

3 GETTING STARTED

THIS CHAPTER provides answers to some commonly asked questions which will help you to get the process started.

Starting a capacity assessment process is not easy. One does not simply jump into such a process without a good reason, without a plan of action and resources, or without an anticipated result in mind.

Typically, a capacity assessment is triggered by a policy direction or decision of some sort: e.g., to improve the delivery of a particular government service; to improve capacity of a local administration; to downsize or reduce the cost of government; to strengthen the legislative processes; to improve the transparency of government decisionmaking; and so on. Such a policy decision or direction can serve as a higher level programme objective which would set the broad parameters for the capacity initiative. Usually, such policy statements are based on some prior analysis of a problem or an opportunity. This is particularly true in the case of governance programmes.

There are a few other important questions to which you might want to find answers before proceeding with a capacity initiative.

[1] Who is Involved in the Assessment?

The Stakeholder

A stakeholder is any individual or entity that is involved, directly or indirectly, in any life cycle stage of the programme, including the ultimate beneficiaries. Major groups of stakeholders might include:

- ▲ “champion” of the programme
- ▲ strategic manager/decision maker
- ▲ clients or customers
- ▲ policy makers
- ▲ decision makers
- ▲ implementors
- ▲ funding organisations
- ▲ other sponsors, others

Who should be involved in the capacity assessment will depend to a large extent on the current situation of the entity or system. This requires judgement and common sense. Many current strategic, programme management and related methodologies refer to those that are involved in the process as **stakeholders**, although this is a somewhat over-generalised term. Other terms often used interchangeably, include actors, players, participants, beneficiaries, and clients, among others.

A **stakeholder analysis** could be carried out to determine precisely who is/should be involved, the nature of their involvement (role, responsibilities, accountabilities; direct or indirect involvement), and magnitude of involvement (e.g., full or part-time, specific activities only). There

are a number of techniques, tools and methods which can support the stakeholder analysis, and individual circumstances will dictate which would be the most effective. For example, some tools include surveys, workshops and conferences, and direct consultation. Care must be taken not to cover so large a “stakeholder” group that the capacity process gets bogged down.

For example, while an envisaged capacity development initiative on governance might eventually include virtually everyone in the “system” (individuals, groups, formal entities), only a very few need be involved in capacity assessments in the initial policy/concept development stages. How stakeholders are to be involved is another key area to be addressed. For example, key stakeholders may be represented through formal management/steering committees. Others may be represented through advisory or consultative councils/boards, surveys, workshops and conferences. These points are addressed in later chapters.

[2] What Factors Are Critical to Success?

A second question to ask is what will determine the success of the capacity assessment, and subsequent capacity development initiative. The following list of success factors is based on extensive UNDP and other international experience in development programmes, technical cooperation, and capacity development.

- ▲ **Visible Leadership:** meaningful commitment and ownership (and “political will”) at the political and senior bureaucratic levels, sustained throughout the process.
- ▲ **Organisation-wide and Participative:** highly consultative, with meaningful involvement of all impacted parties or stakeholders.
- ▲ **Open and Transparent:** the process itself is open, with no hidden agendas, and decisionmaking is transparent. In some situations, external consultants may help facilitate this process and assure independence and objectivity.
- ▲ **Awareness and Understanding:** all impacted parties/stakeholders are aware of and understand the development or capacity initiative, the implied changes and capacity needs; requires strong internal and external communications; public relations.
- ▲ **General Buy-in and Acceptance:** understanding generates buy-in and acceptance; critical mass of commitment; resistance is managed.
- ▲ **Appropriate Methodologies:** for programme and project management; tools and techniques; adapted to the local situation and needs; measures of performance established (results, outputs, outcomes); allowance for early successes and pilots, ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Questions to Help Identify Stakeholders

Who makes/influences policy and decisions?

Who would “champion” the capacity initiative?

Who could provide financial and technical resources?

Who would be impacted?

Who are the direct/indirect beneficiaries?

Who with no “voice” needs special attention?

Who are the representatives of those impacted?

Who is likely to support or oppose the initiative?

Who is responsible for implementation?

What political forces are there?

- ▲ **Clear Set of Objectives and Priorities:** built into project/programme plans; incremental and phased; available resources appropriate to workload.
- ▲ **Clear Management Accountabilities:** transparent processes and decisionmaking; open dialogues; explicit responsibilities and accountabilities set.
- ▲ **Sufficient Time and Resources:** committed availability of financial, information and human resources to plan, develop, implement the capacity initiative; strong managerial resources.

[3] What Sorts of Situations Call for Starting a Capacity Assessment?

Finally, it is useful to determine the current status of an entity/organisation, or a system as a whole, in terms of its “Current Strategic Management Situation.” These situations are defined by the extent to which **core capacities** are in evidence (as, for example, developed by DAC—please see footnote on page 6). The table on the following page provides some guidance on the status or state of core management capacities at the systems/entity levels.

The nature and level of detail of an assessment will vary according to the current situation of the entity or system. For example, capacity assessments will be far more critical and very much different for a system/entity under Situation 1 than for a system/entity under Situation 4. Hence, it will be very important to know the current situation before embarking on a capacity assessment process. This can be done through a quick “situation assessment” or similar analysis. This is addressed in the next chapter: “**Where We Are Now.**” The important thing to remember is that capacity assessments can and should be carried out on a continuous or ongoing basis. The nature of the assessment depends on the situation of the organisation, and the status of its core strategic management capacities.

CURRENT SITUATION	DESCRIPTION
<p>1 No Strategic Core Management Capacity</p>	<p>This is a typical situation for many organisations, and for the most “systems” situations. There is no established strategic or long range plan, no agreed vision of the future or sense of mission, and most of the core strategic management capacities are absent or weak at the systems and/or entity levels.</p>
<p>2 A General Management Strategy Has Been Formulated</p>	<p>Many organisations are at the initial stages of developing core strategic management capacities. There exists a preliminary or high level strategic plan, but the core capacities to implement are absent or weak at the system and/or entity levels.</p>
<p>3 A Management Strategy Is Being Implemented</p>	<p>A detailed strategic management plan has been accepted and is in the process of being implemented. All of the core strategic management capacities have been, or are in the process of being put in place at all levels within the system.</p>
<p>4 Full Strategic Management Capacity Achieved</p>	<p>All core strategic management capacities are in place. The organisation (or system) may be seen as a fully sustaining operation. Strategic management is an ongoing activity at all levels and across all dimensions.</p>