

Capacitybuilders campaigning programme: evaluating capacity building

supporting paper

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INTRODUCTION

Capacitybuilders is developing a programme "to enable the voice of vulnerable people to be heard through campaigning and advocacy, empowering them to act as agents of change".¹

As part of this programme, Capacitybuilders is looking for a "method of measuring the effectiveness of our pilot capacity building initiatives, as well as the campaigning initiatives they result in".²

As an outcome from the programme, Capacitybuilders anticipates that there will be a set of findings around "effective approaches to building the capacity of small organisations to undertake campaigns"³ and this project supports this learning aspect

The key task therefore is to develop a methodology of evaluation that Capacitybuilders can then apply to the capacity building element of the pilot programme.

This report outlines our findings, conclusions and recommendations in relation to this task. We have structured this report to shadow the main phases of the project and hope that this structure helps explain the rationale for and provenance of the methodology we outline and its associated principles:

PHASE ONE: scoping review and initial research

This involved:

- a literature review (see bibliography)
- a significant number (17) of semi structured unattributable interviews with voluntary and community organisations of different sizes, and local, regional and national infrastructure support providers and a range of progressive funders with a [recent] history of funding campaigns and advocacy
- a small set of more detailed case study investigations (see appendix, p28) of:
 - a community anchor organisation
 - a local support provider
 - a front-line voluntary organisation working with marginalised groups (in this case, refugees & asylum seekers)

Findings from this stage of the project were then further developed in consultation with IVAR (the Institute of Voluntary Action Research at Birkbeck College), were subsequently further refined, and are presented in part one of this report.

PHASE TWO: Draft methodology

The approach that we initially developed is summarised in part two of this report (the full version is available/can be appended). This draft approach was then subjected to further testing and review; this involved:

- a further set of interviews including a bilateral consultation exercise with a targeted group of stakeholders drawn from the above list in Phase One.

¹ from Campaigning Programme Stakeholder Paper

² from Capacity building for third sector voice and influence: Invitation to submit proposal

³ from Campaigning Programme Stakeholder Paper

- a focus-group with a set of 12 participants all of whom are currently acting as national, regional or local support providers for building capacity for campaigning, advocacy and voice
- further testing, analysis and advice from IVAR

We also summarise the feedback received on this draft during this consultation, and our responses to it. Finally, we outline a brief set of conclusions and recommendations.

This is a draft version of our final report and we welcome comments and feedback on it.

PART 1: KEY FINDINGS FROM SCOPING & REVIEW

1. KEY ISSUES AND KEY TASKS

Capacity is defined in many ways. We have chosen to adopt perhaps the most straightforward definition: the “potential to perform”.⁴ In this context for the purposes of simplification, we also equate performance with effectiveness.

However, for the purposes of this paper and this project, questions about the definition of *effectiveness* are more substantive (especially in an advocacy context) than those surrounding the term capacity, and so we deal with these in more depth below.

(We are aware too that usage of such terms as advocacy, campaigning, voice, influence, etc. is contested; but for the purposes of this paper we use the term ‘advocacy’ throughout as shorthand to denote influencing efforts by voluntary organisations primarily directed at social and/or political change.)

In a simplistic representation of the capacity building process,

- capacity building leads to enhanced capacity; and
- enhanced capacity leads to enhanced performance.

However, as we explore:

- even if we define the term capacity simply, understanding and delineating its components is not so straightforward;
- capacity building interventions are inevitably only one contribution to capacity and so making the link between capacity building and enhanced capacity can be difficult;
- capacity is only one contribution to effective performance, so again making the links presents certain challenges;
- effective performance is itself a problematic notion in an advocacy context.

We can draw conclusions about the best approach to monitoring and evaluating capacity and capacity building, and the challenges involved, (only) by

- exploring further the primary complexities;
- considering how the various elements inter-relate; and then
- identifying how this impacts on assessment.

In the following sections we explore the key questions surrounding capacity, capacity building, and effectiveness in advocacy contexts. We then look in more detail at approaches to evaluating capacity building interventions.

2. CAPACITY

Capacity can best be understood to operate at interlinked levels; these can be defined as follows:⁵

⁴ Horton et al, 2003 p34

⁵ these levels are drawn from, and amalgamate, analysis in Banerjee et al, 2008 pp9-10; Blagescu & Young, 2006; & Horton et al, 2003 pp41-2

level of intervention	in an advocacy context, focus would be on
individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ individuals' relevant skills and abilities
projects & programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ single-issue campaigns ▪ broader advocacy programmes
organisational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ organisational structures, processes and resources ▪ management and governance issues
external linkages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ extent and quality of coordination between organisations ▪ extent and quality of links between organisations and the groups and communities they are supporting and representing
enabling environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the political and policy context within which advocacy processes take place

We look at these levels in turn before drawing some general conclusions.

2.1 individuals' capacity

There have been various efforts to identify what the salient characteristics are in relation to individuals' capacity to conduct effective advocacy.⁶ These typically boil down to the following areas:

1. practical skills – negotiating, communicating, influencing, listening 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.

As context here, the Workforce NSS is currently leading the development of National Occupational Standards for Campaigning. Currently in the research and design stage, these draw and develop existing thinking in this area. It may be useful for Capacitybuilders to identify synergies between that emerging area of work and the new programme.

In the research phase, we identified that almost all advocacy capacity building currently being delivered is focused at this individual level. This is most frequently represented as training courses and occasionally by the mentoring and coaching of individuals. It is also important to note that these programmes of work delivered by support providers are relatively recent initiatives; indeed it is difficult to identify any systematic approach to third sector advocacy capacity building before 2005.

Nevertheless, many of those we interviewed recognised the limitations that this approach (in isolation) has, one typical comment from a support provider being: *"The courses we offer are fine, the feedback is good... but, 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 the importance of conceiving these different levels as interrelated and interdependent and the importance of intervening at multiple levels.

⁶ e.g. Cairns et al, 2008, pp23-26; Chandler, 2007; Skinner & Mitchell, 2008

2.2 programme capacity

Many have sought to articulate the elements that combine to constitute advocacy capacity.⁷ The basis of this approach has generally been to seek to identify common themes in terms of what makes advocacy *more likely to be effective*, whilst acknowledging that all organisations are different, all issues unique and the variable of operating context is paramount.

The kinds of areas covered in these analyses typically include:

- clear design
- good research and evidence, understanding the issues
- identification of a workable solution
- understanding political processes and political context
- networking & coalition building
- ability to use a range of techniques
- strong links to community & local knowledge
- links to decision makers
- horizontally with peer organisations
- leadership
- effective communications
- ensure that policies are developed and implemented

A typical off-the-shelf example is PACT's advocacy index⁸, which scores organisations according to the following:

- The organization's advocacy issue/s is/are timely (determined both in terms of citizens' perceptions of importance as well as reasonable prospect that policy change is feasible).
- The organization is able to collect sound and persuasive data on the effects of the policy sought to be changed.
- The organization is able systematically to secure input from its constituency on the need for the policy change.
- The organization, with constituency and public participation, is able to formulate a viable alternative policy position.
- The organization is able to analyze and document gender-specific implications of the current policy and the proposed policy alternative.
- The organization internalizes advocacy by devoting resources (time and money) for advocacy on the targeted policy issue.
- The organization is able to provide public education and to build public support (including through use of the media) for the proposed policy change.
- The organization is able to build coalitions and networks to enlist partners in joint action to secure the policy change.
- The organization engages in direct action with the legislative and/or executive decision-makers empowered to effect the policy change.
- After a policy change is effected, the organization takes follow-up action to foster implementation of the policy change.
- The organization demonstrates that it has institutionalized its commitment and capacity to follow-through on policy change and implementation.
- The organization demonstrates sound financial management and internal governance.

In addition to these generic principles, there are specific additional issues to take into account with the organisations that Capacitybuilders is thinking about

⁷ e.g. Alexander; Cairns et al, 2008; Court et al, 2006, to name only a few

⁸ Hansen et al, 2005, p10

supporting - i.e. those supporting and representing marginalised groups - for example:

advocacy in an organisational context

Specific challenges arise from the fact that advocacy is typically only an implicit function within community organisations' overall work programmes, whether it is 'dispersed' or 'embedded' within organisational structures and management.⁹ Implications of this are that considerations of advocacy capacity should include review of:¹⁰

1/ advocacy visibility and coherence, for example:

- how the advocacy function is built into reporting mechanisms;
- whether the advocacy function is viewed and planned as a programme area;
- whether advocacy is acknowledged as a core function in relevant job descriptions;
- how and how well the advocacy function is coordinated across the organisation.

2/ supporting systems, for example:

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

specific additional resource issues, including:¹¹

- a preoccupation with survival;
- specific problems with securing funding for advocacy;
- a likely skills deficit, including often low levels of understanding about the different strands and dimensions of advocacy;
- governance constraints – Trustees in particular may lack confidence and skills in, and knowledge and understanding of, advocacy.

These issues are also good representative examples of the practical challenges faced by those interviewed and consulted in the research phases for this project. Many organisations (both front line and infrastructure) articulated a common concern that the discipline of advocacy was "*often internally marginalised, and usually underresourced*" and/or seen by senior managers as "*being less important than the other things that we do*". As a pattern, this seems to be less of a problem for those organisations that have been recently funded to plan and deliver advocacy capacity building (as opposed to those organisations delivering advocacy themselves) but remains a key challenge for the function.

2.3 organisational capacity

There are a number of existing frameworks for assessing organisational capacity. Again, we have highlighted one typical example pointing to the areas to be examined:¹²

area	aspects to consider
strategic leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership• Strategic planning

⁹ Cairns et al, 2008 pp13-14

¹⁰ from Cairns et al, 2008, pp54-5

¹¹ from Cairns et al, 2008, pp19-22

¹² summarised from Lusthaus et al, 2002, pp23-25

financial management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial planning • Financial accountability
organisational structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance • Operational management of staff & systems
organisational infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities & technology management
human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR systems (recruitment, selection, maintenance) • performance management & career development
programme and service management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Implementing • Monitoring
process management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem-solving & decision-making • Communications • Monitoring and evaluation
inter-organisational linkages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks & partnerships

Other frameworks cover the same sort of ground.¹³

It's worth noting however, that in these three areas – individual, programme and organisational capacity – whilst there is congruence around the kinds of areas that are pertinent, there is no commonly accepted way to categorise them, and attempts to do so definitively would seem to be somewhat fruitless.

More positively however, the demarcation in levels between these three areas garnered significant support from those organisations that were interviewed.

There was a commonly held opinion expressed that this was a logical and helpful way to conceptually consider approaches to capacity building and, moreover, to the planning for and evaluating of capacity building. Typical of the views were this from a local support provider: *"The levels are very helpful, they would help us understand the relationship between the [trained-up] staff member and the organisational context they face"*.

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

2.4 external linkages

Two dimensions have particular 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 and if there is a functioning network, the extent to which there is an explicit basis of unity and its characteristics and ways of working facilitate effectiveness.

¹³ e.g. Raynor et al, 2009; Lofgren et al, 2008; Horton et al, 2003 pp36-40

¹⁴ van Tuijl & Jordan, 1999

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

Clearly this is key, and would be demonstrated by, for example:

- 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 community groups;
- the quality of processes of information sharing and communication 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

A picture began to emerge in the research of a number of organisations and funders asserting that the issues of external linkages, and the enabling environment (2.5 below), were crucial in identifying the likely capacity to plan and deliver effective advocacy. 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 local support provider who articulated: *"it has to be about the quality of relationships"*, with another national support provider expressing: *"for us in our work, it's having an analysis and understanding of the three Ps; policy, politics and power"*

2.5 the enabling environment

The key point here then is that questions about *capacity* to influence should not be delinked from issues about the *opportunity* to influence. In relation to the latter, challenges facing local groups include for example:¹⁵

- cultures within statutory authorities tending not to reward responsiveness to community, nor to promote transparent consultation processes or joint planning
- varying degrees of commitment to partnership working being evidence on the part of local authority personnel, including resistance in some statutory bodies
- a tendency for statutory participants in LSPs to engage in 'agenda gate-keeping';
- relationships with local authorities being characterised by unequal power relations;
- policy room to manoeuvre being narrowly defined;
- the tendency for policy makers to identify and 'socially construct' target populations in positive and negative terms and then distribute benefits and burdens to reflect this¹⁶

Opportunity to influence would be determined by whether targets have, for example¹⁷

- 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 statutory bodies which invite monitoring and review by local communities.

¹⁵ e.g. Cairns et al, 2009

¹⁶ Ingram et al, 2007

¹⁷ Gaventa, 2004; Cornwall, 2008

Hence the suggestion that the best approach is to 'work both sides of the equation', (a) focusing on the capacity of the communities and organisations representing them to engage whilst also (b) supporting the capacity of local officials and civil servants to respond meaningfully to this.¹⁸

Clearly in different contexts, the dynamics will be different. One simple model for plotting whether the key blockages to effectiveness are internal to the sector and/or external is the following:¹⁹

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

2.6 intervening at multiple levels

The literature and practical experience is clear that "it is rarely, if ever, sufficient to explore capacity assets and needs at only one level".²⁰ Briefly, some reasons for this claim include that:

1. whilst some theories of change for example stress the importance of charismatic leadership and the role of individuals, and whilst much 'capacity building' effort is focused at individual level, it remains the case that lack of individual capacity is unlikely ever to be the whole story, and is not generally even the main constraint;²¹ indeed, its important that any enhanced individual capacity is institutionalised in some way, so that skills, expertise and learning are spread more evenly.²²
2. few advocacy initiatives stand alone; they are often part of a larger programme of work designed to achieve a particular end; and so it is difficult, and may not make sense, to separate out the skills and capabilities needed to perform an advocacy role from generic community development and organisational skills and capabilities

¹⁸ e.g. Gaventa, 2004 pp26-7

¹⁹ adapted from Changes, 2007 & Changes, 2008

²⁰ Banerjee et al, 2008, p11; others echo this point, e.g. Blagescu & Young, 2006

²¹ Horton et al, 2003, p65

²² Gaventa, 2004

3. interventions focused on individuals and projects and programmes may miss the bigger organisational picture, and thus be somewhat out of context; as such they may even undermine overall organisational capacity²³
4. capacity should ideally be considered holistically, with the dynamics and connections among various actors and issues at different levels conceived as integral parts of a broader picture, rather than as set of unconnected components²⁴
5. providing support to individual organisations is likely to privilege some groups and not others, and may even be at the expense of others; whereas there is significant evidence that enhancing cooperation between organisations is key to effective advocacy
6. any additional capacity gained by organisations supported will deliver results only if there is realistic expectation of exerting influence, and this will depend crucially on how decision makers operate

Given this, it's likely that any intervention will seek to achieve a range of outcomes, involving some kind of combination of the following:

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

Our research would indicate that the balance between the levels would have to be determined on a case-by-case basis, following an analysis of:

1/ the capacity problems and best solutions:

In any given situation, what's the 'under-capacity' problem in relation to representing marginalised communities? For example, is it that certain groups are under-represented, or that those representing them are under-capacitated, relative to others? And if it's the latter, what are the internal capacity issues faced, and does it make sense to try and address them at individual or programme levels, or is an overarching organisational approach more appropriate? And/or is there an issue about how organisations work together and how they work with and engage community groups? And/or is it something about the political process that makes it more difficult for these groups to participate (in which case building organisational capacity might not tackle the key blockage)?

2/ the gaps that Capacitybuilders is in a good position to fill:

Who's currently doing what and what strategic opportunities does this create, whether by working in isolation or (and more likely) by adding value and investing to complement existing activity?

Many of the organisations and funders that participated in this research suggested that embarking on a new programme as proposed by Capacitybuilders while welcome, would need to build on existing activity.

²³ Horton et al, 2003, p66

²⁴ Blagescu & Young, 2006

For example, one front-line organisation suggested: *"the sector working with those [marginalised] groups is fragile and under-resourced, the support for them in terms of voice and influence is still developing... any new project should proceed with care and sensitivity"*.

SUMMARY IMPLICATIONS FOR 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 approach is crucial.

3. CAPACITY BUILDING

3.1 types of intervention

The nature of the intervention can take very different forms. This has overarching significance but is also directly relevant to our investigations because how you conceive providing capacity building support would affect how you would think of assessing it. Very different approaches to evaluation would flow from different approaches to capacity building. At the risk of oversimplifying, there seem to be three broad approaches available²⁵

BLUEPRINT

In this model the capacity builder 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 capacity in - these pre-determined areas in the diagnostic phase;
3. planning for and tracking progress against this baseline.

This approach is comparatively simply 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 is that controlled and directed change, especially that imposed from an outside source, generally has little chance of delivering meaningful results; reasons for this include that:

- in practice it proves not actually possible to develop a comprehensive framework that fits different organisations' circumstances²⁷
- there is not generally a best way or set of ways for doing things²⁸
- pre-determined approaches may even restrict opportunity for change because they discourage reacting to unforeseen events and dynamics²⁹

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

This blueprint approach is most viable where there is good opportunity to quantify means and ends for example;³⁰ this is not generally the case in advocacy.

Despite that, our research indicates that it would seem that most current advocacy capacity building is both focused at the individual level (see section 2.1 p25) and usually applies this blueprint approach, for example, the certificate in campaigning, the campaigners awards scheme and various training initiatives at national and local levels.

STRUCTURED SUPPORT

In this model, the capacity builder works with the '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. Objectives and milestones then function more as guidelines than as actual fixed targets.

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

Specifically, it is an approach that draws more on internal understandings, the idea being to identify and then hone and adapt 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 works best in situations where the context is unstable and choice of strategy difficult to clarify,³² so is likely to be more appropriate to advocacy contexts. However, a risk remains that tools have a tendency in use to regress into mechanistic checklists,³³ so in effect you end up with a blueprint approach by default.

FLUID APPROACH

This model recognises capacity as a complex issue, not readily susceptible to standard checklists and traditional improvement monitoring.

In this understanding, drawing on complexity theory, capacity is determined by the multiple interactions and interdependencies within the organisational system. In consequence, it 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).

³⁰ Baser & Morgan, 2008, p77-8

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

An obvious practical difficulty is that an exploratory approach along these lines is likely to make a donor nervous, not least because directions are unlikely to be clear and because it's "not an approach to get a specific task accomplished within a short period of time".³⁴

There's also the risk that an approach that considers capacity in broadest terms - involving changes in norms, values, relationships - may actually not be in line with the kind of support people are typically actually looking for: "the ability to do something", a practical skill or aptitude that had been lacking.³⁵

summary

Broadly speaking, it's possible to demarcate these three generic approaches as follows:

	blueprint	structured support	fluid engagement
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)
implications for evaluation	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

Effectively rejecting a top-down blueprint approach, the literature stresses the importance of customising interventions to need and context.

A good quality diagnosis is vital: "capacity building work should start with a systematic assessment of the needs of the organisation in order to accurately

³⁴ Baser & Morgan, 2008, p79

³⁵ IDRC, 2006, p2

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 for example.³⁷

It's important to build in enough time for each stage to be undertaken appropriately; this is especially true for the design and information-gathering stages.³⁸

Obviously it's then important that this diagnosis forms the basis for action. Plans need to link to organisational mission, strategy and values, for example by thinking and acting from the prism of creating sustainable capacity outcomes; and by linking processes of organisational incentive (following the principles that what gets measured gets done).³⁹

This is not simply a linear process, however; it's important to embed cyclical learning within each stage, to ensure continual reassessment.⁴⁰ As part of this, the principle underpinning the approach should be to operate flexibly around an agreed purpose, adapting in response to ongoing learning.

As previously stated, the development of initiatives for advocacy capacity building is a relatively recent phenomenon. These initiatives have been, predominantly, adopting a blueprint approach and focused at the individual level.

However, 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 support providers and front line organisations – also doubted whether support providers would themselves have the capacity to undertake, say, a hybrid of structured support/fluid approach, given the implications for resources.

This seems to be a slightly paradoxical finding, as one interviewee said: "*...ideally you'd want to keep this simple, as that's what practioners 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...*"

3.2 principles in capacity building provision

The following key principles are widely supported in the literature.

1. embed principles of partnership & participation

Some consider it desirable that the 'client organisation' should take a leading role in the process, for example by defining their own indicators of change.⁴¹

But at the same time, it's "*easy to overestimate the enthusiasm for self-assessment and underestimate the complexity*".⁴² 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.⁴³ And organisations have varying degrees of

³⁶ Cornforth et al, 2008, p13

³⁷ Baser & Morgan, 2008, p41

³⁸ Banerjee et al, 2008 p25

³⁹ Blagescu & Young, 2006 p6

⁴⁰ e.g. Hansen et al, 2005

⁴¹ e.g. James, 2001, p11

⁴² Hailey et al, 2005, p9

⁴³ Woodland & Hind, 2002 p4

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.⁴⁴

Some kind of joint approach therefore seems necessary, with both Capacity builder and funder exhibiting openness to learning from the other partner. The nature of the relationship between the fundee and capacity builder, and the degree of trust underpinning the relationship, is key.⁴⁵

2. ensure continuity of involvement

Single interventions are unlikely to result in significant change – training, for example, tends to be ineffective unless there are organisational support structures and networks in place.⁴⁶ Offering a range of support tends to be most effective.⁴⁷ Capacity development is an ongoing process and so long-term investment of support, and persistence, is key.⁴⁸

But there are twin dangers to guard against. 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.⁴⁹

One reflection a number of organisations shared was the importance of a sustained approach for a capacity building intervention. This experience has been drawn - not from the advocacy function, as it may still be too early to detect lessons and learning - but from other organisational disciplines, for example, ICT, Finance and the role of Trustees and good Governance.

SUMMARY IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORK

- A blueprint approach would be simple to apply but looks unlikely to suffice and could even distort fundees' 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's 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 to design, implement, manage and monitor and evaluate the approach is likely to be.
- A customised approach, underpinned by sound diagnosis, is 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

⁴⁴ Cornforth et al, 2008, p13

⁴⁵ e.g. James, 2001, p22

⁴⁶ Gavelin & Alexander, 2006

⁴⁷ Cornforth et al, 2008, p14

⁴⁸ e.g. Horton et al, 2003, p90; Cornforth et al, 2008, p14; James, 2001, p19

⁴⁹ Gaventa, 2004, p31

4. EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is for many reasons 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 one organisation may be a poor choice for another".⁵⁰

Specifically in relation to effectiveness in advocacy, there are a number of problematic factors, the key ones being:

1. **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;
2. **timescales of judgment** - conditions can change rapidly - new announcements can be made, a change of personnel in government can take place, and what looked previously like a victory can take on a different appearance
3. **dimensions of success** - are not always clear, and their inter-relationships may introduce additional complexities – if for example there is evidence of policy change 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 regard as a shameful sell-out

You would normally evaluate something against the extent to which objectives were achieved. But 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 fact in our experience they tend to be vague and hopelessly aspirational, meaning that they don't provide a yardstick against which to measure advocacy. Because of weak design, it's rarely clear what anticipated success would look like. The importance of setting clear and plausible goals is widely stressed (as noted in section x above).

Essentially the same issues arise in relation to how you evaluate capacity building, and the same solutions present themselves, so we look at these below (see section 5.2).

Ideas about effectiveness are possibly further complicated by introducing the notion of 'innovation' into the equation. There is some concern that innovation may not be so desirable in advocacy as it is in service provision, where the voluntary sector's ability to identify new ways of doing things can be a key strength. Hence for example the 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

⁵⁰ Herman & Renz, 2008

⁵¹ Edwards, 2008

SUMMARY IMPLICATIONS FOR 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

5. EVALUATING CAPACITY BUILDING

5.1 current practice

Practice seems in fact to be extraordinarily weak. As one recent survey of capacity building in advocacy contexts 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. For example, whilst Intrac has produced significant outputs discussing issues in, and approaches to, evaluating capacity building, the nuances of these approaches don't appear to have been fully applied to Intrac's capacity building programme itself. The evaluation of Intrac's major Praxis programme concludes fairly half-heartedly, for example, that “many of those who engaged with Praxis commend the learning processes, but are challenged to be able to report how it affected their practice”.⁵³

In addition, the research conducted for this report identified few – if any – efforts to systematically monitor and evaluate and share learning from capacity building efforts in this area.

This is not perhaps unsurprising given the relatively recent growth in third sector advocacy capacity building programmes, however it would seem that the pace of development of advocacy support provision is moving quicker than the pace of implementing evaluation and learning methodologies.

As one local support provider 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”*. Interestingly, this was a view that was shared by those funders we interviewed and although we don't have an evidence base of current practice to draw on - and the needs may therefore be speculative - this may be an opportunity for Capacitybuilders to usefully lead the sector in this area, in terms of testing, adapting and sharing the learning.

5.2 purpose of evaluating capacity building

Our evidence would lead us to a crucial principle that the starting point for any evaluation process is to be clear about purpose.

⁵² Blagescu & Young, 2006, pvi

⁵³ Intrac, 2008, p1

Clearly, 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.

But to help ensure this result, any organisation supporting/providing capacity building, must

- 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

5.3 links between capacity building, capacity & effectiveness

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

Three key variables 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. We have explored these aspects in section 3 above.

2. organisations’ receptivity to capacity building

One aspect to take into account is potential fundees’ ability to benefit from support. This would be determined by factors such as:

- power relations within a particular organisation – the importance of engaging with and through those with the power to effect change within the organisation for example;
- 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 internally⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Baser & Morgan, 2008, p87

⁵⁵ Baser & Morgan, 2008, p87

⁵⁶ Blagescu & Young, 2006 p6

For example, one analysis of a capacity building intervention (though not one specifically related to advocacy) groups respondents in the following way: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 that support provision should focus on those with most potential to improve.⁵⁸ But such an approach could risk that capacity building efforts would by-pass 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 on enabling environment). Hence the need for some way of understanding 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 the programme.

two additional dynamics

- from effectiveness to capacity – one observed dynamic is that one possible route to enhancing capacity is through enhanced effectiveness - improved 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 round.⁵⁹
- capacity as effectiveness – some see capacity as an end in itself, as well as a means to an end (improved performance); in this perspective what's important is the ability of an organisation to learn and solve problems and thus improve the ability to assess and react to future 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.

5.4 challenges in evaluating capacity building

Given that capacity building is closely related to – and according to many definitions is actually a form of – advocacy, it's not surprising that the various

⁵⁷ Aitken & Paton, 2006, p23

⁵⁸ e.g. Cornforth et al, 2008, p13

⁵⁹ Baser & Morgan, 2008, p89

⁶⁰ Horton et al, 2003 p45

discussions about the challenges in evaluating capacity building are reminiscent of many of the same debates about evaluating advocacy.

Aspects highlighted in the capacity building literature⁶¹ include in particular those related to problems of:

- attribution & causation – especially given shifting contexts and multiple influence on outcomes;
- timescales of change and hence assessment.

We have already briefly explored these same complexities in the section above on effectiveness. Points specific to capacity building include that:

- difficulties in attribution are compounded by the fact that capacity building efforts are often embedded within wider processes and thus difficult to demarcate⁶²
- timescales of change - 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

In addition to these conceptual and contextual challenges, there are more practical considerations (again the same issues feature in evaluating advocacy more generally). Evidence for this includes that respondents to a recent survey note high difficulty both in finding good ways to collect information and in collecting good quality information.⁶⁴

This requires that organisations:

1. recognise the importance of evaluation, and evaluating capacity and capacity building interventions;
2. have the ability to devise and implement a workable approach for tracking progress and gathering relevant information, in ways that fit with and into wider organisational ways of working;
3. commit to dedicating resources to this end, on an ongoing basis, even when faced with other, generally more urgent, priorities.

Finally, it's clear that there are a set of challenges in evaluating capacity building that are actually challenges of design. Again, 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

For an intervention to be effective, and for there to be a reasonable prospect of assessing this effectiveness, what's needed is a clear and plausible routemap of how it is anticipated that capacity will develop and the steps needed to achieve this: unless the theory of change behind the capacity intervention and the programme strategy is strong, change is likely to be superficial and/or unfocused.⁶⁶

⁶¹ e.g. James, 2001; Blagescu & Young, 2006

⁶² Blagescu & Young, 2006, e.g. p9

⁶³ Cupitt, 2009, p32

⁶⁴ Cupitt, 2009 p32

⁶⁵ Cupitt, 2009, p32

⁶⁶ Baser & Morgan, 2008, pp91-2

5.5 principles in evaluating capacity building

These challenges can be overcome, or at least mitigated; to do so would involve adopting the following set of principles:

- 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 changes⁶⁷

We develop the possible practical application of these principles in the methodology described below.

SUMMARY IMPLICATIONS FOR FRAMEWORK

- Current practice in evaluating capacity building is very weak; the inability to draw on evidence and experience makes it a great deal more difficult to be confident in developing an approach for this programme.
- Approaches to monitoring and evaluating 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 & commitment to this element of the programme; a clear set of goals accompanied by a plausible route to 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

⁶⁷ the Most Significant Change approach suggested by Davies & Dart, 2005 is one technique designed with this in mind

PART 2: DEVELOPING THE METHODOLOGY

6. OUTLINE OF DRAFT PROPOSED APPROACH

6.1 developing the draft methodology

An earlier paper (produced at the end of March) summarised our findings to that stage. This was used to inform interim discussions with Capacitybuilders; we were looking in particular for guidance on:

- the levels of intervention anticipated within the pilot programme (outlined in brief at that stage to CB and developed in more depth in section 2);
- the type of intervention anticipated within the pilot programme (outlined in brief at that stage to CB and developed in more depth in section 3);
- the identified purpose of evaluating the pilot programme (see section 5);

In a progress meeting on 30th March Capacitybuilders confirmed that:

- the intention is to provide capacity support at individual, programme and organisational levels, according to specific need and context;
- Capacitybuilders recognises and welcomes the fact that organisations' understanding of their capacity needs will evolve; the programme will be responsive to this;
- the primary purpose of the evaluation framework is to support the learning from this pilot, for Capacitybuilders (exploring campaigning techniques, and what works in capacity building in this area) and for supported groups themselves;

Our initial research, informed by this input from Capacitybuilders, formed the basis for the development of a draft suggested methodology of evaluation.

6.2 key features of draft methodology

Our draft methodology had the following primary features:

- 1. a set of steps** that organisations being supported would work through, in conjunction with Capacitybuilders and with external evaluation support as appropriate:
 - agree capacity building purpose and principles
 - set capacity building objectives, relating to
 - organisational capacity
 - the quality of provision of support
 - anticipated contribution on effectiveness
- 2. a set of principles** to be used as a starting point for agreeing a common understanding about the purpose behind the programme and the key principles underpinning both the programme and the evaluation of it:
 - diagnosis/needs assessment
 - capacity building plan
 - partnership approach
 - strategic orientation
- 3. additional guidance**, notably

- a suggested set of themes and areas to consider in establishing organisational capacity building objectives
- a suggested set of areas to consider in establishing objectives around the quality of provision of support
- some basic guidelines on how to identify information needs, and collect and use information gathered

The methodology was designed for joint use by Capacitybuilders and those organisations being funded through this programme.

7. FEEDBACK ON DRAFT APPROACH

7.1 feedback on the overall approach

Some respondents offered a fair degree of scepticism about CapacityBuilder's campaigning programme. Without wishing simply to dismiss these concerns, they are not necessarily pertinent for this project, which takes the fact of the programme as outlined as its starting point. One comment we received back: "are all organisations going to have progressed that far in what is a pretty short timeframe? For some I suspect 'advocacy success secured' may be a future aspiration (subject to funding I suspect) rather than something they will be able to achieve within the given timeframes of the programme".

Flowing from these critiques, however, were some comments more directly relevant to our project, notably that:

- we are advocating an inappropriately top-down approach;
- "I can see the methodology generating paperwork, compliance and form filling regardless of how clear it is";
- "The only people who can evaluate campaigns and advocacy work are the people doing it – the people campaigning and advocating";
- "I don't agree that 'success' can only really be defined subjectively: the campaigner defines what they mean by it".

We think the first two points in fact primarily reflect a negative view of the programme itself; the approach we advocate is designed to mitigate these criticisms (by stressing learning not accountability, by promoting partnership approaches, and by seeking to embed evaluation processes within supported organisations themselves). Our understanding is that Capacitybuilders is aware of these potential risks and is supportive of the approach we are proposing.

We disagree with the final two points. We think that the best evaluation comes from the aggregation and interpretation of multiple perspectives, not a sole reliance on internal ones. And we put the case for why we think success in an advocacy context is necessarily subjective in part one of the paper.

These critical views were in the minority. Others were generally supportive and highlighted various features in the draft as positive, including:

- the stepped approach;
- the stress on learning not accountability;
- the articulation of the need for a partnership approach;
- the efforts made to stress flexibility (with the caveat discussed below)
- the identification that capacity is manifested at multiple levels;
- the table suggesting (with the caveat discussed below)
- the list of questions to consider in review.

- And: “the approach needs to be varied to each specific organisation. I think it will be hard to compare organisations as the activity and structures will be very different in each case”.

We therefore believe that feedback overall validates the broad approach that we presented in the draft. However some issues arose, and we comment on these below:

7.2 ambition and ambiguity of scope

As one respondent put it, “this document seems to be trying to do a number of very big things”, and is not simply about how to evaluate a capacity building programme but also concerns itself with issues to do with developing a capacity building programme.

The problem, as perceived by this respondent, is not so much the attempt to cover planning as well as evaluation - this was seen as the right approach given that they are inextricably linked – but more lack of clarity of intention. In other words, we should stress the importance and nature of the link more clearly. And we should also be clearer about the nature of the flow underpinning the approach, which in places is implicit only (for example in the draft we make reference to a ‘needs assessment’ but don’t explain how this fits within the approach we are outlining).

It was suggested by others that:

- the approach need to be clearer about how campaign objectives might inform and be supported by capacity building objectives; and that
- we should be more explicit in addressing additional and wider capacity issues, notably those to do with the capacity of a community or neighbourhood and ‘capacity’ issues in relation to statutory bodies’ receptivity to influence (these points were missing from the draft approach but reflect our analysis of the levels of capacity in section x).

These suggestions are all helpful, but each one complicates the process a little. Hence the observation that, “It will require a lot of time and investment from them to plan this well, and the training and on-going support will be crucial”.

It was also pointed out that the target audience was not wholly clear, with the draft being part-written for Capacitybuilders and part-written for supported organisations.

7.3 level of guidance and detail

We also heard that various aspects of the draft needed or would warrant more explanation. Overall the sense was that the draft erred on the side of assuming a certain level of understanding that groups may not actually have: “I think the overall usefulness of the document will depend very much the organisation’s understanding of monitoring and evaluation”.

Many agreed that including examples would help. And it was suggested that including more practical tips and guidance would be useful. There was also the recognition, however, that there is a risk that guidance can end up being utilised as a reductive checklist (i.e. people take it at face value and don’t attempt to interpret and adapt to specific circumstances).

The inherent difficulties of this were widely acknowledged: "it is always difficult to get the balance right between offering flexibility and being so flexible that the groups can't really grasp what you are after".

7.4 detailed feedback

We were grateful to receive very detailed feedback about sections, sentences and specific terminology that could be clearer. We have tried to respond appropriately to this in the updated version. To give one example of this, terms such as "diagnosis", "needs assessment" "internal context" were used in the draft without accompanying explanation.

More than one respondent suggested that we could usefully be clearer in outlining the need for, and use of, indicators. In fact we thought we had made the key distinction between the information you would need and the methods you would use to collect it. What seems to have obscured that for some is that we deliberately avoided using the word 'indicator' because we felt that it is jargon, not readily recognised by practitioners. We talked instead about "key pieces of information". However, in consequence the fact that we were actually referring to indicators was missed. Similarly, one respondent asked, "where is the reflective learning?" whereas we would hope that a careful reading would reveal that reflection is bolted in (in the review questions, the stress on adapting strategy in the light of findings, the note to look for unanticipated outcomes, etc.)

We do not dismiss these comments: if people read something in a certain way, that's how they read it. Instead these comments illustrate and help emphasise the salient point that it's not possible to write something that everybody will read and understand as it is intended to be read and understood, given people's different starting points, interests, positions, etc.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 revisions to the draft approach

The feedback we received was very helpful and in response we have reworked the draft approach; in particular:

- We have followed feedback, and our own inclination, that it's not possible to neatly separate evaluating capacity building from linked elements of the programme; twin-track process, even though we recognise that this introduces additional complications
- to deal with this, and reflecting feedback, we have included more explanation of how the elements could best fit together;
- again in response to feedback, we have also included more practical examples to help organisations identify how the various tasks might be accomplished;
- we have also attempted to simplify the language in key places

8.2 implementing the approach

At the same time, we think the feedback exposes the more general point that would be unreasonable to expect to be able to produce a resource that is sufficient to meet all needs in all situations.

Thus any document will need to be used as a resource tool, to be used flexibly and actively. This would entail Capacitybuilders working through the document with participating organisations, rather than expecting them to be able to utilise it as a stand-alone support.

We are grateful that some respondents attempted an 'as live' review of the draft approach, considering what it would actually mean to take this document and apply it.

We think the updated version benefits from this interrogation. We hope too that this supporting paper makes clear its provenance and its consonance with evidence from the literature as well as leading practice and thinking within the sector, as far as we have identified it.

But these points do not detract from the fact that actual live piloting will be key. One major constraint we have faced in devising the methodology is the lack of actual practice to draw on. Perhaps even more importantly, there is no actual *guidance on practice* that we have been able to draw on and adapt. Materials that are available tend promote blueprint approaches; and as we have demonstrated, these are likely to be inadequate to the task.

Inevitably, therefore, applying this approach in real time to real situations will reveal issues and flaws hitherto unrecognised.

9. SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Capacitybuilders should prioritise live testing of the approach in the early stages of the programme, and adapt and hone it accordingly.
2. Even beyond this early testing, the outlined approach should remain a living document, adapted throughout the course of the programme, through an iterative and organic approach, in response to users' experiences.
3. In its end-programme version, the document laying out the approach should itself represent a key learning output from the programme. This could create a tool and resource for use beyond the programme's lifetime.

In addition, we recommend that,

4. As part of the programme, Capacitybuilders should establish an objective to build the capacity of all participating organisations to evaluate their own advocacy programmes.

Appendix: CASE STUDIES

1. The Trust for Developing Communities

BACKGROUND

The Trust for Developing Communities (TDC) is a Community Anchor organisation based in Brighton that focuses on community empowerment within socially excluded and economically deprived neighbourhoods. They describe themselves as *"a community development and regeneration organisation"* and have 14 mostly part-time staff providing services and advice and delivering training to individuals in community development. They hold the view that: *"capacity building is community development"*.

The TDC plan and deliver development work on a spectrum of issues; public health, parenting, employment and skills (for example, they run an IT drop-in centre for the local unemployed and elderly)

They also operate close to the local and national political processes, they are well linked into Brighton City Council and play an important role on the Local Area Agreement (LAA) as well as Neighbourhood Forums and Local Action Groups. They also indicated their understanding that the national policy context is changing, positively, for example: *"the DCLG, Hazel Blears White Paper have helped stimulate a more 'bottom-up' approach...there's been a change in the political context...more efforts in devolving power"*

There was a degree of concern about the term advocacy: *"For us, advocacy is about service provision rather than empowerment, we try and avoid advocacy, as it can be disempowering to have others presenting your case on your behalf"*.

On the subject of hard to reach, they say: *"It's not people that are hard to reach, it's services that are hard to access"*. Their target groups include, the unemployed, people with disabilities and mental health problems, the elderly and socially disadvantaged women. They note that it is more difficult to work with local BME organisations, but note that TDC's focus is an analysis of shared need and not identity: *"...the powerlessness that comes from poverty and economic deprivation is the main focus"*.

CAPACITY

They understood and welcomed distinctions between developing two levels e.g. the individuals and community organisations that TDC support. The other observation they make about any public policy external influencing strategies with decision-makers is: *"that it's all about relationships isn't it?"* And they make contextual distinctions between developing different types of relationships with different units and departments: *"When responding to community needs, there may be tensions with, say, Environment or Housing Departments and you have to try and hold them to account... a positive relationship with the local authority Communities Team is useful as they can act as our brokers in the council"*

EVALUATION

They recognise that: *"evaluating community development is always tricky..."* mainly because of attribution and causality but also because of capacity and available resources (the recent IVAR report was cited as one way to carry out research for evaluating impact). They recognise that it's important to be clear about the difference you plan to make in community development terms but evaluating that is challenging. For example, their core funding, from the local authority, is to enable them to participate in the local partnership structures and does not enable them to dedicate resources to assessing the effectiveness of their training and skills development programmes: *"...recruiting and retaining skilled, trained staff is our biggest problem... we have to try and do long-term work with short-term funding"*

2. The Migrant Resource Centre

INTRODUCTION

The Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) is a voluntary organisation working with migrants and refugees and in partnership with other agencies, to effect social justice and change, enabling migrants and refugees to fully participate in society. It provides support services to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants from EU member states.

Operating across London, they provide legal advice on asylum claims, housing and welfare support and a health advisory service. Their capacity building work, known as, "The Empowerment Project" in the Migrant and Refugee Media and Policy programme, includes media and policy training for members.

"Members of the various initiatives of the Empowerment Project have moved from the lively debates, discussions and meeting rooms to the outer public and political stage, actively representing themselves, advocating for their rights, speaking out at various events, and face to face with politicians and members of the public".

CAPACITY

The focus and purpose of their training, skills and capacity building work with members is one of: *"[increased] migrant empowerment and aiming to give members a voice".*

In terms of what this increased capacity and skills might in turn contribute to, they provide two longer term capacity building 'outcomes' – firstly, *"to address and a rebalance of media coverage"* and secondly *"to influence policy-making and policy change using migrant's own experience"*. They point to a number of complementary activities and outputs, some with partners the Refugee Council, London Citizens inter alia, that aim to contribute to creating a conducive context for this.

EVALUATION

The MRC recognise that, although they are confident about the purpose of their capacity building work - giving a marginalised, hard to reach, socially excluded group a voice - then a key challenge is monitoring and evaluating, both the MRC interventions and also what results from it.

They seek to build and retain an archive of press cuttings as part of a monitoring process and indeed strive to learn from the successes of previous media and policy representation work. For example, the extent of individual members increased confidence and competence and how they expressed themselves in public forums. They could also point to some cases of influencing certain key individual journalists. But they also acknowledge: *"...one capacity building need we have is how do we evaluate this part of our work? And it's not easy to evaluate policy work anyway..."*

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