



Practitioner's Guide:

Strengthening Civil Society Organizations in Good Governance Processes

gtz

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Strengthening Civil Society Organizations in Good Governance Processes

Brief Description



A critical focus of development projects in countries transitioning to democracy has become the strengthening of civil society. Civil society organizations are viewed as both an important check on, and complement to, the exercise of government power. Depending on the political and social realities of the country civil society organizations (CSOs) may play myriad roles, including watchdog, advocate, agitator, educator, and social service provider. Given the range of CSO activities, it is not surprising that the overall civil society sector does not have a uniform relationship with state bodies. The interests advanced by individual CSOs may correspond or clash with those of the State, depending on the individual organization's agenda.

Just as civil society is comprised of a diverse and varied range of entities, there is also **no universally accepted definition of the term "civil society."** Conceptualization of civil society differ based on perspective. For purposes of the capacity building exercise discussed in this Method, a Civil Society Organization is **defined** as a group or entity that is neither in the state nor private sector but is engaged in a public activity aimed at advancing the interest or values of its members or society at large.

Applying this definition to the reality in which development organizations operate can be difficult. In reality a variety of organizations that exist on paper are inactive and provide little benefit to their members or society at large. The reasons for their inactivity may include the poor organizational structures, misunderstanding of the proper role of a non-governmental organization, inadequate funding and an inhospitable political climate. In the early stages of a capacity building exercise aimed at strengthening local civil society groups, it is important to avoid value judgments about their effectiveness and activity level. Dormant or inactive entities may, in fact, reveal a great deal about the training needs of local CSOs.

Providing an effective capacity building training necessarily begins with a thorough and reliable identification of the potentials, weaknesses and needs of local civil society entities. Following the initial identification of all CSOs in the project area, a comprehensive needs assessment will identify both organizations which would benefit from capacity building training and appropriate training topics. Trained professional facilitators will then be able to provide targeted training to CSO representatives which will meet their specific needs and empower CSOs to engage civil society more fully in community affairs.

The method proposes a process that strengthens the role of civil society in good governance processes. Compared to many other civil society programs, it takes a wide view of civil society, working with more than just formally registered NGOs. It focuses on certain functions that civil society groups can perform in a good governance system rather than their legal forms.

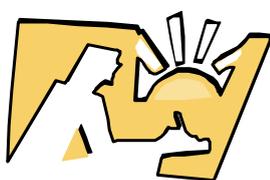
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Proposed Main Users

Governmental and non-governmental organizations, national and international development agencies, private sector.



Purpose of the Method



The procedure described in the method helps to identify civil society organizations and then to strengthen their capacities as well as their role within their communities. The method enables the participating organization to:

- ▶ Better articulate and express their constituencies' interests and lobby on behalf of those interest;
- ▶ Better identify their needs in advancing the interests they represent;
- ▶ Improve constructive interaction skills within and between levels of local, regional and national political institutions;
- ▶ Increase self-confidence;
- ▶ More effectively serve in a social control, or watch dog, function;
- ▶ Increase community participation in local good governance processes;
- ▶ Encourage inclusive and balanced decision making on different levels;
- ▶ Better serve as an intermediary between authorities and local population;
- ▶ Strengthen their ability to act as a moderator between elected and appointed authorities.

In developing countries and evolving democracies, civil society organizations may be hampered in their activities and impact by a host of constraints, including organizational weaknesses, lack of popular understanding or support of CSOs' roles in society, apathy, insufficient funding, and obstructionist or overt hostility from various levels of government.

Photo 1: Using new technologies



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Advantages



- ▶ Strengthen the confidence of local CSOs regarding their own abilities;
- ▶ Provides a wider vision of good governance and not an isolated view only;
- ▶ Clarifies CSOs' understanding of their role and responsibilities in relation to the population they serve;
- ▶ Increases CSOs' understanding of the roles and functions of local government in development;
- ▶ Strengthens CSOs' abilities to monitor the allocation of internal and external resources for efficient and effective investments;
- ▶ Improves their ability to mobilize human, financial, and other resources for community development;
- ▶ CSOs will serve a stronger watchdog function in community development programs;
- ▶ CSOs will become more pro-active in local affairs;
- ▶ CSOs will establish networks for lobbying and cooperation;

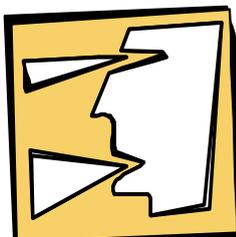
Limitations



- ▶ Long-term lethargy or inactivity may be difficult to overcome;
- ▶ Requires the existence of basic good governance structures;
- ▶ Perpetually underfunded CSOs may have lost sight of their own mission and objectives as they were forced to focus on raising capital and material support to the exclusion of other activities;
- ▶ State actors may be perceived as acting in an arbitrary and unpredictable manner, which creates a sense of futility or hopelessness in the civil society community;
- ▶ Passive local media may hinder out-reach activities;
- ▶ Low levels of civil activity and awareness and a general negative attitude toward community leaders may limit community support of CSO activities;
- ▶ Insufficient knowledge of one's own civic rights, such as the right to participate in a village or community groups and meetings may restrict CSOs' impact and participation may be low;
- ▶ CSOs' practical impact may be stymied by political corruption beyond their control;
- ▶ CSOs' access to information through channels such as the internet may be limited, thus restricting their ability to build capacity. For example, prohibitively expensive or nonexistent internet access will impact a CSO's ability to obtain information regarding available grant sources.

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Principles & General Procedures



Step 1: Define the scope of the term civil society and the objective of the intervention

The working definition should be broad enough to encompass a wide spectrum of entities while at the same clearly excluding those entities which do not fall within any plausible understanding of the term. A good example of a functional definition is “a group that is neither in the state nor private sector but is engaged in a public activity aiming to advance the interest of values of its members or society”.

CSOs can fulfil many different functions. At the beginning of the exercise it is important to define the exact objective of the activities. For example, “increase CSO involvement in local government affairs” or “strengthen the ability of CSO in articulation of needs” may be identified as the project objectives. Furthermore, CSOs are always part of a system and therefore play a certain role. It is important to understand the different roles CSOs play and how to support them in these roles.

Step 2: Identify CSO in target area

Once a common understanding of the term “Civil Society Organization” is agreed upon, a survey is carried out in the project area to identify existing civil society organizations (CSOs). In order to capture as accurate a picture as possible, the surveys are carried out by trained individuals with good knowledge of the area.

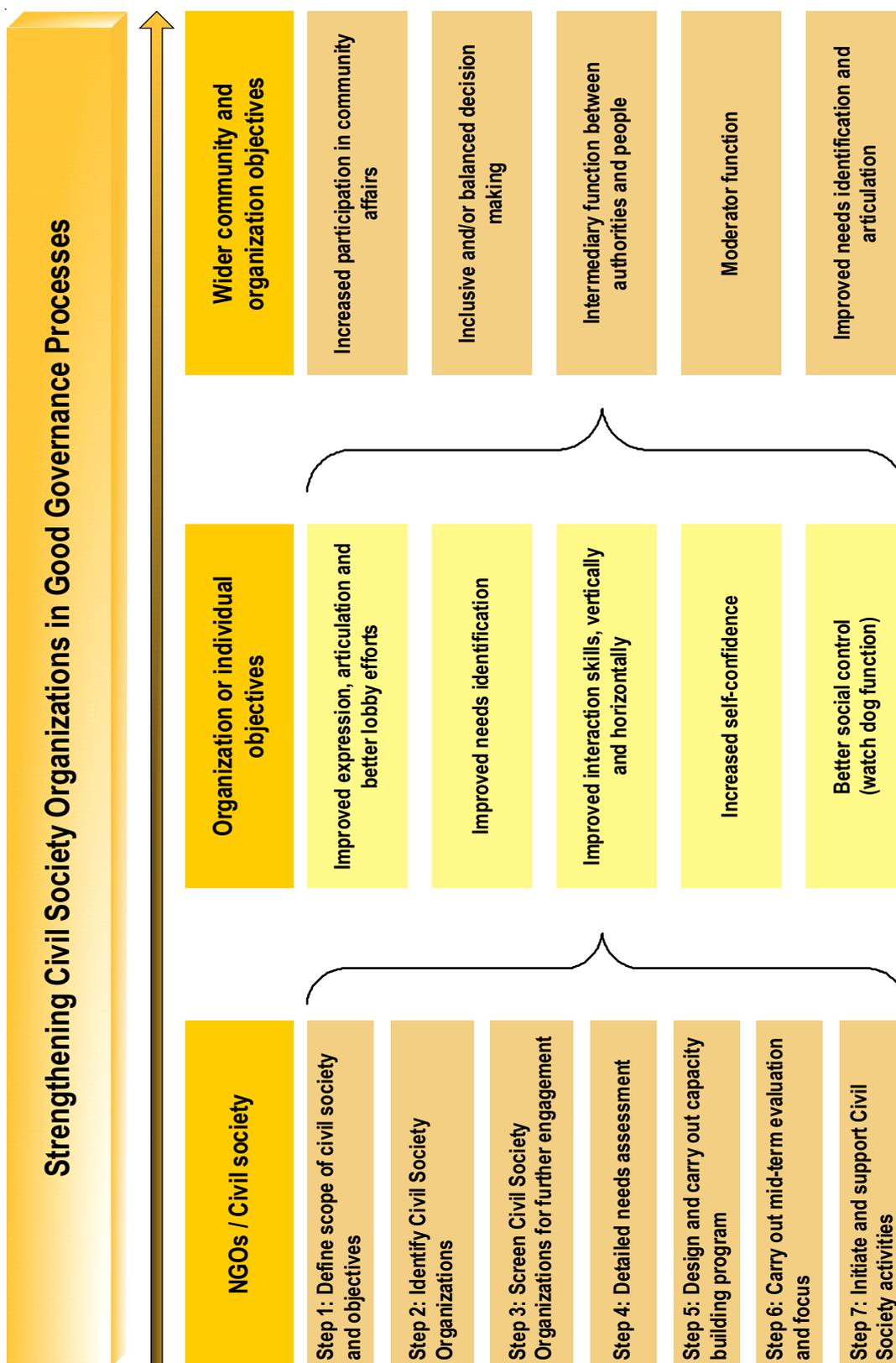
The surveys are conducted at the provincial, regional, and local level and should gather the following information:

- ▶ the name, address and date of foundation of organization;
- ▶ the number of members and the name of contact person;
- ▶ formal status;
- ▶ historical background;
- ▶ sphere of influence and activity;
- ▶ restrictions, achievements and successes;
- ▶ shortcomings;
- ▶ plans and ideas;
- ▶ comments of interviewers.

All organizations which meet the definition of civil society defined above should be included in the survey report, even those organizations which are not active at the time of the survey. The survey should not be limited to formally registered organizations. Rather, effort should be made to go to the communities and villages to reveal informal and nonregistered civil society groups. At this stage it is important to obtain as complete a list as possible of civil society groups in the target area.

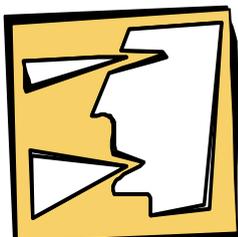
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Figure 1: Seven-step model for strengthening civil society organisations



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Step 3: Screening of revealed CSO

Once the identification survey is complete, all CSOs must be screened to determine which entities will participate in a more detailed Needs Assessment. The scope and objective defined in the first steps is used to pre-select the CSO for further activities. This selection process is conducted by trained moderators.

When targeting groups to participate in the needs assessment consideration must, of course, be given to their demonstrated interest in receiving capacity building training. Clear selection criteria should be developed in advance of the targeting exercise and with a view to capturing those CSOs that would benefit the most from capacity training. Finally, the selection criteria should follow from the stated objectives of the training program. Criteria to consider in targeting groups for participation in the needs assessment will include:

- ▶ Is the group representative of a larger population and formed through elections held by that larger population (such as labour unions, parents committees, and teachers' councils)? Selection of groups meeting this criterion will address the core objective of increasing participation on a community level.
- ▶ Does the group have multiple fields of activity and operate on a community level (such as civic action groups, village elders, and town elders)? Again, selection of groups meeting this criterion will address the core objective of increasing participation on a community level.
- ▶ Does the group act on the provincial level? Selection of groups meeting this criterion will address the core objective of increasing civil society representatives' capacity to act as a moderator between elected and appointed authorities.
- ▶ Do the organizations represent the interest of a particular or discrete segment of society, particularly a segment which has traditionally been under-represented (such as women or youth groups)? Selection of groups meeting this criterion will address the core objective of enhancing inclusive and balanced decision making on different levels.

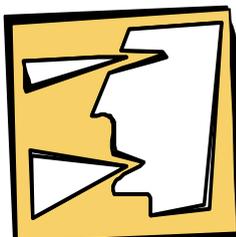


Step 4: Needs Assessment

Conduct a needs assessment of the targeted CSOs in order to determine their relative strengths and weaknesses. The needs assessment should be undertaken by trained moderators and use a predetermined, set methodology including focus-group discussions, questionnaires, and in-depth follow-up interviews that follow focus group discussions. The needs assessment should ascertain both material needs, such as office space and equipment, and deficits in skills. Clustering the identified CSOs according to the above-mentioned criteria can be very helpful at this step.

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Step 5: Design and conduct capacity building training

A capacity building training programme is designed and implemented based upon the results of the Needs Assessment,

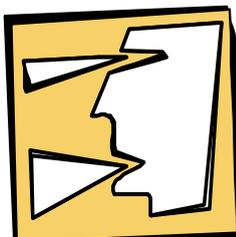
The following steps are required:

- A. **Development of training modules and materials:** Training materials must be developed reflecting the specific requirements revealed by the needs assessment. For example, modules and materials may be required on topics such as NGO organizational development, cooperation skills, and community involvement. The findings of the needs assessment will determine the content of the training module and it will thus reflect the specific needs and objectives of each organization.
- B. Depending on existing capacities, a **Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop** might be needed. A team of professional trainers has to be formed and trained in training methodologies. At the end of the ToT workshop, the team of trainers should have acquired the necessary training skills and methodologies, such as role playing, brainstorming, effective lecturing, and leading group discussions.
- C. **Conduct the training of Civil Society Organizations** over several days. Organizations participate in both group workshops addressing broad themes and common needs and more specific training workshops tailored to address particular weaknesses or needs revealed during the needs assessments.

Photo 2: Developing a strategy



Principles & General Procedures



Step 6: Mid-term evaluation

During the implementation of the training program, a mid-term evaluation is conducted.

The mid-term evaluation is designed to detect errors and omissions in both the content and delivery of the training programs and provide the opportunity to correct these problems.

The evaluation sought feedback on the number of topics covered in the training, the applicability of the topics, the accessibility of the training modules, the professionalism of the presentations, the supporting and visual aids, the training venue, the number of trainers and participants, and the trainer's professionalism and skill. A sample evaluation sheet is provided in Figure 2.

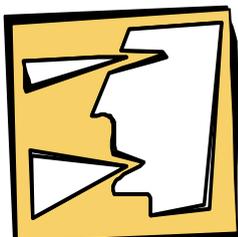
Figure 2: Sample Mid-Term Evaluation Sheet

Mid-term evaluation of the training course	
Community _____	Civil Society group _____
Venue _____	Date _____
1. Please mark with the following logic 1- excellent, 5-very bad	
too many topics	5 3 1 3 5 too few topics
too applicable	5 3 1 3 5 too inapplicable
too accessible	5 3 1 3 5 less accessible
too difficult	5 3 1 3 5 too simple
too much theory	5 3 1 3 5 too much practice
too much lecturing	5 3 1 3 5 too much discussions
too many exercises	5 3 1 3 5 to few exercises
too many participants	5 3 1 3 5 to few participants
too many trainers	5 3 1 3 5 too few trainers
Right venue	5 3 1 3 5 wrong venue
Proper time	5 3 1 3 5 inaccurate time.
good, professional presentation	1 2 3 4 5 bad, unprofessional presentation
good supporting materials	1 2 3 4 5 bad supporting materials
good visual aids	1 2 3 4 5 bad visual aids
very well organized	1 2 3 4 5 very bad organized
good training atmosphere	1 2 3 4 5 bad training atmosphere
time and effort spent were worth it	1 2 3 4 5 time and effort spent were not worth it

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Step 7: Select a sampling of CSO representatives to participate in activities

Based on the mid-term evaluations, a sample of CSO representatives, judged to be well trained and prepared to put their new skills into action, are selected to participate in follow-up activities involving community development and good governance.

Facilitated meetings are held between CSOs and local government and other organizations to ensure the continued participation of the newly trained CSOs in civic and governance matters.

One example of a follow-up activity in which the newly trained civil society representatives can be engaged includes the Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA). By working together with local councils the civil society representative can help to identify local conflicts which must be taken into account by government and other actors in the design and implementation of community development project.

Photo 3: Community joining together to repair a road



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