Praxis Paper 25

Capacity Building for Advocacy

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Contents

Executive summary

Why advocacy

Driven by the need to find effective solutions to the problems of poverty and injustice, recent thinking about civil society has begun placing a greater emphasis on advocacy. There is a growing expectation that civil society organisations (CSOs) should be conducting advocacy, engaging with and influencing key policies and decision makers to complement the service delivery role of CSOs. To facilitate the shift, considerable effort has been invested in capacity building for advocacy. So, what has been learnt in the process?

This Praxis Paper looks at current practice, experiences and theory in advocacy capacity building. In line with INTRAC's Praxis programme, the paper's findings are primarily directed at civil society support organisations (CSSOs) globally but the insights are relevant to CSOs, donors, research institutions and individuals from a variety of backgrounds.

Planning and implementing advocacy capacity building interventions

Before an intervention takes place it is important to identify the 'under-capacity' problems and best solutions. Literature and advice on good practice stresses the importance of customising interventions to need and contexts. Plans for interventions should link to organisational mission, strategy and values, and embed cyclical learning as well as principles of partnership and participation. Interventions should build on existing capacities rather than seeking to create new ones. Capacity development is an ongoing process and long-term investment in support, and persistence, is key.[1]

Evaluating interventions

Evaluation seems to be an area in which there is little evidence of practical application. Assessing advocacy capacity building interventions is a complex business. Dimensions of success and change are not always clear. These complexities again highlight the importance of a sound diagnosis and setting clear, plausible objectives against which to measure change. Adequate resourcing and commitment to this will help mitigate some of the challenges. It may also be necessary to remain flexible in approach in order to gain meaningful information.

Recommendations

Advocacy capacity interventions should be considered and planned on multiple, interrelated levels that can sometimes seem confusing and complex. Disentangling these links involves assessing the quality of capacity building support provided, exploring and addressing questions about the extent of an organisation's receptiveness and understanding, and tracking the external environment and its influences on the organisation. Most importantly, as this paper shows, for a capacity building intervention to be effective, CSSOs must be aware of the complex nature of advocacy and follow a strategic, diagnostic approach.

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[1] E.g. Horton et al, 2003, p90; Cornforth et al, 2008, p14; James, 2001, p19

1. Capacity building for advocacy

Driven by the need to find effective solutions to the problems of poverty and injustice, much of recent thinking about civil society has involved a greater emphasis on advocacy. There is a growing expectation that civil society organisations (CSOs) should be conducting advocacy, engaging with and influencing key policies and decision makers. Previous approaches, which focused more on the service delivery role of CSOs, are often felt to have had limited impact. With this shift in focus, capacity building efforts need to adapt in order to best support CSOs.

This Praxis Paper explores current practice and thinking in this area through a literature review and interviews with a variety of stakeholders. We spoke to civil society support organisations (CSSOs) of different sizes, operating in different public policy sectors, as well as 'front-line' CSOs operating in a variety of advocacy contexts. These CSOs generally had a history of running global (and national) campaigns and advocacy across a range of different public policy sectors (public health, basic education, water and sanitation, conflict, human rights, democracy and governance etc). They gave insights into their experiences (both positive and negative) around giving or receiving capacity building support for advocacy.

The main purpose of this paper is to explore ideas around good practice principles for advocacy capacity building, planning and evaluation by looking at current practice, experiences and theory. This will initiate further questions and encourage dialogue through application. In line with INTRAC's Praxis Programme, the paper's findings are primarily directed at CSSOs in the South and North, but many insights are relevant to CSOs, donors, research institutions and individuals from a variety of backgrounds.

The paper begins by highlighting some complexities around key definitions and processes before exploring questions that arise in relation to:
* assessing and critiquing different levels of advocacy
* capacity building for advocacy
* defining effectiveness in advocacy contexts
* definitions of advocacy capacity building effectiveness
* evaluating these capacity building interventions.

In many ways the paper's structure follows the process a CSSO would follow in supporting capacity building efforts around advocacy. Insights develop incrementally and each section is linked to others. Throughout the paper there are boxes of 'summary implications for capacity providers'.

2. Definitions

Capacity can be defined in many ways. This paper will use a straightforward definition; the "potential to perform"[2] (See also chapter one in INTRAC's *Capacity Building For NGOs: Making it Work[3]*). For the purposes of simplification advocacy performance will be equated with advocacy effectiveness in this context.

Notions of effectiveness are less easily simplified (especially when talking about advocacy) and questions about this will be dealt with in more depth below.
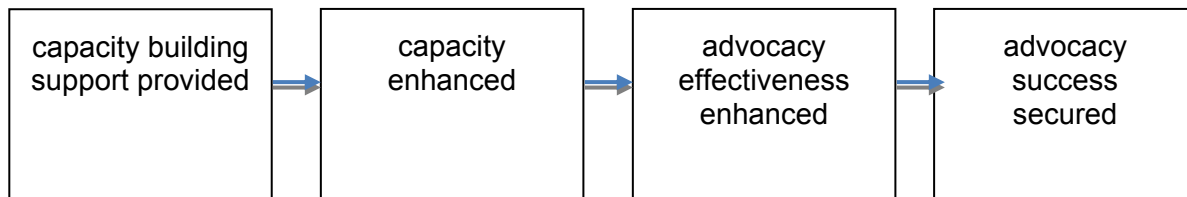
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[2] Horton et al, 2003 p34
[3] James & Hailey. 2007 (www.intrac.org/resources.php?action=resource&id=369).

The use of terms such as advocacy, campaigning, influence, voice etc is a contested arena; for the purposes of this paper the term 'advocacy' will be used as shorthand to denote influencing efforts by CSOs primarily directed at achieving policy, practice, social and/or political change.

In a simplistic process representation of the advocacy capacity building 'theory of change':
- capacity building leads to enhanced capacity; and
- enhanced capacity leads to enhanced performance

| capacity building support provided | → | capacity enhanced | → | advocacy effectiveness enhanced | → | advocacy success secured |

Even with a simple definition of capacity, however, these stages are individually complicated, and the interrelationships between them are not straightforward. Capacity building interventions are inevitably only one contribution to capacity, just as many factors, including capacity, contribute to effective performance. Describing these links can be difficult. Effective performance is itself a problematic notion in an advocacy context.

We can draw conclusions about the best approach to effective capacity and capacity building for advocacy and the challenges involved by:

- Considering how the various elements inter-relate; and then

- Identifying how this impacts on effectiveness and assessment.

- Exploring further the questions and complexities that arise.

The following sections explore the implications of these questions in detail.

3. Advocacy capacity

Before planning an intervention it is necessary to have an idea of what capacity exists already. A helpful way of doing this is though identifying the different qualities that 'capacity' as a whole can possess. There is sufficient evidence to support the idea that advocacy capacity can best be understood to operate at six interlinked levels. Capacity building interventions are normally targeted at one or many of these levels. They can be defined as:[4]

Level of intervention		In an advocacy context, focus would be on:
1	Individual	▪ individuals' relevant skills and abilities
2	Projects and programmes	▪ single-issue campaigns ▪ broader advocacy programmes
3	Organisational	▪ organisational structures, processes and resources ▪ management and governance issues

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[4] These levels are drawn from, and amalgamate, analysis in Banerjee et al, 2008 pp9-10; Blagescu & Young, 2006; & Horton et al, 2003 pp41-2

4	External linkages	▪ extent and quality of coordination between organisations ▪ extent and quality of links between organisations and the groups and communities they are supporting and representing
5	Enabling environment	▪ the political and policy context within which advocacy processes take place
6	Multiple	▪ the connections between each of the above levels and how they work together to enhance advocacy capacity

Many of the CSOs interviewed for this paper expressed the opinion that looking at capacity from these different perspectives was a logical and helpful way to conceptually consider approaches to advocacy capacity building. They also felt that these levels would be helpful in the planning for and evaluating of capacity building. There seems to be little evidence of testing this conceptual model for advocacy capacity building in a systematic way, but some respondents did show interest in exploring its practical application.

This view from a funder of global advocacy was typical of the respondents' thoughts:
> "The levels are very helpful, they would help us understand the relationship between the [capacity built] staff member and the organisational context they face."

Other levels and issues were also suggested by those organisations interviewed, for example:
> "You have to build in a feedback loop for beneficiaries - sort of below the level of individual - that's very important."

The following sub-sections (3.1-3.6) look at these six levels, before highlighting the implications for CSSOs planning an intervention.

3.1 Individuals' capacity

There have been various efforts to identify what the salient characteristics are in relation to individuals' capacity to conduct effective advocacy.[5] These typically boil down to the following:

1. **practical skills** – negotiating, communicating, influencing, listening skills, research skills etc
2. **partnership skills** – identifying basis of unity, collegiate, collaborative, ability to compromise etc
3. **personal abilities and behaviours** – such as enthusiasm, resilience, focus, etc
4. **knowledge** – of a particular field, of local and national policy contexts, of local issues
5. **understanding** – ability to interpret knowledge and experiences, determining when to criticise and when to cooperate for example.

Practitioners' experiences:
This initial Praxis research found that most advocacy capacity building currently being delivered is focused at the individual level. Most frequently interventions take the form of training courses and occasionally the mentoring and coaching of individuals, some of whom had been identified as exhibiting characteristics of high-quality leadership.

Some respondents recognised the limitations of this approach when planned and delivered in isolation. One typical comment was: *"The courses we offer are fine, the feedback is good… but,*

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[5] E.g. Cairns et al, 2008, pp23-26; Chandler, 2007; Skinner & Mitchell, 2008

one common factor is that many participants [we train] say that the blockages happen when they get back to their organisation."
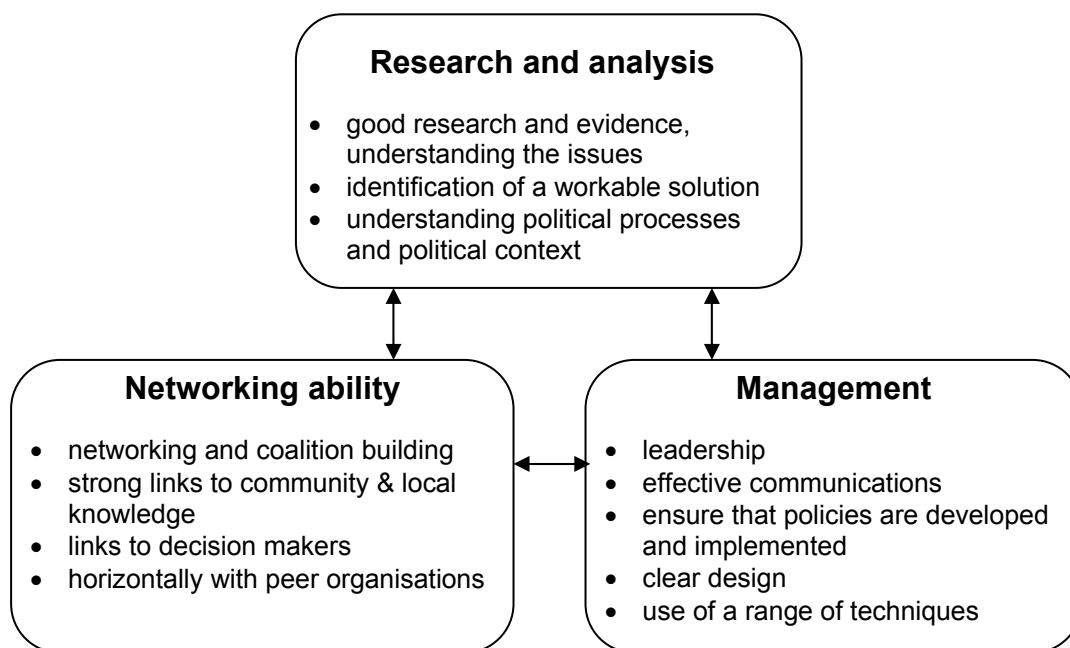
This comment and others like it begin to indicate that intervening only at the individual level is unlikely to result in meaningful change. The next sections illustrate the importance of conceiving the different forms of advocacy capacity as interrelated and interdependent as well as the significance of effective capacity assessment and intervention at multiple levels.

3.2 Programme capacity

As outlined in the table above, single-issue campaigns and broader advocacy programmes are another area that should be explored in relation to advocacy capacity. Although some elements of programme capacity overlap with those at an organisational level it is important to analyse the two separately.

Many have sought to articulate the elements that combine to constitute programme/campaign advocacy capacity.[6] It seems most helpful to seek to identify common themes in terms of what makes an advocacy programme *more likely to be effective*, whilst acknowledging that all situations are different, all issues unique and the variable of operating context is paramount. These variable factors would ideally all need to be considered by those capacity builders with an interest in effectiveness.

The kinds of areas covered in an analysis of advocacy programme capacity potential could, tentatively, be grouped into the following interconnected categories:

Research and analysis

- good research and evidence, understanding the issues
- identification of a workable solution
- understanding political processes and political context

Networking ability

- networking and coalition building
- strong links to community & local knowledge
- links to decision makers
- horizontally with peer organisations

Management

- leadership
- effective communications
- ensure that policies are developed and implemented
- clear design
- use of a range of techniques

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[6] e.g. Alexander; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Cairns et al, 2008; Court et al, 2006, to name only a few

These would ideally give evidence that a CSO will continue or begin to:

Research and analysis

- Good research and evidence and clear understanding of the issues, political process and political context.
- Confirm that the programme/campaign's issue is timely (determined both in terms of citizens' perceptions of importance as well as reasonable prospect that policy change is feasible).
- Maintain strong links to community and local knowledge.
- Systematically secure input from those constituencies the CSO seeks to represent on the need for the policy change.
- Identify of a workable solution with constituency and public participation.
- Analyse and document throughout.
- Collect sound and persuasive data on the effects of the policy/issue sought to be changed.
- Remain aware of gender and disability-specific implications of the current issue and the proposed alternative.

Management

- Institutionalise commitment to advocacy by devoting resources (time and money) for developing the advocacy programme or issue.
- After a programme is finished follow-through with action to ensure changes effected are sustained.
- Demonstrate sound financial management and internal governance.
- Maintain effective communications.
- Clear programme design.
- Identification of a workable solution.

Networking

- Build networks and coalitions with partners and peer organisations.
- Actively support joint action to secure programme/campaign success.
- Strategically build links to decision makers.
- Provide public education and to build citizen support for campaign/programme (including through use of the media).

This analysis draws heavily on the very useful PACT advocacy index, which scores organisations according to similar criteria.[7]

Practitioners' experiences:
Specific challenges arise from the fact that advocacy is typically an implicit function within organisations' overall work programmes, whether it is 'dispersed' or 'embedded' within organisational structures and management.[8] This means that advocacy potentially is not always

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[7] For more details about the PACT advocacy index go to: www.pactworld.org/galleries/resource-center/strengthening_measuring_adv_capacity_csos.pdf
[8] Cairns et al, 2008 pp13-14

obvious within a specific programme, making it difficult to assess prior to an intervention. Considerations of actual and potential programme advocacy capacity should include reviews of:[9]

1. advocacy visibility and coherence, for example:

- how the advocacy function is or can be built into reporting mechanisms
- whether the advocacy function is or will be viewed and planned as a programme area
- whether advocacy is or will be acknowledged as a core function in relevant job descriptions
- how and how well the advocacy function is or will be coordinated from within programmes across the organisation.

2. supporting processes, for example:

- processes to facilitate a stronger evidence base for advocacy programme work
- processes to ensure that links with beneficiaries reflect and support the advocacy context
- processes for assessing the effectiveness of advocacy activities and outcomes.

3.3 Organisational capacity

There are a number of existing CSO frameworks that help us to analyse and assess the existence and potential of organisational advocacy capacity. Below is a typical example, pointing to the areas to be examined by a capacity provider:[10]

Area	Aspects to consider
strategic leadership	• leadership • strategic planning
financial management	• financial planning • financial accountability
organisational structure	• governance • operational management of staff and systems
organisational infrastructure	• facilities and technology management
human resources	• HR systems (recruitment, selection, maintenance) • performance management and career development
programme and service management	• planning • implementing • monitoring
process management	• problem-solving and decision-making • communications • monitoring and evaluation
inter-organisational linkages	• networks and partnerships

Other frameworks appear to cover similar ground.[11]

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[9] From Cairns et al, 2008, pp54-5
[10] Summarised from Lusthaus et al, 2002, pp23-25
[11] E.g. Raynor et al, 2009; Lofgren et al, 2008; Horton et al, 2003 pp36-40

Practitioners' experiences:
Many of those (both front-line staff and capacity builders) interviewed and consulted articulated a common concern that advocacy was "often internally marginalised, and usually under-resourced" and/or seen by senior managers as "being less important than the other things that [they] do". As a pattern, this seems to be more of a problem for organisations delivering advocacy themselves than for those organisations that have been recently funded to plan and deliver advocacy capacity building. For both groups, however, it remains a key challenge for the function of advocacy capacity building projects.

Additional challenges for southern advocacy[12]
It is important to recognise additional challenges that might affect capacity assessment and interventions for southern-based organisations.[13] For some, advocacy might not feature in the organisation's structures, or if it does it may be in the very early stages of being thought about.

There might be a number of reasons for this, including:
- a preoccupation with organisational survival
- specific problems with securing funding for advocacy
- a likely skills deficit, including low levels of understanding about the different strands and dimensions of advocacy
- governance constraints – individuals on boards in particular may lack confidence and skills in, and knowledge and understanding of, advocacy.

For some organisations internal motivation to adopt advocacy strategies may also be lacking. If, for example, a donor applies pressure for a non-advocacy organisation to start focusing on advocacy strategies, the capacity building intervention is perhaps less likely to succeed. This was highlighted by those interviewed who suggested that the conceptual model discussed above was limited by not recognising organisational culture:

> "we shouldn't underestimate the importance of the extent of shared organisational values and culture, how [they are] identified and how explicit they are made within organisations".

3.4 External linkages

Within this level two dimensions have particular practical relevance:

1. The strength of joint working amongst like-minded organisations

This would be demonstrated by quality of information flows, congruence of objectives and strategy, and strength of mutual accountability.[14] If there is to be a functioning advocacy network or coalition, the following are important: the extent to which there is an explicit basis of unity and the extent to which its characteristics and ways of working facilitate effectiveness.

2. The quality and extent of links between organisations and the communities they are working with, supporting and representing

This is key to any research-based approach initiated by advocacy capacity providers, and would be demonstrated by, for example:

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[12] from Cairns et al, 2008, pp19-22
[13] from Cairns et al, 2008, pp19-22
[14] van Tuijl & Jordan, 1999

- the ability of the organisation to balance engagement with decision makers with the need to engage widely and maintain good links with local communities and village and community groups
- the quality of information sharing and communication processes and the extent to which they enable and support a culture of accountability and transparency
- the extent to which the organisation promotes and amplifies the voices of those affected within relevant debates.

Practitioners' experiences:

A picture begins to emerge in the research of a number of organisations and funders asserting that the issues of external linkages, and the enabling environment (section 3.5 below), were crucial in identifying the likely capacity to plan and deliver effective advocacy.

In interviews, there is a high degree of coherence in comments such as: "it's about knowing your way around the system [and] how the system works", another helpful insight was from one CSO, articulating that "it has to be about the quality of relationships", with another funder expressing: "for us in our work, it's having an analysis and understanding of the three Ps; policy, politics and power."

These comments illustrate the significance of external linkages and engaging with the external environment, for effective advocacy. For any organisation wishing to provide capacity building for advocacy, looking at this area is very important.

3.5 The extent of an enabling environment

The key point here then is that questions about *capacity* to influence and seek change cannot be delinked from issues about the *opportunity* to influence. CSSOs must bear this in mind when supporting advocacy work. Even if an organisation has the internal capacity to influence, many of the external, 'opportunity' challenges being faced may limit its advocacy success.

The following examples illustrate challenges that CSOs might face in engaging meaningfully with political/governmental partnerships in advocating for policy change.[15]

- Cultures within government institutions tend not to reward responsiveness to community, nor to promote transparent consultation processes or joint planning.
- Varying degrees of commitment from partnership-working on the part of local state personnel, including resistance in some state bodies limit the opportunities for CSOs to engage
- Unequal power relation between the CSSOs and local authorities undermine advocacy progress or make it difficult for CSSOs to approach local authorities in the first place.
- Policy room to manoeuvre being narrowly defined, especially within authoritarian states, makes it difficult, even dangerous, for CSSOs to advocate.
- Policy makers may identify and 'socially construct' target populations in positive and negative terms and then distribute benefits and burdens to reflect this.[16] An example of this would be the idea of 'deserving' or 'undeserving' poor.

It is generally accepted that an ideal approach is to 'work both sides of the equation'; focusing on the advocacy capacity of the communities and organisations representing them, whilst also

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[15] E.g. Cairns et al, 2009
[16] Ingram et al, 2007

supporting the capacity of the advocacy targets – local officials and, for example, civil servants, officials and MPs – to respond meaningfully.[17]

A relevant and interesting example of this in practice is the ongoing work of SAVI (State Accountability and Voice Initiative) in Nigeria which aims to promote the more efficient and effective use of Nigeria's own resources to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Working both sides of the equation – SAVI, Nigeria

SAVI is based around three thematic areas:
(i) design and implementation of advocacy projects that address key service delivery issues
(ii) support to independent monitoring, research and policy analysis
(iii) enhancing the effective functioning of the State House of Assembly.

The initiative 'works with both sides of the equation' because it is principally focused on the accountability relationship. It seeks to both strengthen civil society's ability to make demands on the authorities and also improve the ways in which members of state assemblies interact with and respond to citizens. SAVI note that *"advocacy can be ineffective even when all the elements are present"* – ineffective in the sense that it doesn't yield the desired result, not because of poor advocacy but because those targeted are not capable of responding positively. Hence, the SAVI programme is designed to be part of a much bigger programme of support to Nigeria that works with both civil society and government at the same time, to strengthen the demand-side and the supply-side simultaneously.

Bearing this in mind, a CSO's opportunity to influence would also be determined by whether advocacy targets have, for example, sufficient:[18]

- strong, enabling leadership and committed officials
- institutional designs that optimise participation and representation and strong forms of consultation
- clear and accessible processes for transparency and information sharing
- organisational learning processes within state bodies which invite monitoring and review by local communities.

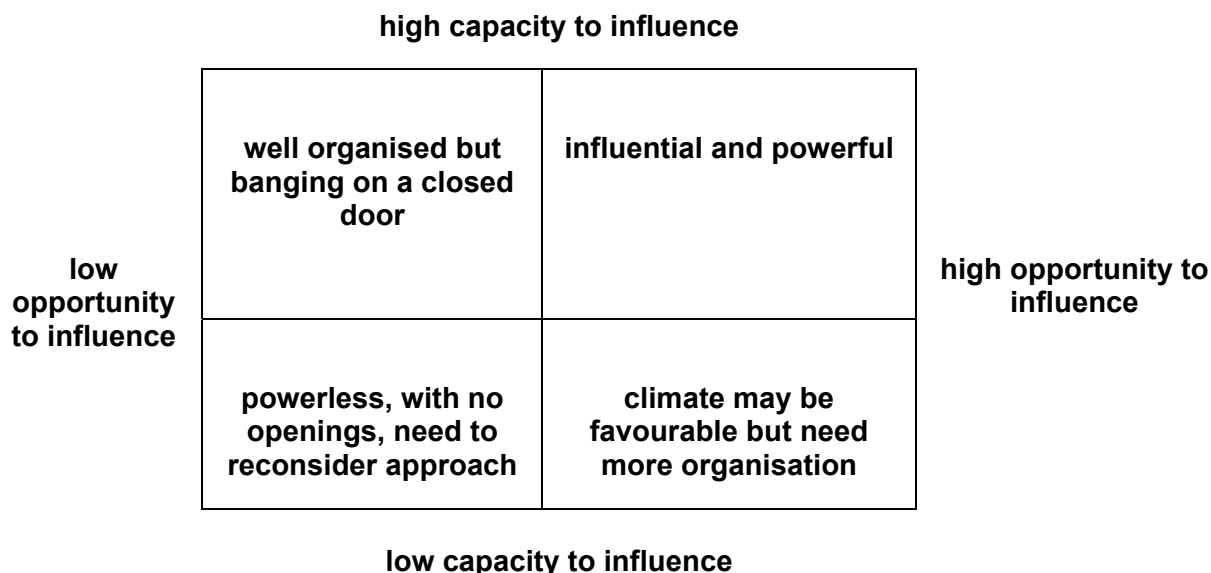### Specific challenges when working in complex socio-political contexts
For CSSOs providing capacity building interventions in complex socio-political environments and/or supporting and representing marginalised groups and citizens there are many extra challenges. A CSO's *capacity* to influence might be completely nullified by the lack of *opportunity* to influence. In some cases it may even be more accurate to recognise the *dis*abling environment in order to then focus on realistic opportunities for advocacy. A strategy that was successful in one country might meet hostility or violence in another. In these cases although internal capacity may be high, the CSO's opportunity to influence is reduced by lack of enabling environment. Organisations supporting capacity must consider these challenges if their interventions are to be relevant and practically applicable.

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[17] E.g. Gaventa, 2004 pp26-7
[18] Gaventa, 2004; Cornwall, 2008

In different contexts, the dynamics will be different. One simple conceptual model for plotting whether the key blockages to advocacy effectiveness are internal or external is the following:[19]

high capacity to influence

well organised but banging on a closed door	**influential and powerful**
powerless, with no openings, need to reconsider approach	**climate may be favourable but need more organisation**

low
opportunity
to influence

high opportunity to influence

low capacity to influence

- where there is low capacity/low opportunity, blockages are both internal and external, so both need to be addressed
- where there is high capacity/low opportunity, key blockages to address are external
- where there is low capacity/high opportunity, key blockages to address are internal

One practical example of this was recent research (2009) into advocacy capacity and potential political opportunity structures for effective advocacy for Education for All in Mali and Uganda. Through the careful mapping of stakeholders and assessing and identifying advocacy capacity, it was possible to reflect that, broadly, Malian civil society advocacy was located somewhere in the bottom right quadrant (possible favourable but need more organisation). While in Uganda, the civil society capacity and external environment indicated their locus in the bottom left (may need to reconsider approach).

3.6 Capacity building at multiple levels

We have looked at five of the dimensions that impact on advocacy capacity – individual, programme, organisational, external linkages and the enabling environment. Literature and practical experience are clear that "it is rarely, if ever, sufficient to explore capacity assets and needs at only one level".[20]

Remember the big picture
Some theories of change stress the importance of charismatic leadership and the role of individuals, and much capacity building effort is focused at individual level. It remains the case, however, that lack of individual capacity is unlikely ever to be the whole story, and is not

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[19] Adapted from Changes, 2007 & Changes, 2008
[20] Banerjee et al, 2008, p11; others echo this point, e.g. Blagescu & Young, 2006

generally the main constraint.[21] Indeed it is important that any enhanced individual capacity is institutionalised in some way, so that skills, expertise and learning are spread more evenly.[22]

Similarly, few advocacy initiatives stand alone. They are often part of a larger programme of work designed to achieve a particular end. This makes it difficult, possibly even illogical, to separate out the skills and capabilities needed to perform an advocacy role from generic community development and organisational skills and capabilities. Capacity building interventions that focus on individuals and projects and programmes may miss the bigger organisational picture, and thus be somewhat out of context; they may even undermine overall organisational capacity.[23]

For example, as one interviewee reflected:
> "Is it possible that by strengthening the capacity of one organisational discipline, you may undermine and weaken another? Look at internal [CSO] debates about competing theories of change for example."

Therefore, internal capacity should ideally be considered holistically. This approach would help providers view the dynamics and connections among various actors and issues at different levels as integral parts of a broader picture, rather than as a set of unconnected components.[24]

In a southern advocacy context a narrow approach, providing support to individual organisations, is likely to privilege some groups and may even be at the expense of others. There is significant evidence that enhancing cooperation between organisations is key to effective advocacy.

Finally, as discussed earlier, any additional capacity gained by supported organisations will deliver results only if there is a realistic expectation of exerting influence. This will depend crucially on how decision makers operate within the advocacy context and what the extent of the 'enabling environment' is.

Given this, it is likely that any capacity building intervention will seek to achieve a range of outcomes, involving a combination of the following:

- key individuals have enhanced capacity to engage and represent
- the strength of organisation's advocacy is enhanced
- organisations better facilitate and strategically situate advocacy within wider organisational contexts and approaches
- local communities and marginalised groups are empowered to engage and advocate;
- more effective collaboration takes place between organisations
- state bodies are better able and/or more willing to engage meaningfully with community organisations and their representatives.

The research findings here would indicate that a balance between the different types of capacity building should to be determined on a case-by-case basis. This is discussed in greater detail later in the paper.

[21] Horton et al, 2003, p65
[22] Gaventa, 2004
[23] Horton et al, 2003, p66
[24] Blagescu & Young, 2006

4. Using strategic multilayered assessment to plan interventions

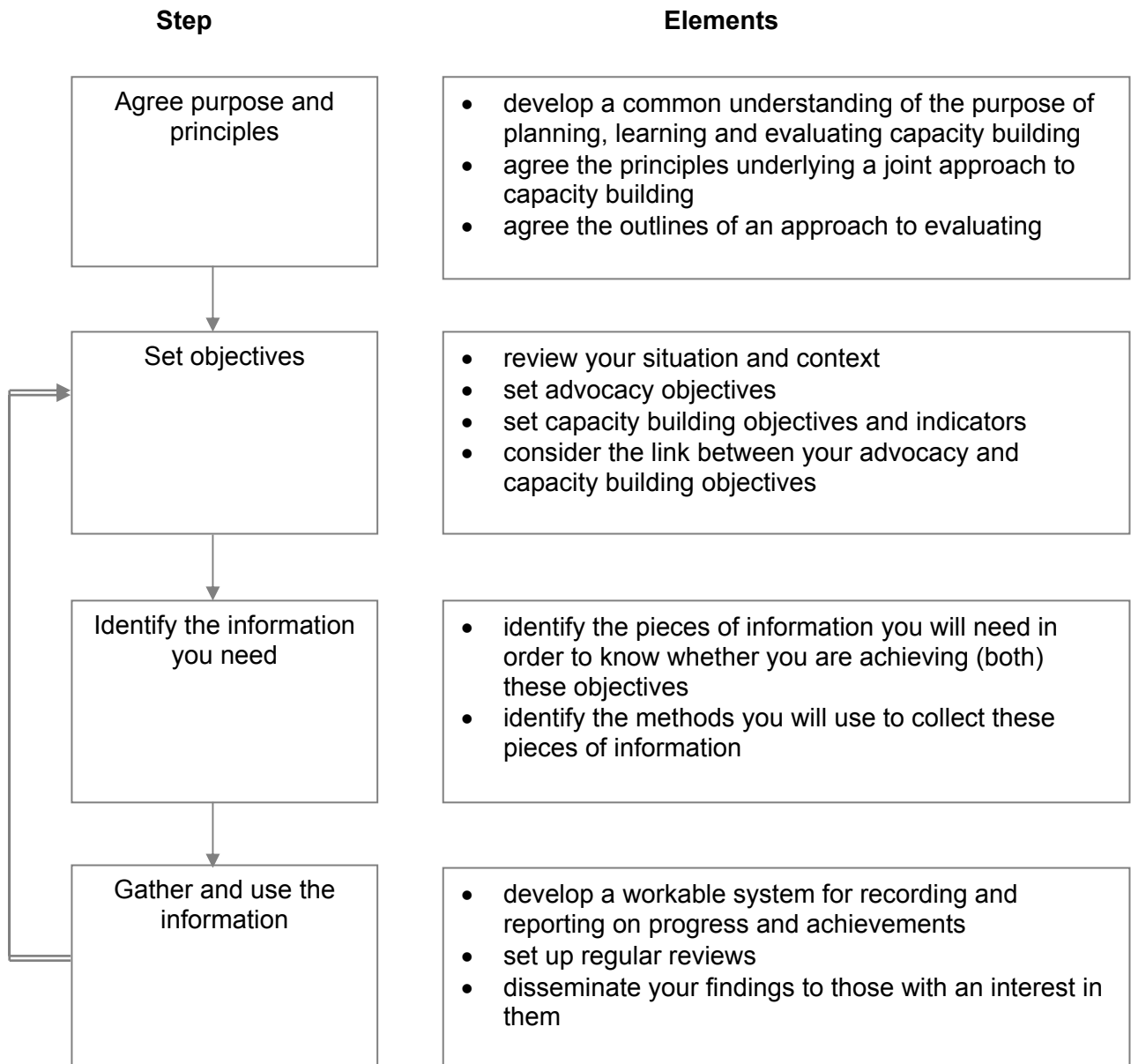## 4.1. Identify the capacity problems and best solutions

In any given situation, the organisation must identify the 'under-capacity' problem in relation to advocating for and with marginalised communities. For example, are certain groups under-represented, or is the problem that those representing them are under-capacitated, relative to others? If it is the latter, the internal capacity issues faced must be identified and an analysis done outlining which level of intervention would be most helpful. Ultimately, the CSSO should consider where the under-capacity lies and address challenges by implementing at the appropriate level.
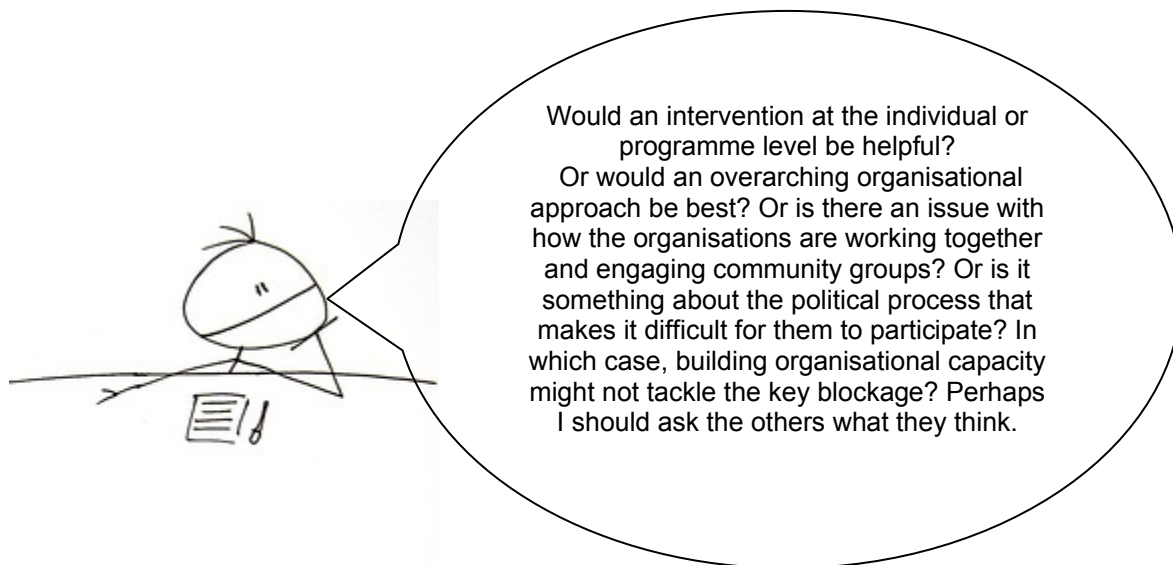
4.2 Identify the gaps that capacity providers are in a good position to fill

Through stakeholder mapping, identify who is currently doing what. What strategic opportunities does this create, whether by working in isolation or (more likely) by adding value and investing to complement existing activity?

Below is a simple diagnostic framework to bear in mind while thinking about planning an intervention. It is not meant to be exhaustive, rather, learning and adaptation should be derived from its practical use. Through the next sections the paper will look at different ways of implementing and evaluating capacity interventions in advocacy contexts, as well as the challenges and opportunities this process holds.

Step	Elements
Agree purpose and principles	• develop a common understanding of the purpose of planning, learning and evaluating capacity building • agree the principles underlying a joint approach to capacity building • agree the outlines of an approach to evaluating
Set objectives	• review your situation and context • set advocacy objectives • set capacity building objectives and indicators • consider the link between your advocacy and capacity building objectives
Identify the information you need	• identify the pieces of information you will need in order to know whether you are achieving (both) these objectives • identify the methods you will use to collect these pieces of information
Gather and use the information	• develop a workable system for recording and reporting on progress and achievements • set up regular reviews • disseminate your findings to those with an interest in them

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Summary implications for CSSOs – Advocacy capacity building framework

- Capacity is manifested at multiple levels and so needs to be considered and addressed at multiple levels.
- This includes looking beyond the organisation as well as within it.
- Given the degree of consensus around what capacity entails at each level, guidance on this can be reasonably crafted; but no categorisation of capacity areas will be universally recognised.
- A genuinely participatory – but with a light-touch – approach is crucial.

5. Types of capacity building interventions

The nature of the intervention can take very different forms. How you conceive of capacity building support has ideological and practical significance. It will also affect how you assess your intervention. Very different approaches to evaluation would flow from different approaches to capacity building. At the risk of oversimplifying, there are three broad approaches available for capacity providers to consider, each valuing different aspects of change and success.[25]

5.1 Pre-planned

In this model the funder or 'capacity provider' takes a view on what areas should be developed and supports efforts in that direction.

The approach would involve:
1. developing and applying a standard assessment checklist
2. conducting a needs assessment of – and capturing a baseline of advocacy capacity in – these pre-determined areas in the diagnostic phase
3. planning and conducting activities and tracking progress against this baseline.

This approach is comparatively simple to manage and implement and certainly makes assessment at least notionally straightforward. However, the validity of this approach is widely questioned.[26] The consensus from the literature and frequently heard in interviews is that controlled and directed change, particularly when imposed from an outside source, generally has little chance of delivering meaningful results, especially within an advocacy context. For example, one common reflection was:

> "We tend to send our staff on training courses – that's what most [CSOs] do isn't it? While that can be interesting and personally helpful – for them and for a short time – it does not reflect their frustration in attempting to apply the learning back in the office."

So the reasons for this relative weakness include that:
- in practice it proves impossible to develop a comprehensive blueprint framework that fits different organisations' circumstances[27]
- there is not generally a best way or set of ways for doing capacity building support [28]
- pre-determined approaches may even restrict opportunity for change because they discourage reacting to unforeseen events and dynamics[29]

This pre-planned approach is most viable where there is good opportunity to quantify means and ends;[30] this is not generally the case in advocacy. Despite that, the research indicates that – where it exists at all - most current advocacy capacity building is addressed at the individual level, and interventions usually apply this pre-planned approach.

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[25] Baser & Morgan, 2008 demarcate and describe planned, incremental and emergent approaches, pp77-79; others describe approaches in similar terms.
[26] E.g. Baser & Morgan, 2008; Herman & Renz, 2008; Blagescu & Young, 2006
[27] Baser and Morgan, 2008, p96
[28] Herman & Renz, 2008, pp13, 14
[29] Baser & Morgan, 2008, p18
[30] Baser & Morgan, 2008, p77-8

5.2 Structured support

In this model, the capacity builder works with the capacity recipient or 'client organisation' to develop a customised tool or framework, crafted in some participative way, that seeks to respond to a particular set of identified needs and challenges. Advocacy objectives and milestones then function more as guidelines than as actual fixed targets.

The model retains some elements of the pre-planned approach – incorporating structured assessment, goals-setting and improvement-monitoring – but seeks to introduce a greater element of adaptability in design and implementation (and evaluation and learning).

Specifically, it is an approach that draws more on internal understandings, the idea being to identify and then hone and adapt advocacy-planning frameworks that are already being tacitly employed within the organisation. In that way the approach is responsive to existing practices and perspectives.

One possible manifestation of this could be a modular/menu approach where a range of possible capacities is identified and then prioritised depending on:

- Which are most-to-least important (as objectives)?
- Which are most-to-least present in the existing set up?[31]

This more organic model of capacity building works best in situations where the context is unstable and choice of strategy difficult to clarify, so is likely to be more appropriate to advocacy contexts.[32] However, a risk remains that tools have a tendency in use to regress into mechanistic checklists, so in effect you may end up with a pre-planned approach by default.[33]

5.3 Fluid approach

This model recognises advocacy capacity as a complex issue, not readily reducible to standard checklists and traditional improvement monitoring. It also serves as a diagnostic lens for understanding the 'multiple-level intervention' discussed earlier.

In this approach capacity is determined by the multiple interactions and interdependencies within the organisational system. Capacity development has to be addressed holistically, with a focus on processes more than structures or outcomes. The trick is to pinpoint the patterns of interaction that are most relevant to effectiveness. These may not be the obvious ones, so would be missed in more formulaic approaches.

An obvious practical difficulty is that an exploratory approach along these lines is likely to make a funder or grant-maker nervous, not least because directions are unlikely to be clear and because it is "not an approach to get a specific task accomplished within a short period of time".[34] Rather, its aim is to explore issues of under-capacity in a creative, flexible fashion, using the appropriate tools and often achieving a 'softer', more qualitative form of change.

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[31] One example of this (looking at network functioning in an advocacy context) is outlined by Wilson-Grau & Nunez, 2006
[32] Baser & Morgan, 2008, p78
[33] Baser & Morgan, 2008, p96
[34] Baser & Morgan, 2008, p79

Although most current interventions adopt a pre-planned approach and (mostly) focus on the individual level, almost all of those organisations that were interviewed recognised that a more sophisticated approach to interventions would be valuable. The caveat being that these same organisations – both funders and front-line organisations – also doubted whether even progressive funders would themselves have the capacity to undertake, say, a hybrid of structured support/fluid approach, given the implications for resources and capacity.

There is also the risk that an approach that considers capacity in the broadest terms – involving changes in norms, values, relationships – may actually not be in line with the kind of support people are typically looking for: "the ability to do something", a practical skill or aptitude that had been lacking.[35] These needs are valid and would, ideally, be met though achieving fundamental and sustainable capacity improvement, as a product of this larger process rather than as a single outcome of a pre-planned intervention. As one respondent said:

> "…ideally you'd want to keep this simple, as that's what practitioners like…but the reality is that is all quite complicated and to see all the stages through means you need to be quite thoughtful about it all…"

5.4 Summary of types of interventions

Broadly speaking, we can think about these three approaches as follows, bearing in mind that each will contain elements of the other and boundaries are more descriptive than definitive

	Pre-planned	Structured support	Fluid approach
Approach	Capacity builder offers support in pre-set areas that are soundly based on evidence about key factors in effectiveness	Customised tool or framework jointly established that seeks to respond to a particular set of identified needs and challenges	Start by looking at and exploring range of blockages and opportunities facing a particular organisation, and providing support in thinking through ways to best respond to these
Rationale	Comparatively straightforward and simple to implement (however, the validity of this approach is widely questioned in the literature)	Importance of adapting approach to different needs and for flexibility in implementation	Capacity is a complex issue, not readily susceptible to checklists and improvement monitoring; capacity is an end in itself, as well as a means to an end
Focus of the intervention	Investing effort in building capacity in pre-agreed areas in pre-agreed ways	Priorities drawn jointly from a wide menu of possible approaches; capacity building strategies would flow from this prioritisation	More on processes than outcomes, pinpointing the patterns of interaction that are most relevant to effectiveness (that might be missed in more formulaic approaches)

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[35] IDRC, 2006, p2

| Implications for evaluation and learning | Capture a baseline assessment of capacity in the diagnostic phase, and then track progress against this baseline | Look less at tracking progress against pre-set indicators: important to capture unanticipated outcomes too; milestones would function more as guidelines than as fixed targets | Focus of assessment would be the quality of organisational analysis and processes, and how well abilities of adaptation have been embedded, rather than necessarily on outputs and outcomes |

Literature and advice on good practice stress the importance of **customising interventions to need and context:** although effectively sceptical about a top-down pre-planned approach, aspects of these interventions might be used within a wider, fluid capacity building intervention. This could be a way of harnessing some of their quantitative potential without making them the end focus or reducing capacity development to rigid outcomes.

A quality diagnosis is vital: "capacity building work should start with a systematic assessment of the needs of the organisation in order to accurately diagnose the type of support that is needed".[36] This assessment should be adapted to context, building on existing capacities rather than seeking to create new ones.[37]

Obviously it is then important that this diagnosis forms the basis for action. **Plans need to link to organisational mission, strategy and values**. Service providers should be thinking and acting from the prism of creating sustainable advocacy and capacity outcomes as well as linking plans to processes of organisational incentive (following the axiomatic principle that what gets measured gets done).[38]

Embed cyclical learning: capacity building for advocacy is not simply a linear process and it is important to try and embed cyclical learning within each stage, to ensure continual reassessment.[39] As part of this, the principle underpinning the approach should be to operate flexibly around an agreed purpose, adapting in response to ongoing learning.

6. Planning an advocacy capacity building intervention

Initiatives for a systematic approach to advocacy capacity building seem to be a relatively recent phenomenon. This paper has explored some of the key issues reflected by the literature and practitioners experiences and will hopefully spark interest in testing and applying the ideas presented. The following guidelines are widely supported in the literature and, to an extent, were reflected in the interview findings.

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[36] Cornforth et al, 2008, p13
[37] Baser & Morgan, 2008, p41
[38] Blagescu & Young, 2006 p6
[39] e.g. Hansen et al, 2005

6.1 Embed principles of partnership and participation

Some consider it desirable that the capacity provider or 'client organisation' should take a leading role in the process, for example by defining their own indicators of change.[40] But at the same time, it is "easy to overestimate the enthusiasm for self-assessment and underestimate the complexity".[41] Even to expect an organisation to commit time to work out what the rationale behind the intervention should be, could be to expect too much.[42] Organisations tend to have varying degrees of awareness as to what their needs are and what kinds of interventions will be most likely to develop their capacities. So others argue that self-assessment on its own is not generally sufficient, stressing the importance of external experts in the process.[43]
Some kind of joint approach therefore seems necessary, with both capacity provider and receiver exhibiting openness to learning from the other partner. The nature of the relationship between the capacity provider and receiver, and the degree of trust underpinning the relationship, is key.[44]

6.2 Ensure continuity of involvement

Single interventions are unlikely to result in significant change – one-off training, for example, tends to be ineffective unless there are organisational support structures and networks in place.[45] Offering a range of support tends to be most effective.[46] Capacity development is an ongoing process and so long-term investment of support, and persistence, is crucial.[47]

6.3 Beware the 'quick fix' approach

The search for quick fixes is unlikely to be fruitful and expecting too much too quickly can lead to superficial changes. Equally, not expecting enough, or not expecting appropriate levels of change can send the signal that more difficult and more challenging areas are not important.[48] One reflection a number of funder and front-line organisations shared was the importance of a sustained approach for a capacity building intervention. As one experienced practitioner sagely observed: "There seems to be a correlation between the more simple the approach, the less effective it tends to be." And another interviewee said: "The trick is to aim to try and build sustained capacity – achieving the external [policy] change can take time so the advocacy capacity needs to be sustained to maintain pressure on policy makers".

It is a truism verging on a cliché that NGOs tend to overestimate their potential influence in the short term, but then underestimate their influence in the long term.

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[40] E.g. James, 2001, p11
[41] Hailey et al, 2005, p9
[42] Woodland & Hind, 2002 p4
[43] Cornforth et al, 2008, p13
[44] E.g. James, 2001, p22
[45] Gavelin & Alexander, 2006
[46] Cornforth et al, 2008, p14
[47] E.g. Horton et al, 2003, p90; Cornforth et al, 2008, p14; James, 2001, p19
[48] Gaventa, 2004, p31

While acknowledging the capacity and resource implications for capacity providers, it is nevertheless important to aim to build in enough time for each stage to be undertaken appropriately; this is especially true for the design and information-gathering stages.[49]

Summary implications for a CSSO's framework

- A pre-planned approach would be simple to apply but looks unlikely to suffice and could even distort a CSO's priorities and capacity development efforts.
- A more adaptive approach looks to be more appropriate but would need sensitive implementation to ensure that principles of flexibility are safeguarded.
- It is important to take a holistic view of capacity and ensure that any intervention identifies underlying capacity issues, and doesn't just take the most obvious route.
- In determining the type of intervention, there is effectively a trade-off between its simplicity and meaningfulness; the further away you move from a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach, the more difficult it will be to design, implement, manage and monitor and evaluate the approach.
- A customised approach, underpinned by sound diagnosis, tends to be most appropriate.
- Evidence points to the importance, and also the difficulties, of embedding a partnership approach and committing to continuity of sustained engagement, involvement and follow through.

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7. Advocacy capacity building effectiveness

In order to implement appropriate capacity building interventions for advocacy the provider must have an idea of what increased capacity looks like. As outlined in the 'theory of change' diagram at the beginning of this paper, advocacy capacity building interventions should (simplistically and ideally) lead to enhanced capacity and then advocacy effectiveness.
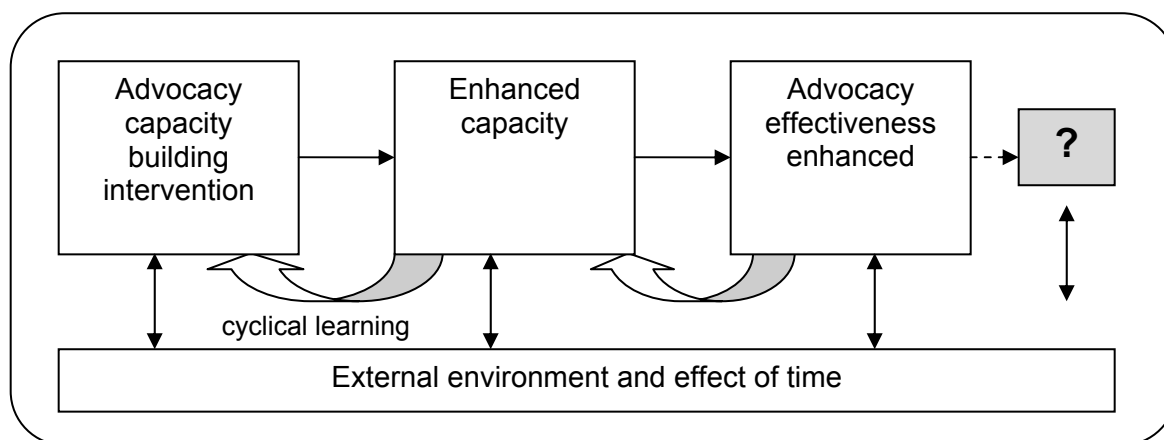
Effectiveness is, however, a contested concept. Assertions of best practice, for example, tend to be subjective and context-specific: "in many instances a practice that enhances effectiveness in

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[49] Banerjee et al, 2008 p25

one organisation may be a poor choice for another".[50] This draws our attention back to the importance of a quality diagnosis that takes stock of individual contexts.

Ideally, advocacy effectiveness should lead to advocacy success being secured. However, there are a number of specific problematic areas, the key ones being:

1. **dimensions of success** are not always clear, and their inter-relationships may introduce additional complexities. For example, if there is evidence of policy or funding changes having occurred:
   - does this policy change represent success or does it depend on whether any change is actually implemented, and if so whether this delivers the anticipated benefits?
   - this could be at the expense of reinforcing existing power dynamics or have other negative ramifications
   - what some might see as a principled compromise, others might see as a shameful sell-out.

2. **attribution** – the search for evidence that a particular organisation is responsible for a particular result tends to be fruitless and is founded on a misrepresentation of how change happens in an advocacy context.

3. **timescales of judgment** – conditions can change rapidly, new announcements can be made, a change of personnel in government, for example, can take place, and what looked previously like a victory can take on a different appearance.

In the diagram below the external environment and time affect advocacy success in unplanned and often unquantifiable ways, just as the advocacy process affects the external environment in way that are not always obvious. This makes measuring advocacy effectiveness challenging.
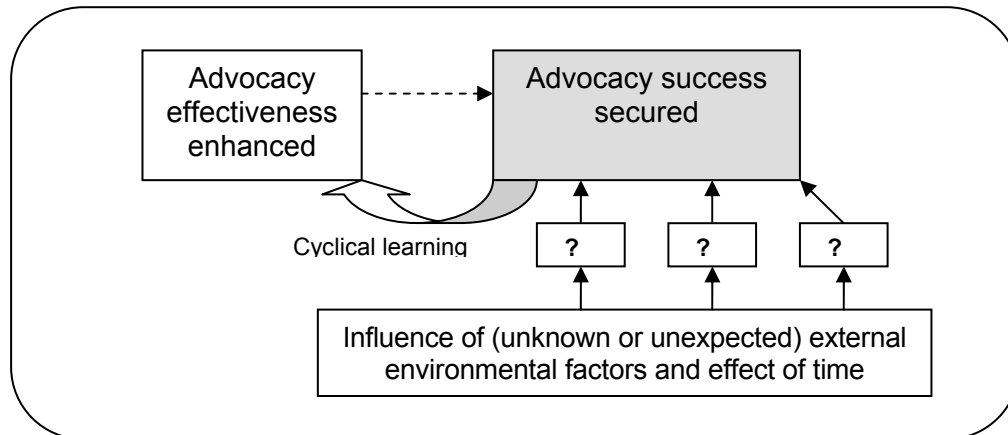
Importance of setting clear, plausible objectives

Crucially, one would normally evaluate something against the extent to which objectives were achieved. This assumes that objectives have some kind of paramount validity whereas, for example, they could be set with the bar deliberately low, in which case achieving them may not count for much. More often in most evaluation experience they tend to be vague and hopelessly aspirational, meaning that they do not provide a yardstick against which to measure advocacy effectiveness. Because of weak design, it is rarely clear what anticipated success would look like. The importance of setting clear and plausible goals is widely stressed.

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[50] Herman & Renz, 2008

Drawing on the ideals of the ongoing SAVI project

Effective advocacy needs to be:
(i) **issue-based** – a tangible problem that people can understand, relate to, sympathise with
(ii) **have traction** – with citizens, with civil society, with government, as a high priority, when there are so many other pressing issues competing for attention
(iii) **evidence-based** – factual, credible, trustworthy, well informed, well analysed, well interpreted
(iv) **strategically planned** – well targeted, well timed, well presented through the most appropriate media: people/events/organisations
(v) **in partnership** – bringing together key players (from across civil society and within government) who are genuinely interested/concerned/passionate about the issue, to form alliances/align strategies, plans, resources to tackle it together (few organisations in Nigeria have the capacity to singlehandedly tackle such issues)
(vi) **'civilised'** – aimed at bringing about constructive dialogue with government (i.e. demanding rights through negotiation) rather than 'militant' antagonism (i.e. naming, blaming and shaming, and demanding rights through protest)
(vii) and, **replicable** – using what is available on ground, building on it, strengthening it, leaving lasting foundations, well grounded, that others can build on and learn from, adapt and apply in other similar settings, to other issues, and supporting the strengthening of local 'institutional memory' of what works well, what doesn't and why.

Ideas about advocacy effectiveness are possibly further complicated by introducing the notion of 'innovation' into the equation (something which funders can occasionally be guilty of). There is some concern that innovation may not be so desirable in advocacy as it is in service provision, where civil society's ability to identify new ways of doing things can be a key strength. Hence for example the recent critique that there is:

> "a tendency to make a fetish out of certain kinds of 'innovation' that privilege business thinking, rather than looking at the impact that civil society makes on its own terms. The bedrock of citizen action may be effective but not especially new".[51]

Summary implications for a CSSO's framework

- Even at the best of times, effectiveness is a problematic concept;
- The nature of advocacy exacerbates the complexities involved in assessing effectiveness, given issues around attribution, and timescales and dimensions of success
- Many of the issues in assessing advocacy effectiveness are essentially those encountered in relation to assessing capacity building

8. Evaluating advocacy capacity building

8.1 Current practice

Although many of the issues encountered in assessing advocacy effectiveness (discussed above) are tied in with those encountered in assessing capacity building current practice seems to be surprisingly weak. As one recent survey of capacity building in advocacy contexts

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[51] Edwards, 2008

concluded, "Organisations that have been delivering capacity building have paid little attention to monitoring and evaluating the impact of their work".[52]

There is useful theoretical guidance but little practical application of it. In addition, the research conducted for this Praxis Paper identified very few efforts made by advocacy capacity providers and receivers systematically to monitor and evaluate and share learning from advocacy capacity building experience.

This is not unsurprising given the relatively recent growth in CSO advocacy capacity building programmes. It seems, however, that the pace of development of advocacy support provision is moving quicker than the pace of implementing evaluation and learning methodologies. One CSO respondent acknowledged: *"the requirements we have are still at the [capacity building] delivery stage…we just don't have the resources to consider evaluating it, not yet anyway"*. This view was shared by most respondents, although the lack of evidence based current practice makes it difficult to generalise this need. It may, however, present an opportunity for a progressive capacity provider to work with interested partners and hopefully lead the sector in this area, in terms of testing, adapting and sharing the learning.

8.2 Purpose of evaluating advocacy capacity building

The starting point for any learning and evaluation process is to be clear about purpose. Any approach to monitoring and evaluation would ideally be consistent with the capacity building aim, i.e. itself build capacity. Investing in evaluation can build capacity, by promoting and embedding processes that support learning. (See also the conclusions outlined in Praxis Paper 23 'Monitoring and Evaluating Capacity Building: Is it really that difficult?' [53])

To help ensure this result, any organisation supporting or providing capacity building should:

- balance the desire that those being supported are accountable for funds/support provided with the fact that they are also accountable to others (including local communities and peer organisations)
- recognise the fact that promoting learning and ensuring accountability can sometimes conflict – if a system is set up to give the funder the information it wants, how does this help the organisation develop their own learning capacities (and vice versa); whilst there may be overlap, it should not be assumed.

8.3 Links between capacity building and effectiveness

As discussed above, the challenge is to be able to assess the relationship and links between capacity building and capacity and between capacity and effectiveness. These are confused and complex:

- from capacity building to enhanced capacity – "Patterns of … capacity development … are uneven, with progress going at different speeds and different times. Investments in capacity can take days or even years to yield significant results".[54]
- from capacity to effectiveness – "Results obviously depend to some degree on the existence of capacity, especially in the medium and long term, but beyond that platitude the interconnections become murky".[55]

[52] Blagescu & Young, 2006, pvi
[53] Simister & Smith, January 2010
[54] Baser & Morgan, 2008, p87

Three key variables can affect the nature of the inter-relationships:

1. The quality of capacity building support provided
Other things being equal, the better conceived and managed the intervention, the more likely it is that it will reap positive results. The implication of this is that the quality of provision should itself be a subject of evaluation. This would involve looking at how the principles of good quality capacity building, however defined, are adhered to.

2. Organisation's receptivity to capacity building
One aspect to take into account is an organisation's potential ability to benefit from support. This would be determined by factors such as:

- power relations within a particular organisation – for example, the importance of engaging with and through those with the power to effect change within the organisation
- the organisation's cultural openness to and interest in change
- the difficulty of challenging vested interests, given that capacity building is never power neutral, even internally.[56]

For example, in one analysis of a capacity building intervention respondents are grouped as follows:[57]

No problem group	saw the approach as common sense and easily adopted
Step-by-step group	see that specific changes that will need to be tackled steadily are required
Enthusiastic integrators	positive response, envisaged quite rapid processes
Culture change integrators	positive response, but identified that significant culture change in the organisation would be required
Not right now, thanks! group	sceptics – felt that existing processes worked fine

There are some suggestions in the literature, also reflected in some of our interviews, that support provision should focus on those with most potential to improve.[58] But such an approach could carry the risk that capacity building efforts would bypass those whose needs may be greatest.

3. Influence of the external environment
The external environment needs to be seen from the perspective of its influence on the organisation as well as the organisation's influence on it. For example, policy and political contexts, and how your issue is perceived, impact on your ability to be effective (See section 3.5). Capacity providers need to reflect an understanding of the external context as a key component of the diagnostic phase, and then tracking and interpreting the external environment and its impacts on the organisation throughout the course of any capacity building programme.

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[55] Baser & Morgan, 2008, p87
[56] Blagescu & Young, 2006 p6
[57] Aitken & Paton, 2006, p23
[58] E.g. Cornforth et al, 2008, p13

Two fundamentally different perspectives on effectiveness can also have an effect on the way the link between interventions and outcomes are interpreted:

- from effectiveness to capacity – a possible route to enhancing capacity is through enhanced effectiveness. Improved advocacy results increases demand, leading to more resources being invested in capacity development; in other words, focus on performance and the capacity follows, rather than the other way around.[59]

- capacity as effectiveness – some see capacity as an end in itself, as well as a means to an end (improved performance); from this perspective what is important is an organisation's ability to learn and solve problems and thus improve its ability to assess and react to future advocacy needs.[60] Criteria for success would likely revolve around measures of sustainable capacity to perform in the future, and whether the organisation has developed its abilities of adaptation, rather than assessment of actual performance. This approach would fit with a fluid approach where objectives might seem less quantifiable.

8.4 Challenges in evaluating capacity building

Much of the literature and the experience of practice indicate that the enhanced building of capacity is actually a form of advocacy. It is therefore not surprising that the various discussions about the challenges in evaluating capacity building are reminiscent of many of the same debates about evaluating advocacy. Similar complexities have been briefly explored in the section above on advocacy effectiveness. Points specific to capacity building include that[61]:

- difficulties in attribution and causation – especially given shifting contexts and multiple influences on outcomes. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that capacity building efforts are often embedded within wider processes and thus difficult to demarcate.[62]
- timescales of change and hence assessment – initial reactions to specific interventions are fairly easily measured (questionnaires after training etc) but whether learning from this is retained and then applied, and whether this enhances performance has been paid less attention. Indeed, the issue of collecting information on long-term change has recently been cited as the area of highest difficulty in evaluating capacity building.[63]
- similarly, if a fluid approach is used objectives might seem less quantifiable and notions of success are harder to pinpoint.

In addition to these conceptual and contextual challenges, there are more practical considerations (again the same issues feature in evaluating advocacy more generally). Some respondents noted high levels of difficulty both in finding good ways to collect information and in collecting quality information.[64]

Engaging with this challenge requires first that organisations recognise the importance of evaluation, and evaluating capacity and capacity building interventions. This resolve must be paired with the ability to devise and implement a workable approach for tracking progress and gathering relevant information. The process of evaluation must be congruent with wider organisational ways of working. Finally, the organisation must commit to dedicating resources to this end, on an ongoing basis, even when faced with other, seemingly more urgent, priorities.

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[59] Baser & Morgan, 2008, p89
[60] Horton et al, 2003 p45
[61] E.g. James, 2001; Blagescu & Young, 2006
[62] Blagescu & Young, 2006, e.g. p9
[63] Cupitt, 2009, p32
[64] Cupitt, 2009 p32

Importance of clarity of design

Many challenges in evaluating capacity building are actually challenges of design. Evidence is that, 'clarifying what difference we hope to make' and 'identifying indicators' are commonly cited as areas of difficulty for organisations concerned with evaluating capacity building.[65]

It seems that a clear and plausible routemap is needed, anticipating what steps will be taken to develop capacity. This plan will help a capacity provision intervention to be successful, with a reasonable prospect of assessing the effectiveness. Unless the theory of change behind the capacity intervention and the advocacy strategy is strong, change is likely to be superficial or unfocused.[66]

9. Planning an evaluation for capacity building intervention

This suggests a challenge therefore, that theories of change need to be considered and established at three interrelated but different levels; one of capacity building, one of advocacy effectiveness and one of advocacy impact i.e. the positive changes in the lives of beneficiaries. These challenges can be engaged with by taking the following actions:

- start with clear sense of what you're trying to achieve, and how you anticipate this will happen
- find ways to measure and track progress against anticipated achievements that balance what is realistic with the desirability of robustness
- track and factor-in changes to wider internal and external contexts
- build an overall picture, cross checking information by gathering it from different sources in different ways
- look for signs of contribution not evidence of attribution
- explore open-ended questions in any assessment framework, as well as tracking anticipated changes.[67]

Summary implications for a CSSO's framework

- Current practice in assessing advocacy capacity building appears to be very weak; the inability to draw on evidence and experience makes it a great deal more difficult to be confident in developing a practical, tested approach.
- Approaches to assessing the effectiveness of capacity building should ideally themselves build capacity. But there is a potential tension of purpose between monitoring and evaluation for learning and for accountability.
- Links between capacity building and capacity and between capacity and effectiveness are confused and complex. Disentangling these links involves assessing the quality of capacity building support provided; exploring and addressing questions about the extent of organisations' receptiveness; and understanding and tracking the external environment and its influences on the organisation.
- Challenges in evaluating capacity building can be mitigated and addressed if there is a clear and understood purpose for evaluation; adequate resourcing and commitment to this element of the programme; a clear set of goals accompanied by a plausible route to

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[65] Cupitt, 2009, p32
[66] Baser & Morgan, 2008, pp91-2
[67] The Most Significant Change approach suggested by Davies & Dart, 2005 is one technique designed with this in mind

achieving them; a workable information system incorporating information gathering from a range of sources; adaptability within the evaluation approach, as well as within the capacity building approach more generally.

10. Conclusion

Through exploring practitioners' experiences and current theory around advocacy capacity building it has been possible to suggest and indicate a number of potential approaches to interventions. It seems that for a capacity building intervention to be effective practitioners must be aware of the complex nature of advocacy, models of achieving social and political change and follow a strategic, diagnostic approach. This approach should always grow out of an understanding of contextual, socio-historical factors while bearing in mind the tenuous relationships between capacity and effectiveness.

It is also clear that while advocacy capacity building is growing in demand there is very little strategic implementation or systematic evaluation taking place. The research has raised a number of questions and challenges that would be interesting to explore further. For example,

- Are the concepts presented here on capacity building for advocacy relevant to practitioner's experiences and work on the ground? How is current thinking developing? How does this vary around the world?

- What approaches to capacity building for advocacy are working well and achieving results both in capacity and advocacy effectiveness?

- How are these approaches being adapted and implemented when working in difficult environments (such as, authoritarian states, no freedom of information, limited opportunities for engagement with government)?

- Who is motivating the advocacy capacity building intervention and how might this affect the outcomes?

- What kinds of advocacy coalitions work well and why? How successful is it to support both sides of the equation (as in SAVI) as part of a capacity building approach?

- How can capacity building help an organisation to maintain its integrity when adopting advocacy work for the first time?

- How can we best assess capacity at the starting point and evaluate the impact of the interventions at the 'end'?

As advocacy climbs on the international development agenda it becomes increasingly important to engage with questions such as these in a creative and inclusive fashion. INTRAC would therefore welcome further dialogue with advocacy capacity-building practitioners.

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