Leaving the microscope at home and taking the can opener instead:

experiences in capacity assessment with civil society organisations in Papua New Guinea

Martin Syder &
Jessica Kenway

Western Highlands "Mammas Group"
– a successful CSO

Purpose of the Joint Organisational Assessment (JOA)

– Build understanding and trust between civil society organisations and program staff.

– Jointly identify aspects of CSO systems that could be strengthened either endogenously or with support from the program.

– Capture a baseline of CSO capacity prior to support being provided.

– Assess /manage the risk of investing in the organisation.

Aspects of capacity considered in the JOA

1. Organisational identity
2. Governance
3. Financial management
4. Human resources management
5. Project management
6. Administration and information management
7. Networks and partnerships.

Other members of the review team

Assistant Development Coordinators:

- – Julianne Rumbi
- – Sabi Pati

The review process

- Trialled iterations of the revised JOA with 8 CSOs.
- Feedback from program staff on previous JOA.
- Reviewed assessment processes from other community development programs (ACCESS & PACAP).
- Input from gender, HIV & M&E Advisors.
- Reflection and modification after each trial.
- Analysed JOA reports and reviewed JOA process.
- Feedback from PNG colleagues as trust developed.

Initial revision of the JOA

- Program needs:
  - Streamline JOA process, report and analysis.
  - Risk assessment.
- Trialled a revised JOA
  - Series of numerical scaled questions which participants used to rank their organisations.
  - Sought evidence of practices (FM, Governance).
- But there were concerns with this process.

Recent research on capacity development

- Capacity development is a complex interplay of individuals, systems, organisations, networks (Morgan 2008)
- Capacity development is a non linear process in an unstable environment (Reeler 2007)
- Perceptions of organisations' strengths and problems can be culturally mediated (Rhodes 2008)

Recent AusAID guidance on M&E for civil society programs
(Kelly, David & Roche 2008)

- Relationships grounded in trust are essential for capacity development.
- Consideration should be given to M&E approaches that are dynamic, participative, and reflective.

Implications for review of JOA

- Clearly defined the purpose of the JOA as supporting organisational development. NOT assessing <u>risk</u>.
- Shifted from assessing to facilitating self-assessment.
- Facilitated the organisation to identify what types of capacity made the most difference given their context, stage of development and goals.
- Process revised to be primarily qualitative, interactive, reflective.

Graphing and discussing changes in staff morale

Extract from repeat JOA

1   Project Management

Review the findings from the previous JOA.

2   What <u>if any</u> have been the **important** positive or negative changes for the organisation's project (or activity) management?

What helped the changes to occur (consider internal and external influences)?

Aspects	Important changes (positive or negative)	What helped the changes to occur?
Needs assessment and planning		
Implementation		
Performance assessment *(monitoring and evaluation)*		
Communication of findings		
Other		

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1. How, if at all, has any support from, or interaction with CDS or DGTP affected the organisation's project management? (this could be positive or negative)

_____

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2. If there have been changes, what impact has this had on the work the organisation does, or the communities, groups or partners the organisation works with?

_____

_____

_____

3. Based on the discussion, what are the main strengths of the organisation, and what priority actions need to be carried out to further strengthen the organisation?

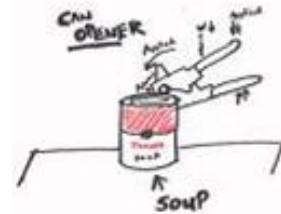| Existing strengths	Priority action/s

4. Overall, how would you rate the organisation's project management on a scale of 1 to 7 (where 1 is very low, and 7 is very high) (NA = not applicable). *Circle the numbers.*

Previous JOA	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
Now	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

5. Explanation of scores: _____

The JOA shifted from being a microscope to a can opener!

Incorporating elements of a Strengths Based Approach

- Ideas from Appreciative Inquiry to draw out the strengths and existing capacity, and generate energy and enthusiasm.

- Included elements of SBA through:
  - Starting on their achievements, high points, existing capacity and wishes for the future
  - Adjusting the language
  - Building skills and understanding of facilitators in SBA.

Comments on
Strengths Based Approach

*The process helped us to identify our strengths and weaknesses in the form of priority actions.... Most times such assessment is done to look into weaknesses but **this process has put a smile on our faces** and **we feel confident in ourselves for heading in the right direction** ...*

(Partners in Community Development, Madang)

Comments continued...

*It has helped us put on a new pair of glasses, to stand back, think more deeply and evaluate ourselves and our performance. It helped us to look at our **strengths,** and **what we can do that is within our capacity***

(Milne Bay Counselling Services Association).

What information to record over time

- A smaller sub-set of questions targeting key capacity issues
- Most questions are 'probing'
- Interpretative and 'sense making'

In Michael Quinn Patton's 2008 paper on 'State of the Art in Measuring Development Assistance' he describes the need to balance efforts spent on data collection, with those allocated to making sense of data.

Considering power

- The importance of building trust between facilitators and organisations
- Power and perverse incentives
- 'de-coupled' from funding processes
- Exploring other delivery options

Conclusions

- Wide-spread interest in the JOA from other AusAID programs, donors and International NGOs.
- The self-assessment process was valued by the CSOs, particularly when it included a more explicit focus on existing strengths and capacity.
- Need to ensure purposes of organisational assessment are reinforcing, not at cross purposes (e.g. Risk).
- Recognise that the assessment is not in isolation. It sits in a context of power and relationships that affect how the process is perceived, who becomes involved, and how useful it is for the organisations and the program.

Next steps

- Need for improved donor coordination across programs working with civil society (e.g. Milne Bay having organisational assessment by 2 separate AusAID funded programs).
- Further work is required to assist CSO personnel to reflect on culture and context. How does the cultural complexity of PNG impact on the performance of CSOs, and what might a truly culturally appropriate organisational capacity assessment methodology look like?
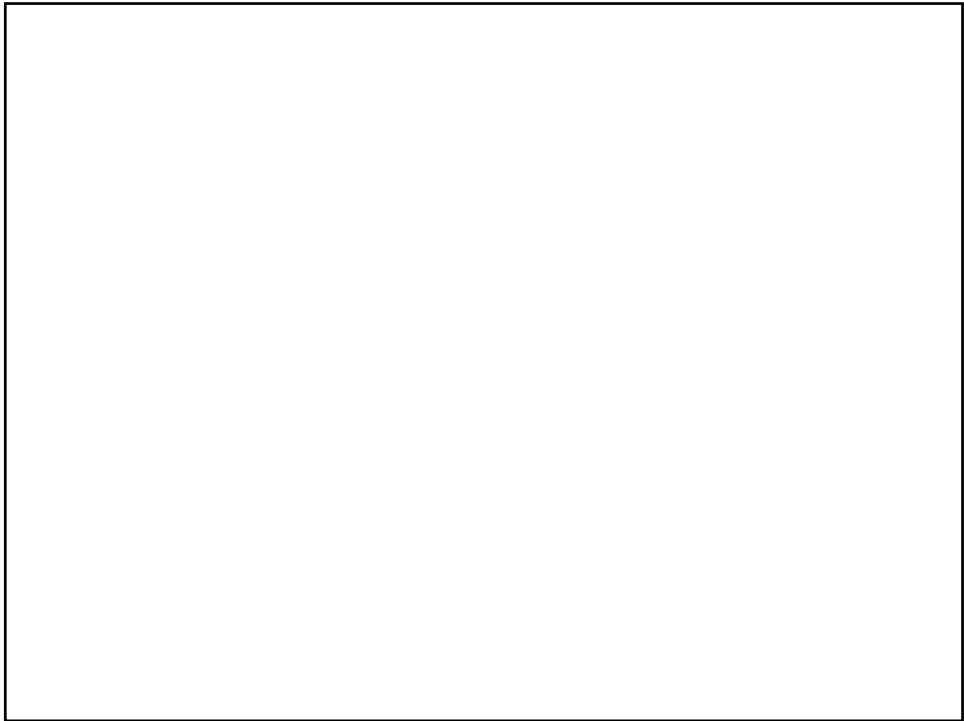
Examples of probing questions:

Needs assessment and planning

- How does the organisation usually develop and plan its projects?

- To what extent does the organisation involve the community in needs assessment and planning? (e.g. were A **wide range** of stakeholders facilitated to determine their own needs and priorities; **women** consulted separately and as **equal participants; t**he rich and the poor, leaders and non leaders, the well and the disabled and the sick were involved. **Government** and the **private sector** were involved).

Implementation
- To what extent does the organisation involve the community (including women and men) in project implementation and assessment? (e.g.were a wide range of stakeholders involved in implementing the project (women, men, disabled, rich and poor, government and private sector).

Performance Assessment (monitoring and evaluation)

- How well does the organisation measure its performance or impact (i.e. whether they are achieving their goal)? (e.g. does it record information on expenditure, activities, outputs and outcomes?).

- How involved is the community in assessing the organisation's work? Are a wide range of stakeholders involved in assessing the project and its benefits? Are women's views sought separately from men's?).

- Does the organisation allow time for staff to reflect together on the progress of the organisation?

Communication of findings

- What is the quality of reports for external funding written by the organisation?

- How well does the organisation share information on its activities, successes and lessons learnt with stakeholders?