



CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

CAPACITY ASSESSMENT: THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY

"Carrying out a capacity assessment to complement activities aimed at enhancing nutrition, allowed stakeholders to get a full picture of the obstacles faced by institutions in Uganda."
- Juliet Aphane, Nutrition Officer, FAO

A lack of institutional and individual capacity often undermines the long-term impact of otherwise technically sound programmes. FAO has thus developed tools to help countries identify capacity gaps and address their real needs in a sustainable way. This brief summarises FAO's capacity assessment methodology and provides guidance on what tools and resources are available.

WHAT IS CAPACITY ASSESSMENT?

A capacity assessment (CA) is a structured approach for analyzing capacity across three dimensions: individuals, organizations and the enabling environment. It aims at providing a clear picture of a country or sector's capacity in terms of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

WHY DO A CAPACITY ASSESSMENT?

CAs identify capacity gaps, and highlight the institutional dynamics, that cause a development challenge to persist. Put another way, even the most well-designed programmes cannot be effective, or sustainable, when capacity gaps and a lack of stakeholder commitment hinder delivery.

During CAs, stakeholders pool their first hand knowledge of a problem or development challenge, and identify possible solutions that are context specific. Indeed, the risk of not doing a CA is that generic solutions, which fail to address the underlying causes of a development challenge and associated capacity gaps, are adopted.

WHAT IS NEW ABOUT FAO'S CAPACITY ASSESSMENT APPROACH?

With the new approach, national stakeholders are fully involved in defining and implementing their own solutions. Furthermore, using a structured systems-based approach, stakeholders look not only at individual capacity, but also at organizations and the broader enabling environment. FAO facilitates and supports the entire process by providing a methodology, tools and training in capacity assessment.

THE CAPACITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS

CAs should be conducted in addition to the technical assessments that are normally part of programme design. Findings from CAs form the basis for strategic action plans.

Typical steps in the CA process:

1. Select the team who will do the assessment and decide how the assessment will be carried out (surveys, desk reviews, focus groups, etc.)
2. Use the **stakeholder analysis tool** to identify key stakeholders; Customize the **capacity assessment questionnaire** for different stakeholders (farmers, government staff, etc.) as well as the specific sector or challenge.
3. Collect and analyze the data and communicate the findings to key stakeholders.
4. Define and gain consensus on next steps.

WHAT TOOLS ARE AVAILABLE?

Commonly Used Capacity Assessment Tools	
Problem/Solution Tree Tool	A problem tree helps clarify the underlying causes and effects of the current challenge. Solution trees help reframe the problem and come up with innovative solutions. These can also be used to develop log frames.
Stakeholder Mapping Tool	The tool looks at stakeholders in terms of whether they support or oppose the issue at hand, as well as their power to influence the outcome. It also helps identify people 1) who should be interviewed during the capacity assessment; 2) whose awareness of the issue needs to be raised; and 3) whose capacity should be strengthened.
Capacity Assessment Questionnaire	The questionnaire covers the three dimensions of capacity development: individual, organizations and the enabling environment. For each dimension, it explores 1) the existing situation; 2) the desired situation; and 3) what needs to be done to achieve it. Questions should be customized for specific stakeholders, countries and sectors.

More guidance on these and other tools can be found in the book **FAO Approaches to Capacity Development in Programming: Processes and Tools (Learning Module 2)**:

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/capacity_building/FAO_CD_LM2.pdf

THE ADDED VALUE OF DOING A CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

- **Promotes ownership and inclusiveness:** Stakeholders play key roles in assessing the situation and designing successful interventions. This leads to ownership of the development objective.
- **Harnesses local knowledge:** Local knowledge is critical for understanding the complex systems

and dynamics behind a development challenge.

- **Brings champions on board:** Many participants in the CA process go on to play key roles in moving the capacity development process forward.
- **Provides a baseline** against which to measure results.

FAO's Capacity Development Approach

For FAO's work to have a lasting impact, there should be a realistic assessment of a country's capacity in terms of:

- **Individuals** - their knowledge, skills, behavior and attitudes;
- **Organizations** - their mandates, priorities, processes and structure; and
- **The enabling environment** - including political will as well as policy and legal frameworks.



CONCLUSION

Applying a participatory capacity assessment approach fosters stakeholder commitment and ownership in the development process. Participants responsible for planning and implementing programmes are likely to play an active role in their organizations and foster successful outcomes. Capacity assessments are an investment in the future since they are the basis of sustainable capacity development.