Strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations to enhance democratisation, decentralisation and local governance processes
Practice Paper
August 2016

Introduction

This Practice Paper outlines the issues that need to be considered when designing and implementing a civil society capacity strengthening strategy. It is based on a review of the latest literature and a discussion group (D-Group) survey among SDC country offices and implementing partners in which participants shared their experiences and lessons. You can download the literature review and survey results from: https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/

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Capacity for what and who?

Before starting to design a strategy, you must clarify "capacities for what and who?" Why does SDC want to strengthen civil society capacity, and what change do you expect to see as a result? This requires clarification of what issue(s) you want to address, and who it would be best to work with? This could be part of your impact hypothesis. Is the issue one of enhancing civic engagement and vibrant civil society in general terms, or is it one of trying to support CSOs who are advocating for change on a specific issue, or is the issue one of improving the internal governance of specific civil society organisations (CSOs) to ensure better financial sustainability, or is it one of trying to improve coordination between CSOs in order to form alliances?

What capacities?

The term capacity refers to the ability of individuals, institutions and societies to do something. Let's take an example: the capacity to learn from mistakes. This capacity can exist at the individual level, an institutional level, and at a societal level.

At all three levels, the environment will either support or undermine the capacity to learn from mistakes. For example, if an individual is working in an organisation that punishes staff who admits to having made a mistake, individuals are unlikely to learn from them. Similarly, at an institutional level, if there is not an institutional culture of sharing learning from mistakes, these lessons will not be institutionally embedded. Finally, if at a societal level, if it is easy to hide or cover up mistakes (through avoiding public inquiries for example), lessons will not be learnt. Therefore, capacity needs to be understood as systemic: It is not only about skills and procedures, but also about incentives and governance within an organisation and the working environment of organisations.

Broadly, the capacities that are important for civil society to contribute towards good governance processes are the ability to: be able to undertake context analysis; navigate complexity; understand and engage with power; learn and adapt; undertake advocacy and influence change; make alliances; and generate a base of support.

These capacities can be divided into functional and technical capacities; or in other words, between more generic, crosscutting capacities (e.g. engage stakeholders, formulate policies, foster coalitions, design and implement a strategies etc.) and specific expertise in a specific sector or domain (e.g. understand the implications of a specific education reform).

Positive leadership and using power relationships to foster positive change are important drivers of the capacity to contribute to good quality governance processes.

D-Group survey findings:

Participants in the D-Group survey gave priority to the following capacities when supporting civil society:

- Promoting responsible citizenship;
- Shaping values and behaviour for legitimacy, e.g. organisational building;
- Inclusiveness, learning, transparency, internal governance (internal control system, financial management), institutional strengthening and organisational development;
- Developing skills for effective action, e.g. communication, policy analysis, strategic alliance-building, technical know-how, organisational and managing coalition;
- Constituency building.

Assessment and Measurement:

Once you have identified why you want to strengthen civil society capacity, and what the result is you expect to see, it is important for you to be able to assess and measure changes in civil society capacity. In order to do this, you need to understand the context in which civil society functions. This includes: 1) understanding who the key players are within civil society (these can be within organized and non-organized civil society), 2) understanding the existing capacities of those key players and 3) understanding how the environment enables or constrains the development of those capacities, including the role of power and political economy.

We recommend undertaking a context analysis (which can be used to inform the design and act as a baseline measurement).

1) To identify key players within both organized and non organized civil society, it is important to cast the net wide, and include analysis of social media as well as traditional media, and include a broad definition of civil society to include non-institutionalised citizen movements

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Tools:

SDC Political Economy and Development, Tool 1: Stakeholder Analysis, Tool 2: Drivers of Change
https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/

Drivers of Change Analysis: This analysis is useful for assessing the role of institutions (both formal and informal) in contributing to change. This can be particularly useful when trying to identify non-organised civil society and understand its role in a particular issue:
http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/doc59.pdf

The UNDP commissioned this study which makes recommendations for how to improve participatory Civil Society Assessments so they capture the informal and non-organised elements of civil society:
http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/partners/civil_society/investing_in_civil_society/2011_UNDP_The-Future-of-Participatory-Civil-Society-Assessments_EN.pdf

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2) To understand the existing capacities of key players, there are several approaches you could take. You could use existing secondary evidence, such as the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (see below), or commission a capacity assessment (see examples below), using a specific framework, such as the Istanbul Principles or the European Centre for Development Policy and Management's Five Capacities Framework (see both below). It is important to adopt a positive approach to any capacity assessment, emphasizing and assessing existing capacities that can be strengthened and built upon, rather than using a gap analysis as an entry point (and emphasizing lack of capacity). It is important to focus on identifying what drives and motivates CSOs and support capacity where there is endogenous energy and ownership.

Capacity Assessment Tools:

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI)
This is a participatory needs assessment and action planning tool for civil society around the world, with the aim of creating a knowledge base for civil society strengthening initiatives. It can be used to assess the capacities of civil society organisations within your country, as well as the enabling environment in which they operate. So can be used as both a base line assessment and context analysis, and as a way of measuring change in capacity, and the enabling environment, over time. CIVICUS has created a searchable online database. The database allows users to create personal accounts to access and search the CSI data and diamond in all countries that have completed and published the CSI results. For more information:
http://www.civicus.org/csi/

UNDP has produced this report on how it used the CIVICUS Index in 5 countries in order to undertake a context analysis:
http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/partners/civil_society/publications/2011 _UNDP_Participatory-Civil-Society-Assessments-Experiences-from-the-Field_EN.pdf

The Learning Network for Capacity Development has a guide to capacity assessments here: http://www.lencd.org/learning/how-assess-existing-capacity-define-capacity-needs and a guide on how to develop capacity indicators (please note these are generic and not specific to governance): http://www.lencd.org/learning/howto-indicators

The UNDP also has a guide to civil society capacity assessments here, which includes an annex with 21 civil society assessment methods, and examples of 16 completed assessments: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/partners/civil_society/investing_in_civil_ society/2010_UNDP_A-Users-Guide-to-Civil-Society-Assessments_EN.pdf

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Capacity Assessment of gender mainstreaming:

The Levy Framework can be used to assess the capacity of a CSO with regards to gender mainstreaming, and their capacity to work on issues of gender inequality in relation to governance processes. For more information, see how WFP used the Levy Framework to assess its own capacity on gender mainstreaming (see pages 18 and 19): http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/7089/wfp273602.pdf?sequ ence=1

Possible frameworks for assessment and measurement:

The Istanbul Principles: The Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness developed 8 Istanbul Principles that can be used as a framework for understanding what makes CSOs effective. Whilst not explicitly designed as a way of monitoring and evaluating capacity development, the Istanbul Principles could be adapted to become indicators of CSO effectiveness, and help to identify capacity strengths and weakness that can be supported and monitored over time. They have also developed toolkits that support CSOs that want to make their work more effective by putting the Istanbul Principles into practice, which can be found here: http://cso-effectiveness.org/-Toolkits-

The Five Capabilities Framework was developed by European Centre for Development Policy and Management (Baser and Morgan 2008). This has been used in a number of evaluations of capacity development interventions, including a meta-evaluation of Dutch support to capacity development, covering 26 case studies (see Annex 1 for more information on this meta-evaluation).

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3) The context matters for supporting capacity. Donors and civil society actors need to understand the context in order to understand who exerts power vis-à-vis CSOs, in which way, and who or what is supportive or constraining. This also helps us 'feel the pulse' of civil society. Fundamentally, it helps us to understand the enabling or constraining environment in which civil society exercises its capacities, including the role of power and political economy. Therefore, one needs to include power and/or political economy analysis in your context analysis. A good power analysis should include gender analysis, as in order to understand power relations, gender relations need to be analysed, as well as dominant understandings of gender norms and roles. This can be particularly important when trying to assess the capacity of civil society to change gender norms and roles, and the capacity of particular genders to participate in governance processes. A good gender analysis involves the systematic gathering and examination of information on gender differences and social relations in order to identify and understand inequities based on gender.

Power and Political Economy Analysis Tools:

SDC has produced a series of tools for political economy analysis (Political Economy and Development Tool 1-3): https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/

IDS has produced guidelines for DDGLN on how to use Power and Political Economy Analysis in their work, which includes practical examples of different approaches used: https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/ACombinedApproachtoPEandPAAMejiaAcostaandJPettit2013.pdf

SIDA Guide to Power Analysis is aimed at supporting country-based donor staff to understand and commission power analysis:

http://www.sida.se/contentassets/83f0232c5404440082c9762ba3107d55/power-analysis-a-practical-guide_3704.pdf

Gender Analysis Tool:

The Moser Gender Analysis Framework is particularly useful when trying to assess the capacity of genders to participate in governance processes: http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTTOPPSISOU/0,,contentMDK:20590734~menuPK:1442609~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:1424003,00.html

D-Group Survey findings:

Participants in the D-Group survey had worked with the following civil society organisations:

- Specialised organisations
- The media
- Communicators (e.g. health promotors)
- Large and small CSOs in urban and rural areas
- Supported endogenous initiatives
- Civil society coalitions and umbrella organisations
- Sector specialist organisations
- Women organisations for specific advocacy
- Both established and emergent organisations
- Women and youth organisations
- Trade unions
- Multi-stakeholder councils
- User associations
- Advocacy NGOs
- Research organisations

D-Group Survey findings:

Participants in the D-Group survey used the following sources for understanding the civil society context:

- Stakeholder mapping
- Context analysis
- Civil Society publications
- Calls for Proposals
- Other donors
- Through implementing partners
- National experts
- Maintains a database on CSOs
- National level networks and coalitions
- Supporting Statistics Bureau to collect data on NGOs

Support Strategies and Modalities:

Once you have identified what the issue is around which you want to strengthen capacity, undertaken a context analysis, and identified who you want to work with, you need to identify the strategy you wish to take. There are many different strategies, and associated modalities, for strengthening the capacity of civil society. In general one needs to consider:

- How are you going to ensure ownership by CSOs of the capacity strengthening process (to ensure sustainability)?
- How can you support endogenous capacity (building on and strengthening existing capacities rather than concentrating on capacity gaps)?
- What can be done beyond training?
- How can you support the capacity of actors outside formal CSOs or non-organized civil society?
- How can you support Southern capacity development providers in the process?

Below are some examples with a short reflection on when and why a strategy and/or modality might be used, followed by some concrete examples.

Grant making (with an emphasis on organisational learning and/or partnerships)

This approach recognizes that capacity strengthening should be an integral part of all projects. For example, an open call for proposals under a thematic area could emphasize either organisational learning as a key component of a grant or prioritize partnerships. This can be used to support the strengthening of CSOs in particular thematic areas, or support the strengthening of their ability to undertake specific activities (e.g. advocacy or coalition building). Prioritizing partnerships can be useful in contexts when external funding for CSOs is reducing and the strengthening of civil society may be improved by consolidation.

Examples:

The Civil Society Support Facility (called Civica Mobilitas) supported by SDC in Macedonia is providing the possibility for action learning of CSOs, their institutional development (self-aware reflection and learning about civil society identity, values, principles, constituencies and theories of change) and alliance building. Main beneficiaries are CSOs that are working at local and national level, action-oriented and willing to undergo change towards a constituency driven Organisation. Expected results are for example that CSOs, other CS actors and their constituencies agree on joint causes and actions for social change, they shall develop and practice attitudes, beliefs and values that are compatible with good governance, decentralisation and (positive) social change and they shall together successfully promote good governance and social change. This is a clear shift from previous SDC support strategy as a result of critical review, and own reflection and learning.

Collective learning of civil society is key to another SDC civil society support programme in Myanmar. Firstly Civil society actors (CSAs) shall have increased capacity to address and influence issues that affect their communities and country. Civil society strengthening approaches include: mentoring, micro and small grants, learning platforms, linking and network building. Secondly, these approaches shall be informed by continuous collective learning within the implementing partner CSO (domestic CSO).

For more information see SDC homepage:
https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/aktivitaeten_projekte/projekte-fokus/projektdatenbank.html/projects/SDC/en/2006/7F05262/phase4; and

https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/activities-projects/projekte-fokus/Project-database.html/content/projects/SDC/en/2014/7F08951/phase1?oldPagePath=/content/deza/en/home/aktivitaeten_projekte/projekte-fokus/projektdatenbank.html

The Romania Civil Society Strengthening Programme project was implemented by World Learning with the aim of strengthening civil society in a transition context where funding was reducing rapidly (McGee et al. 2011). It provided grants to CSO partnerships, together with technical assistance and mentoring. Its partnership component focused on supporting enduring organic partnerships by not interfering with the process of collaboration (*Ibid*.). It developed a Partnership Capacity Tool (PCAT) to evaluate how well partnerships were functioning.

For more information, see this study of best practices: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadt366.pdf

The Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) is an international fund for CSOs working on governance, rights, and accountability. Triple Line supports the GTF with a focus on learning component for the grantees: organising workshops and providing technical assistance (McGee et al. 2011). Applicants are obliged to design learning strategies and mechanisms for sharing experiences across the diverse range of partners.

For more information: www.tripleline.com

Supporting and creating issue based Coalitions/Networks/Platforms

This approach recognises that civil society is broader than individual CSOs and can be strengthened through focusing on issues rather than organisations. This can be done by either supporting a physical network/platform through funding collaborative activities, meetings etc.; funding an online network/platform that can act as a space for dialogue or campaigning; or supporting an umbrella organisation that is already acting as a network. Support can be for specific activities and/or technical support to strengthen specific skills. This can be used as a strategy when a particular issue

needs a broad coalition of support in order to be moved up the political agenda. It can be a way of reaching out to non-organised civil society. Such networks can provide spaces for citizens who are not members of formal CSOs to participate, however networks and alliances can sometimes act as gatekeepers, so their membership policy needs to allow for this.

Examples:

The State Accountability and Voice (SAVI) project in Nigeria focuses on supporting the strengthening of relationships between organisations, rather than on capacities within standalone organisations. They work towards improving the accountability relationship by working with civil society to make demands on the authorities and with state assemblies to improve the way they interact with and respond to citizens (Stalker and Sandburg, 2011: 12). This project is based on DFID Nigeria's issue based approach to capacity, which doesn't focus on organisations, but issue based coalitions and outcomes. "Rather than focusing on the individual organisations, the interventions focus on specific outcomes (related to institutional change) and then engage with a range of stakeholders to support a change process…[this] needs a highly flexible and non-prescriptive programme with the ability to respond to unanticipated opportunities and setbacks as the process unfolds" (Pycroft and Butterworth: 3-4.)

For more information: http://savi-nigeria.org/

SDC has supported the Participation and Equity Platform in Cuba primarily works with local municipal governments to improve the participation and inclusion of vulnerable groups, as part of a broader support to decentralisation. However it also supports five national CSOs and a research institute to participate in the platform, and in doing so, are supporting the capacity of vulnerable groups and other local actors to dialogue with local municipal governments"

For more information (in Spanish):
http://www.mujeresafro.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=629:armaad-recibe-visita-de-plataforma-de-participacion-y-equidad-de-cuba-visita-armaad&catid=2:ultimas-noticias&Itemid=12

The Local Initiatives Support Programme in Nepal aims to support the partner CSOs it works with to create networks. It does so by demonstrating the benefits of working in networks when working on common issues and interests, based on a 'learn together' principle.

For more information: https://assets.helvetas.org/downloads/learning_6.pdf

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Supporting the strengthening of context analysis/power analysis

This approach recognises that a key capacity for CSOs working on issues such as democratisation, decentralisation and local governance is the ability to undertake a good political analysis of their context. Technical support to CSOs on how to undertake context and power analysis can strengthen their ability to understand the political context and the complex social realities in which they work. Supporting shared political analysis can also be a way to begin to support collective action between CSOs.

Supporting Citizen Mobilization:

Example:

The Inter-church organisation for development cooperation (ICCO) bring together diverse actors working on democratisation to undertake a shared political context analysis, with the aim of both supporting the design and implementation of governance programmes by those actors, and for supporting their capacity to undertake political context analysis (McGee et al. 2011).

For more a guide on the methodology used see: http://www.kit.nl/sed/wp-content/uploads/publications/1905_Facilitating%20a%20Shared%20Political%20Context%20Analysis-guidance%20note%20for%20workshop%20convenor.pdf

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This approach recognises that civil society is broader than individual CSOs and focuses on supporting opportunities for citizens to participate in governance and accountability processes and mechanisms. They tend to be more successful if they support endogenous processes already underway. For example, providing small stipends to citizens who represent marginalised or traditionally excluded groups so that they can attend meetings, or providing training to local governance officials in how to run inclusive meetings that ensure everyone can contribute. This can be an effective way of reaching citizens who are not members of formal CSOs.

Example:

SDC has supported the PROGOAS initiative in Mozambique has supported capacity building activities with community organisations called Conselhos de Desenvolvimento Comunitario, to support their involvement in devolved governance and accountability mechanisms, notably Conselhos Consultivos, consultative bodies made up of diverse and representative members of civil society who are meant to relay the views of their communities to the authorities (Faehndrich and Nhantumbo 2012). The project has also supported radio programmes that disseminated information and best practice on governance, and hosted debates and question and answer sessions (*Ibid.*).

For more information: http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp420.pdf

Again, the Civil Society Support Facility (supported by SDC Macedonia) can be mentioned as another example, where constituency building and mobilisation is a core objective (see page 8)

Organisational learning

This approach recognizes that capacity development is an on-going process that involves supporting individual capacities as well as organisational capacities. Therefore, supporting organisational learning involves supporting spaces and processes that allow organisations to reflect on their work, learn from their experience, and apply that learning 'on-the-job'.

Examples:

Support to Civic Education in Angola, funded a 'Reflective Partnership' approach to the capacity development of civil society called "Support to Civic Education" (Affolter and Cabula 2010). The approach is an intervention which "enables learners not only to grasp concepts and skills, but also to apply them in new job settings, and to *transfer* knowledge to third party learners" (*Ibid*.: 280). The project funded several 'mentors' in management, M&E, gender and finance to develop a 'master-teacher-apprentice" relationship with representatives of Angolan CSOs to facilitate reflective learning throughout the project cycle (*Ibid.*). As well as on-going face-to-face mentoring and coaching support, M&E missions and reporting formats were structured to allow critical reflection and learning in a safe space, including the use of journaling (*Ibid.*). The project was more time and human resource intensive than a traditional training approach.

For more information, see the mid-term review of this programme:
http://erc.undp.org/evaluationadmin/manageevaluation/viewevaluationdetail.html?evalid=3322

The AcT Accountability Programme provides grants to CSOs working in the area of democratic governance and accountability in Tanzania, and supports their *learning for change strategies* (McGee et al. 2011). They fund CSOs for 1 or 2 years. AcT organises a range of activities to assist the grantees to better understand the accountability environment they are trying to influence, facilitating and documenting learning opportunities and undertaking policy-relevant research (*Ibid*.):

For more information see the ODI review: http://www.accountability.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/042011-RAPID-OM-report-_2_.pdf

SDC office in Benin, in a collaborative effort with all partner organisations developed an instrument for analysing their internal governance. It is a self-assessment tool, which is based on 7 governance principles and includes a factual as well as a perception survey. Experience shows that contextualisation with local realities and broad anchoring within the organisations is important to enhance internal reflection and learning on the concepts of good governance.
https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/topics/governance/SitePages/Home.aspx

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Peer/Mutual Learning

This approach recognises that CSOs can be rich sources for each other's learning and that funders can act as convenors to support mutual or peer learning on specific issues or skills.

Examples:

The Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability project is a CIVICUS managed project aims to improve the credibility of CSOs through enhanced accountability (McGee et al. 2011). Civicus acts as a convenor, bringing together international organisations, local organisations and academics to debate and discuss issues of legitimacy, transparency and accountability with the aim of mutual learning (*Ibid.*)

Networking for learning is an ICCO initiative that has created learning networks for each of their thematic areas of work, which includes their own staff and staff from partner organisations. There is a website for each theme, with a wiki, blogs, discussion groups, and online meetings, all facilitated by a dedicated member of staff (McGee et al. 2011). A report on the network undertaken by the ICCO and European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) in 2004 stated that donors should not underestimate the costs of running a learning network and that donors needed to resist trying to define learning outcomes, as this lessens ownership and the chances of sustainability (ICCO 2004).

For more information: http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/networkingforlearning.pdf

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Reflections from SDC Mozambique:

In late 2015, SDC Mozambique commissioned a survey of CSOs to assess 1) what constituted good performance in term of the internal governance of CSOs; 2) the main causes and context underlying the capacity of CSOs to achieve results; and 3) the main causes and context underlying the capacity of CSOs to work in networks or influence policies. Some findings are relevant to this Practice Paper:

The internal governance of a CSO matters: The organisation's culture should support internal democracy and respect for the Statutes; the decision making process should be participatory and consensus oriented; the processes should be transparent and the decision makers should be accountable to the CSO's stakeholders.

Chasing funding can weaken impact: There can be a tension between specialising (in order to have impact) and broadening a CSOs remit to secure more funding.

The Leader Dilemma: Charismatic leaders are needed to start an organisation, but there is a danger that they become the organisation. Effective CSOs need a group of people who form the 'leadership' and with the power to make decisions and internal governance that holds them to account.

Competency is a process and not an event: The length of this process varies in accordance to the context, situation and characteristics of the CSO.

Supporting capacity entails taking risks. Funding should be based on the recognition that the leaders of a CSO are genuinely interested in societal change.

SCD is a "hands off" organisation and this is one of the most treasured characteristics by CSOs. This attitude helps the local CSO to gain the sense of ownership of their own organisation and strengthen their assertiveness and self-worth. SDC is different from other donors because it helps CSOs to link up with potential donors and even promotes the establishment of "common funds". This allows the CSO to see itself as a "whole", not broken by the owners of the resources it receives, while reducing the tendency to pay attention to the one organisation that provides the bulk of the funding.

Basket funding is the best modality: Project based funding constrains capacity development because of a need for multiple reporting (one for each donor) thus creating inefficiencies; less flexibility to prioritize and reprioritize the use of funds by the CSO; less autonomy for CSOs to intervene based on their own evidence-based objectives; and increased accountability towards donors and less towards CSO constituents and society. In addition, CSOs funded by projects and INGOs were less likely to see the broader picture. INGOs build capacity in order to improve their delivery functions rather than to develop a CSO's own agenda.

Recommendations and Risks from the D-Group survey:

In the D-Group discussions, members discussed some of the risks they faced when trying to strengthen civil society capacity, and made some recommendations they would give to others. These have been clustered into themes below.

Recommendations:

Work in partnership:

- Partnership principles should be clearly established before the contract.
- Donors should encourage partner-driven capacity development, and increase core funding support.

Provide core funding:

- Core funding, if an organisation has a clear mandate, consistency and strategy, has several advantages over project oriented support.

Identify learning needs collaboratively

- Be strategic in what you send staff to be trained in. Make sure the topics of trainings and coaching are coming from the CSOs themselves and select the right people to attend.
- Train and coach the same group of people over a longer period of time.

Allow time and space to learn:

- International actors need to structure funding, programs and approaches to allow CSO partners the space and time to try new things, learn and adapt.
- Strengthening capacity of CSOs is a long process by nature.
- As a process, capacity development relies on internal ownership and commitment of the CSO to dedicate extra time, staff, and energy. However, there are challenges in balancing the associated time commitments and workload with their project obligations and regular business.
- Have practical activities and opportunities to practice what is learned.
- Allowing time for reflection on learning is a crucial part of capacity building.

Support Learning Platforms:

- A Knowledge sharing platforms are useful for horizontal learning among citizens and institutions.
- Platforms of exchange are an important part of capacity development of CSOs. They raise the profile of CSOs in front of potential partners, facilitate cross-pollination of ideas as well as exchanges of best   practices, resources and information

Understand the context CSOs work in:

- Capacity development is a two-way street. In particular, international actors need to better understand the political and power dynamics in the regions and sectors in which they work and recognize the great diversity of CSOs.

Support CSO capacity to understand their political context:

- CSO qualities including authenticity, unique depth of understanding, knowledge of political and power relationships, and community embeddedness, are often overlooked by donors and not captured in traditional assessments.

Make sure procedures are clear and transparent:

- Clear definition of eligibility criteria and execution of evaluation procedures enhances legitimacy.
- Be transparent in relationships and cooperation with CSOs.

Think about sustainability from the start:

- Be conscious of not creating dependencies, consider and plan phasing out from the beginning.

How to measure success:

- A flexible planning framework for M&E, knowledge management and continuous monitoring is important for adjusting projects.
- Unconventional monitoring tools like third party monitoring by CSOs can complement the standard M&E by providing additional valuable information related to project progress and outcomes.
- Close monitoring and coaching of the grantees is a must.
- Grassroots, new NGOs require more resources for M&E, as they need more support in implementing the projects. Supplementary funds have to be allocated to be able to offer this support to grantees, especially for grassroots organisations or new ones.
- Have periodic reviews of 'evolutionary theory of change' with project participants

Risks:

- Risk of creating parallel structures which are not sustainable.
- A focus on working via international CSOs, might be detriment to longer term capacity development of local CSOs.
- Non-representative and/or legitimate CSOs, e.g.
  - Losing touch with the organisation's roots/ being co-opted.
  - Donor dependency: chasing donor funds, with no opportunity to develop an own programme.
  - Perception of CSOs as being affiliated with partisan politics and acting as sister organisations of political parties.
  - Fuzzy distinction between CSOs and private sector organisations, like service providers.
  - CSOs struggle between conventional service delivery approaches versus taking a greater role in promoting accountability. CSOs sometimes lack capabilities and confidence to play a "watch dog" role, particularly where powerful donors or the government are concerned. Hence, they require heavy backstopping and morale support.
- Inconsistent and fluctuating funding of sector
- Brain drain of young dynamic persons and staff turnover
- Weak internal governance within CSOs, e.g.
  - Dependency on charismatic leader.
  - Mismanagement of funding and lack of effective internal control.
  - Lack of professional competence, confidence and expertise.
  - Lack of an internal democratic culture.
  - Working in silos and carrying out overlapping activities, not being issue or policy driven, thus not being effective.

- The political context, e.g.
  - Political manipulation or persecution of political activists.
  - Personal safety when raising voice against powerful actors: CSOs are most often exposed to a conflictual situation while reporting inconsistencies, discrepancies and manipulations. Sometimes, they are exposed to life/property risks.
  - Political uncertainties and the government becoming more suspicious and critical of CSOs.

Annex 1: Evaluation of Capacity Development using the Five Capabilities Framework:

The meta-evaluation used four overarching questions:

1. What changes have taken place in the capacity of Southern organisations?

2. What effects have changes in the capacity of these organisations had on the realisation of their development objectives (outputs and outcome)?

3. How effective has Dutch support been in terms of strengthening the capacity of Southern partners?

4. What factors explain the level of effectiveness of Dutch support, and what lessons can be learnt? (de Lange 2013.:35)

It then used the Five Capabilities Framework to assess organisational capacity. Baser and Morgan argue that there are "five core capabilities as key, all of which, to a greater or lesser extent, can be found in all organisations or systems. These are the capabilities to commit and engage, to carry out functions or tasks, to relate and attract resources and support, to adapt and self-renew, and finally, to balance coherence and diversity" (2008: 26). The meta-evaluation used these capabilities to identify indicators for organisational capacity, as seen in Table 1 below. Within these indicators, the ones are highlighted in bold that relate to the capacities identified within the literature as being particularly important for civil society organisations to engage in political processes such as democratisation, decentralisation and local governance (although all will be relevant for the overall effectiveness and sustainability of an organisation).

Table 1: Common indicators for Southern Partners

Core capability	Indicators
To commit and engage	- Can plan, take decisions, and act in concerted way - Has a legal basis for engaging in binding commitments - Can properly mobilise financial and human resources within the organisation **Has committed and stable leadership**
To carry out functions or tasks	- Can guarantee current and future financial and human resources base - Can handle dependence on external funding to guarantee delivery - Can generate own financial resources (members, services/products, or subsidies) **Can access (external) knowledge sources**
To relate and attract resources and support	**Can build and maintain networks with outside actors for realisation of its objectives** - Can build and maintain relationships within its own setup/structures - Can build and maintain relationships with international organisations for the acquisition of funding
To adapt and self-renew	**Is open to learning** - Is pursuing internal learning on performance and strategy **Can analyse political trends and understand consequences**
To achieve coherence	**Has a clear vision and mandate** - Works with set of organisational principles, operational/HRM guidelines/manuals - Handles a planning, monitoring, and evaluation (PME) system for its operations - Can consistently apply a style of management that fits the organisation

Source: de Lange 2013: 38