### 3.4 What Are Capacity Areas?

Capacity areas tend to address WHO the organization is (i.e., its purpose, values and approach that give it a distinct identity), WHAT the organization does (i.e., its choice of activities, level of efficiency, etc.), HOW it operates (i.e., management issues, resource mobilization, etc.) and with WHOM it relates (i.e., program participants, donors, etc.). These capacity areas affect the performance and viability of local organizations.

#### Examples of Capacity Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legitimacy &amp; Recognition</th>
<th>Identity &amp; Vision</th>
<th>Systems &amp; Procedures</th>
<th>Performance &amp; Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official/Legal Recognition</td>
<td>Shared Hopes &amp; Commitment</td>
<td>Communication Systems</td>
<td>Able to Identify &amp; Prioritize Problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance &amp; Leadership</td>
<td>Clarity of Vision, Purpose &amp; Direction</td>
<td>Organizational Learning</td>
<td>Acquire &amp; Adapt New Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad-based Leadership</td>
<td>Shared Values &amp; Philosophy</td>
<td>Staff &amp; Volunteer Evaluation/Incentives</td>
<td>Implementation of Program Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems of Accountability</td>
<td>Resource Mobilization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative Decision Making</td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning, Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediation &amp; Conflict Resolution</td>
<td></td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Locally Appropriate Application of Policy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advocating &amp; Lobbying for Local Interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5 Locally Generated Indicators

Indicators are used to measure capacity and to track progress. Participants generate capacity indicators by imagining what their organization or community group would be like at each of the five stages of organizational development. For example, an organization with an Embryonic capacity to collaborate with other groups may only recognize the need, but be unable to initiate partnerships. At the Emerging stage, the organization would be able to identify potential partners, and so on. In this way organizations are able to diagnose their current developmental stage and measure the progress made over time.

A critical principle underlying the methods presented in this guide is that participants generate their own capacity indicators. Field tests of these exercises have generated a wealth of sample indicators, presented here to serve only as examples. It should be emphasized that it is the process of generating locally appropriate indicators of organizational capacity that is important, and not the indicators themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Self-Financing</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Program Evaluation</th>
<th>Community Organizing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embryonic</td>
<td>raises less than 20% of core costs</td>
<td>recognizes need to collaborate</td>
<td>annual informal evaluation meetings with communities</td>
<td>initiative comes from outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging</td>
<td>raises 20-30% of core costs</td>
<td>identifies potential partners initiates contact with potential partners</td>
<td>plans include some specific indicators to measure results</td>
<td>takes initiative to call meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing</td>
<td>raises 30-50% of core costs</td>
<td>collaborates with several groups</td>
<td>program evaluations use participatory methods</td>
<td>some responsibility for running meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Developed</td>
<td>raises 50-90% of core costs</td>
<td>receives significant support from partners</td>
<td>all program plans include impact indicators</td>
<td>full responsibility for calling &amp; running meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>raises more than 90% of core costs</td>
<td>benefits from all forms of support from partners</td>
<td>evaluations include nonparticipants &amp; wider community</td>
<td>diverse interest groups are involved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6 How Guided Self-Assessment Works

The tools and methods presented in this guide help participants strengthen their organizational capacity by:

- Diagnosing and prioritizing the organization’s strengths and weaknesses
- Developing locally appropriate indicators for continuing to measure these capacities
- Identifying concrete actions that will help the organization to mature

An important component of this process is that the participants themselves generate and analyze the information. For example, an organization might decide that its system of financial mobilization and accountability needs to be strengthened. On the other hand, participants may conclude that their organization already has a strong and clear vision. What is important in the process is that local organizations define their own list of important “capacity areas” to be strengthened and the indicators for measuring them.

Once organization members identify their priority capacity areas, they need to envision what a strong or “Mature” level would look like for each capacity as it relates to their purpose and performance. With this ideal in mind, participants then identify the different evolutionary stages that their organization must go through to achieve this objective.

Taking the capacity mobilizing financial resources as an example, organization members might decide that a Mature organization would raise and manage 100% of its core administrative and operating budget from diverse local funding sources. An Embryonic group, on the other hand, would rely on external donors for most of its financial needs. In between these two extremes, participants would identify the characteristics of an organization that is Emerging (i.e., raising 25% of its core budget), Growing (i.e., raising 50% of its core budget and handling most of the accounting duties) and Well Developed (i.e., raising 75% of its core budget with full responsibility for financial planning and management).

Once these stages are outlined, participants identify indicators for measuring these capacity areas, so that they can continue to assess their organization and develop their short and long-term capacity strengthening objectives for the future.
GUIDED SELF-ASSESSMENT

Participants then need to devise strategies and plan activities to achieve these capacity building objectives. This entails identifying what combination of system, structure, and environmental factors limit performance and how these can be overcome. It also requires supporting organization members to select the right mix of tools, methods and strategies for bringing about the required changes. These will vary according to the capacities identified.

Continuing with the previous example, an organization that wanted to increase its capacity to raise and manage local funds could decide to ask the support organization to provide a special grant for setting up more effective fund development activities. Or, participants may decide to begin charging a nominal fee to all NGOs that participate in a network that the organization sponsors. *The key is helping organizational members have a clear understanding of their short and long-term objectives, what they need to do to achieve them and how they are going to measure their progress along the way.* Capacity goals should seek both to improve performance or impact, and to enhance the organization’s viability.

3.7 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU REACH STAGE FIVE?

Overtime, the organization will ideally reach the Mature level for some of the capacities that it is working to strengthen. For example, an organization may eventually increase its self-financing capacity until it meets its ultimate goal of raising more than 90% of its core funding. When this happens, the organization members can choose between two strategies for continued growth and development. They may decide to direct their efforts away from the more mature capacities and focus their energy on improving the weaker capacity areas. If organization members score a five on the indicators they have set for self-financing, for example, they may stop their efforts to strengthen this capacity and focus on weaker areas.

A second option is to “raise the bar” by reformulating the indicators. In the above example, the organization could make the indicators for self-financing more challenging by adding that a certain amount of funding should come from local sources. If the organization members reformulate indicators, their organization’s score on the capacity would initially drop because new and higher standards would be set. A drop in score would not indicate a diminished ability to raise funds, but rather provide room for continued improvement. This needs to be kept in mind if comparisons over time are being made. In practice, with an ever changing environment, organizations must be constantly learning and adapting to remain viable, including re-examining their capacity building efforts and the indicators used to measure progress.
3.8 What Can a Guided Self-Assessment Address?

A guided organizational self-assessment can cover a variety of themes at both the organizational level and at the program or community level. These themes fall into four broad categories: To Do, To Be, To Relate and To Manage. Understanding these themes can help facilitators and organization members identify the focus of the self-assessment.

### Organizational Self-Assessment Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To Be (Organization Level)</th>
<th>To Do (Community Level)</th>
<th>To Manage</th>
<th>To Relate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose/Mission</td>
<td>Delivery of Services &amp; Benefits</td>
<td>Effects &amp; Impacts</td>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Needs Assessment &amp; Planning</td>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>Financial Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Organizational Learning &amp; Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimacy &amp; Recognition</td>
<td>Choice of Activities</td>
<td>Sustainability of Activities</td>
<td>Leadership &amp; Decision-Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach &amp; Values</td>
<td>Relevance of Activities</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Leadership &amp; Decision-Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability &amp; Viability</td>
<td>Strategies &amp; Efficiency</td>
<td>Relevance of Activities</td>
<td>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</td>
<td>Gender &amp; Equity</td>
<td>Mobilization of Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Constituencies (Community Groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local &amp; Regional Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partners &amp; Peer Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Donors &amp; Funding Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Networking &amp; Influencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advocacy &amp; Negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Technical/Support Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.9 Organizational Capacity Building & the Transfer of Responsibility

Building capacity of local organizations is not enough to ensure a self-sustaining development process. If the supporting intermediary organization strengthens the capacity of the local organization or community group, but does not progressively hand over responsibility for program activities commensurately, the capacity will go unused and may be lost. On the other hand, if the supporting organization hands over responsibilities too quickly and without ensuring that its local partner has developed the underlying necessary capacities, there is a great risk of failure.

For the capacity building process to become effective and self-sustaining, therefore, there must be an appropriate dynamic and progressive equilibrium between the degree of responsibility and the
organization’s capacity. The organizational self-assessment process can help ensure that this occurs.

The shaded boxes within the diagram represent the increasing level of responsibility held by a local organization as it builds its capacity. At the beginning, communities or embryonic organizations are Respon-
sive and focused on technical training and activities. Most of the resources and program implementation are managed by external staff who consult community members about decisions. Progressively, an organization will Share Responsibility for program implementation as it develops its organizational capacities and strengthens its leadership structure. As the local organization continues to mature, it will take over Implementation, or the management of the day to day operations of the program. With growing responsibility, the organization focuses on Self-Financing and long-term planning to continue to become more sustainable and autonomous. Once the local organization has achieved Independence, it continues to build links with other agencies in an ongoing effort to improve performance and viability.
1. Guided organizational self-assessment is designed to help organizations recognize their own potential and decide for themselves how to best address the challenges they face.

2. Assessing the process dimensions of a development program is important for improving the self-reliance of local organizations and for strengthening a community’s capacity to take collective action.

3. Guided self-assessment helps to create a culture of learning within an organization and provides recommendations for change that are generated and articulated by the participants themselves.

4. All organizations go through a series of developmental stages, which can be illustrated using the analogy of a tree.

5. Capacity areas tend to address who the organization is, what the organization does, how it operates and with whom it relates.

6. A critical component of participatory self-assessment is that local organizations define their own list of important capacity areas to be strengthened and the indicators for measuring them.

7. In order to smoothly transfer the responsibility from an external agency to local organizations, there must first be mechanisms in place by which leaders and community members diagnose and address their organizational strengths and weaknesses in undertaking collective action.

8. Once organizations reach their capacity goals, they can choose to focus on strengthening other capacity areas or to reformulate indicators.

9. For the capacity building process to become effective and self-sustaining, there must be an appropriate dynamic and progressive equilibrium between the degree of responsibility and the organization’s capacity.
A Common Understanding of Self-Assessment

Relevance
To establish a clear understanding of the major organizational elements addressed in the self-assessment process. A complete assessment must consider not only what the organization does (activities), but also identity, relationships and management issues.

Objectives
- To deepen participants’ understanding of the major organizational dimensions, and the themes to be reviewed and addressed through organizational self-assessment.
- To clarify or deepen participants’ understanding of how the process can help them to develop their own, organization specific, capacity strengthening program and action plan.

Selection of Participants
All participants

Steps
1. Present the idea that an organizational self-assessment should address many themes. These themes can be grouped into the broader categories: “To Do,” “To Be,” “To Relate” and “To Manage.” Give examples of themes to illustrate.
2. Using a drawing of a human figure, ask the participants to identify which parts of the body will be used to represent each of the organizational dimensions. For example, the hands could represent the “To Do” group while the heart might symbolize “To Be.”

3. Present cards with all of the organizational self-assessment themes and ask the participants to suggest any that are missing. Write these suggestions on cards and add them to the list.

4. Once all the cards are made, ask the participants to organize the themes by organizational dimensions, taping the cards to the appropriate part of the figure on the poster.
**INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF CAPACITY AREAS**

**RELEVANCE**
Through this exercise, participants share their initial perspectives about the organization’s capacities and indicate which, in their view, merit deeper analysis. It also introduces the concept of scoring, an important tool in the process of organizational self-assessment.

**OBJECTIVES**
- To elicit participants’ initial perceptions of the organization’s capacities and needs.
- To identify some criteria and indicators for measuring these capacity areas.
- To generate results that will be used in selecting future exercises.

**SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**
All participants

**STEPS**
1. Review the capacity area cards generated in the *Identifying Organizational Capacities* exercise (pg. 96) and the diagrams of the *Five Stages of Organizational Development* (see pg. 97).

2. Assign each capacity area card a letter code (A,B,C...) and place them in order along the vertical axis of a grid on the floor or large flip chart. Along the horizontal axis, designate one column for each participant and one at the end for averages and/or totals.

3. Hand out ballots and ask participants to assign the organization a score (1 to 5) for each of the capacity areas. A score of 1 would indicate being at the Embryonic stage while a 5 would be Mature.

4. When all of the participants have completed their ballots, collect them and transfer the results to the grid. Calculate the totals and/or averages and write them in the last column.

5. As a group, identify capacity areas with a wide divergence in score and circle them. Taking the first of these, ask participants to discuss the criteria that they used when scoring this capacity. Write this criteria on cards and place them near the corresponding capacity card.

6. After agreeing on the criteria, hand out new ballots and ask participants to score this capacity again. If there continues to be a wide variation of scores, ask the group to come to a consensus. If only slight differences in scores remain, take the average. Write the final score on the card and repeat this process for the other capacities with divergent scores.
**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

- Which capacity areas received the highest average scores? Why?
- Which capacities were scored the lowest? Why? For each, give concrete examples illustrating these weaker capacities.
- What benefits does the organization enjoy from its stronger capacities? What are the consequences of the weaker capacity areas?
- What capacity areas are most in need of strengthening to help the organization improve performance and become more viable?

**Tips**

- Use probing questions to ensure that a robust and objectively verifiable list of criteria or indicators is developed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity Areas</th>
<th>Participant #1</th>
<th>Participant #2</th>
<th>Participant #3</th>
<th>Averages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) Representative Decision Making</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) Communication Systems</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) Collaboration with other groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Negotiation for Services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(E) Identify &amp; Prioritize Problems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F) Implementation of Activities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(G) Lobbying for Local Interests</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(H) Clarity of Vision &amp; Purpose</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I) Systems for Raising Revenue</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(J) Mobilizing Human Capital</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(K) Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scale**

1 = Embryonic  
2 = Emerging  
3 = Growing  
4 = Well Developed  
5 = Mature
**RELEVANCE**

To better understand the specific context for capacity-building work, to generate initial findings that will be deepened in subsequent exercises, and to assess the organization’s capacity for learning and coping with change.

**OBJECTIVES**

- To enable the participants to produce a timeline indicating significant events, achievements, setbacks and changes in the history of the organization.
- To provide a reference point for later assessment of the impact of important changes on the organization’s development.

**SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

Longest serving members of the organization, leaders, administrative staff and field staff

**STEPS**

1. Present the blank timeline diagram and explain that a timeline helps to outline an historical sequence of events over a period of many years or decades.

2. Present the checklist of key events to record on the timeline and ask participants to add other important types of events to the list.

3. Have participants list key events in their organization’s history. Write these events and the year each took place on cards.

4. Ask the participants to indicate whether each event was “Positive,” “Negative” or “Neutral.” Positive events are those which improved performance or strengthen the organization. Negative events are those that set back performance or weakened the organization.

5. Tape these cards to the timeline, near the corresponding dates and in this order:
   - “Positive” events are places above the horizontal line
   - “Negative” events are places below the horizontal line
   - “Normal” or “Neutral” events are placed along the line

[Criteria for sorting events into these three categories should be determined by the participants].
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

? Who was primarily responsible for creating your organization?
? Why did these people decide to do so? What was their purpose?
? Why did a particular setback happen?
? How did you expand to reach more groups?
? What brought about a change in the purpose of the organization?
? Why did a leader resign?
? How did you succeed in getting a major funding grant?
? What did you do with the funding received in year X?
? What critical issues affecting your organization’s performance or viability arise from the analysis of the timeline?

Tips

• Often cards will fall off and get mixed up before you are able to capture the results. Code each card with the year of the event and whether it was positive, neutral or negative to avoid confusion.
• Leave plenty of room at the bottom of the timeline for the Timeline Analysis exercise (pg. 104).
• Tape several sheets of paper together to make the timeline large enough for all of the data.
ACTIVITIES ONION

RELEVANCE
To assess the relevance of the organization’s activities in relation to its purpose.

OBJECTIVES
- To measure the relative contribution of each major program activity to achieving the goals of the organization.
- To identify which activities more directly lead to the desired impacts.
- To identify activities which are less relevant to the organization’s mission and desired impact, yet take time and resources to carry out.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS
Field and program staff

STEPS
1. Ask the participants to list all the main activities of the organization and write them on cards. If you have already generated an activity list in a previous exercise, you may use this as a checklist.

2. Clarify the participants’ understanding of each activity and assign each one a letter code (A,B,C...).

3. Present a large flip chart with a drawing of an onion cut in half. Explain that the center of the onion represents the core purpose of the organization, or the desired impact. Place a card with the purpose statement or desired impact in the center of the diagram.

4. Number the layers of the onion and explain that each layer signifies the relative connection between a program activity and the purpose or desired impact of the organization. Activities that have a strong, direct relationship would be found in a layer closer to the center than those that have a weaker relationship.

5. Give each participant small squares of paper (different colors for each participant if possible). Ask them to write the codes of the different activities on the pieces of paper.

6. Ask the participants to score each activity in relation to its role in achieving the organization’s mission or desired impact (1 being closest to the core purpose). Tape all the coded papers in the corresponding layers of the onion.
**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

- What program activities are closest to the organization’s purpose?
- What activities are farthest from the organization’s purpose?
- To what extent do the participants agree? For which activities is there a significant degree of disagreement?
- What criteria was used to place the activities in the diagram?
- Why does the organization support the activities found in layers farther away from the center? Is this an efficient use of resources and time?
- To what extent are the organizational activities well selected, in relation to the organization’s purpose?
- **What critical issues arise relating to the selection and appropriateness of the organization’s activities?**

**Tips**

- Because this exercise uses small pieces of paper, there is a strong chance that cards will be lost or mixed up when the diagram is folded and stored. To avoid losing data, transcribe the activity codes and scores directly onto the onion diagram at the end of the exercise.
- Make sure that the meanings of the codes and scores are recorded when documenting the results.

**Program Activities**

A. Provide Literacy Training  
B. Exchange visits between other local NGOs  
C. Publish newsletter  
D. Leadership Training  
E. Trainings for Traditional Birth Attendants
RELEVANCE
The potential for organizational learning and change is heavily dependent on the attitude and openness of its decision-makers. It is important to assess the decision-making process and to compare the actual process to the official system, if any, outlined in the constitution, bylaws and/or organizational “organigram.”

OBJECTIVES
• To identify the key decision-makers at different levels and to determine what influence they have.
• To identify the types of decisions made within the organization.
• To assess the types of decision-making processes employed.
• To determine the degree of staff and program participant involvement in the decision-making process.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS
Representatives from different departments and levels of the organization

STEPS (1-5)
1. Review the organigram developed earlier and identify as a group the major decisions made by each department in the recent past (i.e. five years). Write each decision on a separate card (color A).

2. Sort the decision cards into three categories: “Very Important,” “Important” and “Less Important.” Code the cards accordingly.

3. Introduce and explain the different broad categories of decisions (see checklist). Each category should be written on a card (color B). Give examples to enhance the participants understanding and ask them to add other categories of decisions if they wish.

4. Tape the Decision Category cards to the top of a flip chart. Underneath each card, group the Major Decision cards into their corresponding categories. Code the cards by their categories.
5. Under each category, identify the primary people who were involved in making those decisions and write their names or position titles on cards to be places at the bottom of each column.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions (Steps 1-5)

? Who has the most input into decision-making?
? How does this pattern of decision-making affect the performance and effectiveness of the organization?
? How could this pattern of decision-making be improved?

Steps (6-7)

6. From each category, take some of the most important decisions and place them on the vertical axis of a matrix. Take the first decision on the list and ask participants to explain how the organization made this decision.

7. Write the four types of decision making processes along the horizontal axis of the matrix. Fill in the matrix by matching up each decision with the corresponding type of decision making process used. Invent new categories if some decisions do not fit in one of the four types. Code each decision card with its corresponding process.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions (Steps 6-7)

? What category of decision-making is the most common?
? How does this pattern of decision-making affect the organization’s performance and effectiveness?
? How could this pattern of decision-making be improved?
? What critical issues arise that should be addressed?

Tips

• Avoid leading questions when dealing with this sensitive issue.
LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

RELEVANCE
The effectiveness of any organization is greatly determined by the quality of its leadership. An evaluation of the leadership is essential to any self-assessment process.

OBJECTIVES
- To identify the characteristics of effective leaders.
- To enable members of the organization to assess their leaders based on the characteristics they have defined.
- To enable the leaders to learn about the perception of the organization’s members about their strengths and weaknesses.
- To assess how the characteristics of the leaders affect the functions and performance of the organization.
- To determine what aspects of leadership could be improved to strengthen the overall performance and viability of the organization.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS
Representatives from all levels of the organization

STEPS
1. Lead a discussion to arrive at a common understanding of the term “leadership.”

2. Review and agree on who the leaders of the organization are. Tape cards (color A) with their names or position titles along the horizontal axis of a grid. Under each card make one column for every participant and one column for totals and/or averages.

3. Brainstorm as a group the characteristics of an effective leader and write these qualities on cards (color B, one idea per card). Suggest others from a checklist if necessary.

4. Sort these characteristics by level of importance: “Very Important,” “Important” and “Less Important.” Tape them on the vertical axis of the grid in descending order. Ask participants to explain why some characteristics are more important than others.

5. Give each characteristic a letter code (A,B,C…) and decide as a group on a scoring system (i.e. a scale of 1 to 5). Give participants ballot sheets and ask them to score the first leader on the list for each characteristic, using the coding system on the ballots. Collect all the ballots and write the scores in the columns under the first leader’s name. Tabulate the scores and write the totals and/or averages in the last column. Repeat the process for each leader.
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

? To what extent is there consensus among participants about the scores?

? For what characteristics of effective leadership do the scores diverge the most? For each of these characteristics, what were the criteria used to decide on the scores?

? What can you deduce from the scores in general?

? In what areas do all the leaders score high? Score low?

? What are the critical issues that emerge from this analysis of the organization’s leadership?

? What are the potential areas of improvement that would enable the leadership to better serve the organization?

**Tips**

- Leaders should be present when defining characteristics, but may wish to leave during the scoring.
- This can be a highly sensitive exercise and should be conducted near the end of the process, after trust and rapport have hopefully been established between the facilitators and the participants.
- Always start with positive remarks in giving feedback and be very sensitive in the use of negative remarks, especially when the assessment affects individuals.

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**Leadership Assessment (Cont.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Executive Director</th>
<th>Program Manager</th>
<th>Fundraising Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asks for input on decisions</td>
<td>3 3 3 4 3.25</td>
<td>2 2 1 2 1.75</td>
<td>5 4 4 5 4.5 3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>4 4 5 5 4.5</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>4 4 4 4 3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegates Responsibility</td>
<td>2 2 3 2 2.25</td>
<td>5 4 5 5 4.75</td>
<td>2 3 3 3 2.75 3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has long-range vision</td>
<td>5 5 5 5 5</td>
<td>2 1 2 3 2</td>
<td>4 4 3 4 3.75 3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to compromise</td>
<td>5 4 4 4 4.25</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>4 3 4 4 3.75 3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to accept feedback</td>
<td>4 5 4 4 4.25</td>
<td>3 3 2 3 2.75</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3 3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains reasons behind decisions</td>
<td>4 4 3 4 3.75</td>
<td>5 4 5 4 4.5</td>
<td>3 4 2 4 3.25 3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives Positive feedback</td>
<td>4 5 5 4 4.5</td>
<td>3 3 3 4 3.25</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens</td>
<td>4 5 5 4 4.5</td>
<td>3 2 3 3 2.75</td>
<td>4 4 3 4 3.75 3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives constructive criticism</td>
<td>4 5 4 5 4.5</td>
<td>4 5 5 5 4.75</td>
<td>4 4 4 4 4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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From the Roots Up  135
**COMMUNITY LEVEL SUPPORT/SELF-RELIANCE**

**Have You...**
- Completed the Activity Matrix & History of Support exercises?
- Prepared a checklist & a matrix?
- Gathered the necessary materials (matrices from past exercises, flip chart, cards, markers, tape)?

**RELEVANCE**
To assess the effectiveness of the organization’s strategy to promote self-reliance and strengthen the capacities of the community groups with which it works.

**OBJECTIVES**
- To determine the extent to which the organization’s support activities contribute to self-reliance among its partner groups or communities.
- To identify changes in the organization’s approach that will improve efforts to strengthen community capacity.
- To understand the connection between creating self-reliance and the ability of the organization to achieve a wider impact.

**SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**
Program and field staff

**STEPS**
1. Review the information from the Activity Matrix (pg. 116) and, if you have already recorded the results, take the cards with the groups or communities written on them. If you have not yet captured the information, rewrite the group names on new cards for this exercise (color A). Write the date the organization started working with each community or group on each card.

2. Assign each activity named in the Activity Matrix a letter code (A,B,C...). On each community or group card, write the codes that correspond with the activities undertaken.

3. Review the information from the History of Support exercise. Clarify the concept of support and discuss criteria for distinguishing among HIGH, MIDDLE and LOW levels of support (i.e. number of support visits, trainings or funding provided, etc.).

4. Sort the community or group cards into these three categories, based on the relative level of support they have received. Code each card on the back with its assigned level of support (for example: H-S, M-S, L-S).

5. Introduce the concept of self-reliance and ask the participants to list characteristics of group “self-reliance.” Suggest other characteristics from a checklist if necessary. Write all of these characteristics on cards (color B).
6. Referring to this list, identify criteria for distinguishing among HIGH, MEDIUM and LOW levels of self-reliance. Shuffle the cards and ask the participants to now sort them into these three categories of self-reliance, using the criteria established. Code each card on the back (using a different color marker) with its assigned level of self-reliance (for example: H-SR, M-SR, L-SR).


**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

- Which groups have high self-reliance, but received low or medium support from the organization? Explain these cases.
- Which groups received high levels of support but are low in self-reliance? Explain these cases.
- Why are some groups more self-reliant than others, despite receiving the same or less support than others?
- What are the factors other than the organization’s support that contribute to or detract from groups’ self-reliance? Considering these factors, to what extent is the high level of self-reliance for certain groups due to the organization’s support activities?
- How can you determine to what extent the organization is really contributing to self-reliance rather than creating dependency on services and assistance?
- To what extent does the current strategy for promoting self-reliance take into account the different needs of the target groups?
- To what extent does the organization have an effective strategy for promoting self-reliance among its target groups?
- What critical issues arise in terms of the organization’s ability to promote self-reliance?

**Tips**

- Write all the information on the back of cards to avoid influencing participants’ categorization of self-reliance.
- When recording the results, don’t forget to capture the information written on the back of the cards.
Have You...
- Prepared a checklist of responsibilities?
- Prepared a grid?
- Gathered the necessary materials (flip chart, cards, markers, small stones or beans, tape, calculator)?

**RELEVANCE**
To identify the degree to which tasks and responsibilities have been transferred from the intermediary organization to the community group. This exercise helps to identify objectives and indicators for this transfer of responsibility and is essential for clarifying the exit strategy.

**OBJECTIVES**
- To identify the degree of responsibility held by the different actors or interest groups.
- To assess the current level of transference of responsibility.
- To establish objectives and indicators for the continued transference of tasks and responsibilities, in response to the growing capacity of the community group.

**SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**
Participants should include community leaders who have been involved with the program for a significant period of time and are familiar with the various actors in the process.

**STEPS (1-5)**
1. For each program sector addressed by the organization, ask participants to name all the major tasks and responsibilities necessary for running an effective and viable program. Suggest others from the checklist if necessary. Write each response on cards (color A) and tape them to the vertical axis of a matrix.

2. Have participants name all the major actors or interest groups who are directly involved in running the development program. These could include the village association, the intermediary organization, donors, technical support, etc. Suggest other interest groups if necessary. Place the cards for each actor in a row along the top of the matrix. Draw columns for each actor.

3. Explain that, for each task, there are ten beans (or stones) to distribute among the various actors. Ten beans represent the total amount of responsibility for each task. Verify that the participants understand this concept.

4. Take the first task on the list as an example. Ask the participants to distribute the ten beans among the different actors in a way that reflects their relative levels of responsibility currently. For example, if the task is shared equally between the community group and the intermediary organization, the participants would place five beans under each. Ask the participants to repeat Step 5 for the remaining tasks.
**Semi-Structured Interview Questions (Steps 1-5)**

1. Does the community have full responsibility for any tasks? Why or why not?
2. Which responsibilities are shared? Why?
3. In your opinion, which tasks and responsibilities are the most important to transfer to the community? What are the obstacles or challenges that prevent the transfer of these tasks?

**Steps (6-7)**

6. Now repeat the process to reflect the situation in the recent past. Decide together on the time period for assessing change (i.e. 5 years). Move the task cards to the left in order to create space for another matrix section. Duplicate the actor cards and place them in the same order along the horizontal axis of the second section of the matrix (see diagram). Have the participants place beans under each actor to reflect the past situation.

7. If time permits, ask the participants to envision what the situation will be like in the future. Create a third section on the matrix and repeat the process, having participants distribute the beans in a way that reflects their hopes for future distribution of responsibility.

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions (Steps 6-7)**

1. For which tasks has there been the largest transfer of responsibilities to the community? The smallest transfer? Why?
2. Are the predictions realistic? What capacities must be strengthened in order to achieve this transference of responsibility?
**Have You...**
- Conducted the Viability Assessment exercise?
- Prepared a matrix for categorizing threats?
- Prepared a checklist of possible threats to viability?
- Gathered the necessary materials (flip chart, cards, markers, tape)?

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**RELEVANCE**
To identify and prioritize the main issues to address in order to improve the viability of the organization.

**OBJECTIVES**
- To help participants identify and analyze the main threats to their organization’s ability to become more self-sustaining.
- To identify critical issues that need to be addressed to strengthen the organization’s ability to overcome these threats.

**SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**
Organization members from all levels and departments

**STEPS**
1. Review the qualities of a sustainable organization and the scores given during the Viability Assessment exercise (pg. 150).

2. Clarify the meaning of “viability” and ensure that there is a common understanding. Organizational viability can relate to:
   - Core costs being met
   - Ability to continue project after donor funding ends
   - Access to funds (diverse donor base, local resources)
   - Strategic Planning
   - Relationships with other organizations
   - Efficient financial management

3. Clarify the term “threat.” Emphasize that threats are EXTERNAL to the organization, but can lead to its downfall.

4. Ask participants to list key external threats to the viability of the organization. Write these threats on cards (color A). Suggest other possible threats from a checklist if necessary.

5. Discuss the difference between a **large** threat and a **small** threat to ensure a common understanding and acceptance of the criteria for each. Have the participants group the threats into these two categories based on their relative potential impact on the organization. Write codes on the cards to identify in which category they were placed (i.e. L and S).

6. Ask participants to explain why they categorized some threats as large and some as small. Then ask participants to prioritize the threats within each category.
7. Tape the cards to the vertical axis of the matrix in descending order of importance. On the horizontal axis, label one column “Partially within the organization’s control” and another column “Completely out of the organization’s control.” Mark an X in the column that corresponds with the nature of each threat listed.

8. Identify which threats are both large and partially within the control of the organization. Ask the participants to think of ways the organization could address these threats and write their responses on cards (color B). Tape these cards to the side of the matrix.

9. Ask the participants to identify the factors that affect the organization’s ability to address or control these threats. List them on cards (color C) and tape them to the bottom of the flip chart.

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

? What are the critical issues the organization must resolve in order to overcome threats to its viability?

**Tips**

- Agree on a clear definition of a threat before you begin.
- If the results are not going to be recorded soon after the exercise, code the cards with their appropriate categories to avoid losing information.

**External Threats**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Threats</th>
<th>Partially within our control</th>
<th>Completely out of our control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climatic Conditions (L)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor Withdrawal of Support (L)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts with other NGOs (L)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Qualified Personnel (L)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Instability (L)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late arrival of funds from donor (S)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Donor Policies (S)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Access to New Donors (S)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ways to Address These Threats**

- Seek to collaborate with other orgs.
- Communicate better with donors.
- More staff training & development.
- Participate more in NGO network.

**Constraining Factors**

- Staff workload too large/stressful
- Project tends to be donor driven
- Lack of local donor base
PRIORITIZING CAPACITY AREAS

RELEVANCE
If the capacity areas identified are quite numerous, it will not be possible to address all of them at once. This exercise helps the participants prioritize which capacity areas they need to devote their limited resources to strengthening.

OBJECTIVES
- To deepen the findings of the Identifying Capacity Areas exercise (pg. 168).
- To identify priority capacity areas to be addressed.
- To generate a list of capacities that will be included in the capacity strengthening program and the action plan.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS
All participants (including facilitation team members)

STEPS (1-6)
1. Review the list of capacities identified in the Identifying Capacity Areas exercise. Tape the title cards from the capacity groups along the vertical axis of a grid. Assign a letter code (A,B,C...) to each.

2. Ask the participants to identify any capacity groups that are strongly linked (i.e. one cannot be addressed without working on the other). Indicate this connection by either placing the cards together or by drawing lines on the flip chart connecting the cards.

3. On the horizontal axis, designate one column for each organization member participating in the exercise. Leave a column for tallying their scores, then designate one column for each of the facilitation team members. Leave a column for tallying these scores, then designate one column for totals. Label each section: Members, Facilitators and Total.

4. Present the first question (see box). Clarify the participants understanding of this question and elicit examples of potential improvements that could arise from addressing several capacity issues.

5. Each participant gets five votes. Participants can distribute their votes among the capacity areas in any way they think best represents the organization’s priorities. One person might put all five votes on one capacity while others might spread their votes among five capacities, or put two on one and three on another.

6. Hand out ballots and ask the participants to distribute their votes by marking lines or dots next to the letter codes on the ballot sheet.
Have them write on the top of the ballot whether they are an organization member or a facilitation team member. When all the participants have finished, collect the ballots and transfer the scores to the grid.

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions (Steps 1-6)**

? What are the capacity areas that most people agreed upon? Why are these seen as important?

? What are the capacity areas that received only a few votes? Why did some not vote for these issues while others did?

? What are the capacity areas that received no votes at all? Why?

? What are the capacity areas that are identified as priorities by both the organization members and the facilitation team?

? For which capacity areas is there a divergence in scores? Why did each group vote the way that it did?

**Steps (7-8)**

7. Hand out new ballots and repeat the prioritization process, using the second question as a guide (see box). You can either record the votes in another color on the same grid or create a second grid.

8. Discuss the results using the SSI questions, and then allow the organization members time to arrive at a final consensus on the priority capacity areas to address (not limited to performance or viability). These results are then presented and discussed by all.

**Tips**

- Do not insist on this prioritization process if you meet with resistance. Continue with the subsequent exercises. Once the Action Plan is designed, it will usually become evident that it is unrealistic for the organization to undertake such an ambitious program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Capacities, Ability to...</th>
<th>Organization Members</th>
<th>Facilitators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop Human Resources (A)</strong></td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengthening Self-Reliance (B)</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Documentation/Program Evaluation (C)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender Policy (D)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to Information (E)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increase Funds for Operations (F)</strong></td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question #2: What capacity areas do you judge to be a priority for the organization to address in order to strengthen its viability?
**Have You...**

- Conducted the Formulating Support Activities & Action Plans exercise?
- Prepared a Pyramid of Action?
- Prepared a calendar?
- Displayed the Action Plans?
- Gathered the necessary materials (flip chart, cards, markers, pencils, tape)?

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**Relevance**

All capacity strengthening programs will consist of both short and long-term activities. Most programs will also require outside resource people and support. This exercise helps participants make one unified Action Plan that takes these factors into account, as well as assess how realistic their action plan is.

**Objectives**

- To synthesize the plans developed for each priority capacity area into one unified Action Plan.
- To assist members of the organization to identify the different actors involved in undertaking the Action Plan.
- To identify short and long-term activities.
- To enable the organization members to fit the activities of their Action Plan into their normal operational activities and programs.

**Selection of Participants**

All participants

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**Steps**

1. Present the Pyramid of Action diagram and explain the six different sections of the pyramid. Assign a code to each section (i.e. A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2).

2. Agree on the overall time period of the Action Plan (i.e. two years) and on the definition of short and long-term. Write these at the bottom of the pyramid.

3. Verify that the participants understand the division of roles and responsibilities represented by the different levels of the pyramid.

4. Divide the participants into the same small groups that made the action plans for each priority capacity area. If not already done, have the participants code the cards to the capacity area for which they were formulated. Ask each group to place their activity cards next to the Pyramid of Action by the sections that represent the level of support needed to achieve them.

5. As a group, eliminate any duplicates and synthesize similar activities. Then look at each section and decide together which actions need to be done in the short-term and which are long-term activities. Tape them in the corresponding sections of the pyramid.
6. Ask participants if they think that the Action Plan is realistic. If not, make modifications, shift some cards from short-term to long-term, or eliminate some of the activities.

7. Ask the organization members to fill in a calendar with their normal schedule for undertaking major operational activities throughout the year. Place this calendar next to the Pyramid of Action.

8. Have the participants write the activities from the Action Plan onto their calendar. Make revisions or modifications as necessary to incorporate the capacity building activities into the work plan.

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

? How much staff time can the organization shift from program work to organizational capacity building activities?

? What are the best periods in the program calendar to conduct capacity building activities? What periods are the worst?
Capacity Building: an explicit intervention to improve an organization’s performance in relation to its purpose, context, resources and sustainability. The aim is to develop a more effective, viable and autonomous local organization by creating the conditions in which change can take place from within the organization. Capacity building entails a self-managed process of organizational change, by which leaders and members learn to diagnose their organizational strengths and weaknesses, identify critical issues, and devise, apply and assess solutions.

Strengthening capacity requires not only new skills and changes in individual behavior, but also changes in organizational behavior. Therefore, investing only in training (or human capital) is not a sufficient capacity building strategy because it does not address critical organizational development issues (i.e. systems, structures, processes, etc.).

Community: a concept pertaining essentially to social relations, a group of people, less self-sufficient that society, but who have closer “associations” and deeper sympathy among members that society in general. Members of a community often share a common identity, tend to use a common language, have clear criteria for membership and understand the social boundaries within which they operate. There are social and psychological ties among members, and often a connection with a geographic area. While one of the functions of community is promote common interest, relationships of dominance and dependency exist in communities as they do in all human organizations.

Community-Based Organization (CBO): an inclusive type of organization created and controlled by local people for their own benefit. These can be traditional organizations or more recently formed groups designed to help members meet their basic needs and further their common interests. Examples include self-help groups, savings and credit groups and village development committees.

Community Capacity: the characteristics of communities that affect their ability to identify and address social, economic, cultural and environmental issues affecting their members. Community capacity operates at the individual, group and organizational levels, and develops in stages. Community capacity requires supportive local organizational structures and processes.
Community Development: a socio-political process undertaken by an organized group of people to improve the social, economic, cultural and/or environmental situation of their community.

Empowerment: capacity building contributes to local empowerment by changing the nature of relationships among community members and between community-based organizations and external agencies. Capacity building can empower traditionally marginalized groups (i.e. women, ethnic minorities, etc.) to more fully participate in community development and decision-making. Also, as members of CBOs learn to take initiatives, negotiate, mobilize local resources, diagnose problems, plan, evaluate and organize more effectively, they will acquire greater control over the local development process.

Institution: a stable and persistent pattern of norms and behaviors that serve some socially valued purpose. Most institutions are organizations that have acquired a special status and legitimacy for having satisfied people’s needs over time.

Institutional Development: a continuation of organizational development that seeks to achieve legitimacy and sustainability.

Intermediary Organization: unlike community-based organizations, intermediary organizations are not set up by, controlled by or directly accountable to beneficiary groups. They are often legally registered organizations with professionally paid staff, and exist to further the interests of external constituencies. In the flow of development assistance from donors to intended beneficiaries, intermediary organizations perform a range of support roles, most often providing community development services such as credit, health care or agricultural extension.

Local: Locality implies a prevalence of face-to-face interpersonal relationships which creates opportunities for collective action, mutual assistance, and mobilizing and managing common resources. While the individual and household levels are the smallest unit of decision-making and collective action, they are not part of this concept of local. Decisions and actions related to sustainable development taken solely at this level are not likely to be effective or long lasting unless they are meshed with what other households and individuals are doing at the group, community or “local” level.
**Organization:** a structure of recognized and accepted roles which unites a group of individuals who are working towards a common purpose. These roles are joined in a logical fashion so that, taken together, they discharge the work required to meet the organizational purpose. Individuals within organizations occupy roles with specific responsibilities which are integrally linked to those of other members.

**Organizational Development:** a process of strengthening the capacity of organizations to be autonomous and effective in achieving their goals. It requires helping organizations identify the combination of system, structure, style and environmental factors that limit performance. It also entails helping the organization select the right mix of tools, methods and strategies to overcome these limiting factors.

**Phasing Out:** a process of changing the relationship between a community organization and an intermediary organization to a partnership between two independent organizations, characterized by support offered in both directions while working towards a common goal. Phasing out consists, among others, of a progressive reduction of support needed by and provided to the community organization.

**Viability:** for organizations, this means reaching a stage where further development can occur without undue dependence on outside support, particularly funding support. Organizational viability refers to core costs being met, access to funds, strategic planning, positive relationships with other organizations and efficient financial management.