

Act Church of Sweden partner capacity building manual

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1. Capacity-building framework – our approach

Introduction

The Act Church of Sweden guidelines for partner collaborations states that all collaboration with partner churches and organisations aims to increase the capacity of the partner and of the Act Church of Sweden in one way or another. Through the collaboration we mutually strengthen each other's capabilities and ability to act.

The purpose of this paper is to outline the Act Church of Sweden¹ approach to specific capacity building initiatives with partners, the capacity building process itself and the tools used in that process. Through this document, the Act Church of Sweden wants to ensure a common understanding and way of working with partner capacity building, as well as a common way of explaining our work to external stakeholders. The Act Church of Sweden has a long history of working with and strengthening the capacity of our partners, and this is a step to further articulate how we view our role in relation to partners, and to define a common strategy for why, when and how to work on capacity-building.

Why Act Church of Sweden engages in capacity-building

In order to work towards the vision of life in the Realm of God, a healed Creation and Humanity in communion, justice, freedom and peace, the Act Church of Sweden partners with churches, church-related development organisations, ecumenical bodies, NGOs, CBOs, networks, alliances and other organisations all over the world². While these organisations have different identities, mandates and roles they are all actors in civil society³. In their various mandates, they work to contribute to the fulfillment of human rights and human dignity as actors for development in their own right. As such, they have different capacities and play different roles on different arenas. A vibrant and pluralistic civil society is a key factor in the development of democratic and just societies where people are able to freely exercise and claim their rights – individually and collectively. The Act Church of Sweden believes that churches, church-related organisations, ecumenical networks and other development organisations can contribute to the democratization of societies by facilitating opportunities and spaces for people as active participants in churches and as rights holders and citizens in society, and by being models themselves for a democratic culture, increasing respect for human rights, making decision-makers available and accountable to their citizens, and by contributing to sustainable economic and social development.

The Act Church of Sweden can play a vital role in strengthening and supporting these local churches and other civil society organisations. Therefore, all partner collaborations aim at contributing to increased capacity in various ways. By working with and strengthening the capacity of partners to fulfill their own mandate and to be democratic and sustainable churches/organisations, the Act Church of Sweden can make a significant contribution to local civil society and to enabling conditions for people to be active participants and citizens in society.

Understanding and definition of capacity and capacity building

The Act Church of Sweden has a holistic view of what makes a “strong” organisation and which capacities that are needed. We depart from the definition of *capacity* as both the “ability to” and

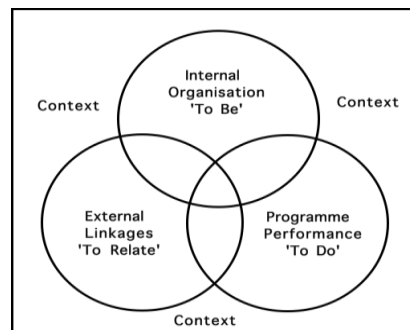
¹ Understood in this context to be The Church of Sweden International Work as defined in the international department's strategy.

² The organisations with whom Act CoS has entered into formal collaboration agreements will hereinafter be referred to as *partners or partner organisations*.

³ With a secular language, a church can be understood as faith based organisation and a civil society organisation

“power to” do something and be something/someone⁴. Act The Church of Sweden defines an organisation as *strong* when it has the organisational capacities (systems, resources, capabilities, relationships etc.) that are needed in order for the organisation to be and do what it was created for – to fulfill its purpose or mandate.

Organisational capacity entails a variety of elements which are needed in order for an organisation to be a strong actor and which can be categorized under three interrelated components; capacities that relate to a) its internal organisational functioning (*to be*), b) the way it performs its programmes/projects (*to do*) and c) its external linkages (*to relate*). In order to be and do what it was created for, the organisation requires different elements of capacity within these three areas as well as in relation to the demands and pressures that may come from the external environment (context).



The ‘Three Circles’ model (INTRAC, 1993):

The overarching principle in the model is the interlocking nature of all three areas of organisational capacity. For example, if an organisation’s capacity to relate to other organisations is poor, or its leadership is weak, this will affect its program performance. Likewise there is a continuous interaction between the organisation and surrounding context – each impacting on the other.

The CSO’s programme (or ‘to do’ circle) is the work that it does – for example, human rights, health, poverty alleviation, education. This dimension includes a series of capacities related to project management; technical skills and knowledge/expertise in the topics which form the content of the organisation’s programme, and on which it depends in order to see results in its own programmes. However, for an organisation to effectively deliver the programme and fulfill its mission it needs to have a strong vision of what it is striving for, based on core values; effective leadership; a strategic plan; appropriate internal systems; competent staff etc. These are some of the specific capacities of the second organisational dimension – its internal functions or ‘to be’ circle. The capacities in this dimension are related to the overall organisational performance and sustainability. In addition, an effective CSO needs to have positive (helpful) external relationships with other organisations and institutions – it needs to be able to relate. CSOs cannot achieve change by working in isolation. The organisation needs to manage its relationships strategically, and staff need to be competent in relevant skills such as negotiation and communication.

The critical element in this model is the context or environment within which the CSO is operating. Understanding how the organisation interacts with the external context is increasingly important in analysing and managing CSO capacity. An organisation’s ability to understand its environment, interact easily with it, and anticipate and manage subsequent change – is a key capacity which enables such organisations to adapt and survive more readily.

Whereas *Capacity development* is an organic and ongoing process in any organisation, *capacity building* is defined as a purposeful, conscious effort to bring about capacity development. It may operate at different levels. Capacity building is a structured process that is framed around the answer to the question ‘capacity for what?’ It has a clear purpose and set of specific objectives, and aims at mitigating risks related to the different capacity elements. It is important to note that it departs from and builds on existing capacities and is always context-specific. As capacity building here relates to work undertaken with partners, it is referred to as “*partner capacity building*”.

From the above follows that the Act Church of Sweden may undertake or support partner capacity building initiatives in relation to all three aspects – *to be*, *to do*, *to relate* – depending on the needs (risks) and opportunities presented by the partner itself, its surrounding context and the strategic priorities of the Act Church of Sweden. Capacity-building work may relate to increased capacity of partner to work for a positive change within the relevant policy areas; i.e. sustainable livelihoods, gender justice and equality, health, peace and reconciliation and/or pastoral development (to do). It may also relate to the general capacities to be a democratic and accountable organisation (to be) or to its role in civil society and its ability to establish and maintain healthy and helpful relationships with different actors and stakeholders (to relate).

⁴ INTRAC

Purpose of the Act Church of Sweden capacity building initiatives

On an overall level, the purpose of partner capacity building is to contribute to democratic, sustainable and accountable organisations who are dynamic civil society actors working for positive sustainable change. On a more direct level, the purpose of capacity building is to ensure that the Act Church of Sweden as well as the partner organisations have the capacity to contribute to the desired changes that we want to achieve through our work. In this sense, capacity-building is both *a goal in itself and a means to an end*.

Basic principles for capacity building

The following are the principles that should guide the Act Church of Sweden's work on capacity building with partner organisations. The basic principles below reflect the Act Church of Sweden commitment to the *Istanbul principles* of pursuing equitable partnerships, knowledge sharing and commitment to mutual learning and development for positive sustainable change.

Continuous dialogue and mutual respect

An open and respectful dialogue is the foundation for the collaboration between the Act Church of Sweden and its partner organisations. Through this dialogue, trust is established and options for collaboration as well as mutual benefits and learning are explored.

Ownership and participation of the partner organisation

Capacity building initiatives are planned in dialogue with the partner organisation, based on the local context, the needs (risks) and priorities defined by the partner, as well as the objectives for collaboration between the Act Church of Sweden and the partner. Although initially, a capacity-building process may be promoted by Act Church of Sweden, the ownership of the organisation is fundamental. Based on the needs and resources of the partner and the findings of the partner assessment, the partner organisation should decide together with Act Church of Sweden the specific actions that should be prioritized in the capacity building plan.

Contextual approach

Each organisation and each context is different and has its specific characteristics. For capacity-building efforts to be meaningful and yield result they need to be based on a thorough understanding of the external context in which the organisation operates and the challenges and opportunities it presents. They also need to be adapted to the characteristics of the organisation itself. Flexibility and creativity are therefore important qualities to design capacity-building processes that are contextually appropriate – there is no blueprint that works for all partners and all situations. This is particularly important given that the Act Church of Sweden and its partners often work in multi-stakeholder contexts and in networks.

Focusing on what works well

Empowerment and strengthening of individuals and organisations is more successful when departing from what is done right and what works well rather than focusing only on weaknesses. Organisational and individual development can only take place if conditions are enabling and people are encouraged to grow, by allowing for learning from mistakes and by reinforcing positive skills, behavior and attitudes. Therefore it is important to define the strengths and resources of the organisation and look at how these can be reinforced to also influence the areas that are less developed.

Process-thinking, coordination and linking

Capacity is fluid in the sense that it evolves over time and can both increase and decline. Several factors determine an organisation's capacity and these factors will also vary over time. Therefore it is important to look at capacity development as an ongoing process where specific capacity building

initiatives promoted by Act Church of Sweden must be seen in view of the larger picture. The results of these must also be seen over time. All capacity building initiatives should take into consideration other parallel capacity-building processes that the partner may be involved in. The Act Church of Sweden should take a multilateral approach and to the extent possible coordinate capacity-building initiatives and plans with other donors. Information from previous assessments that the partner has done can feed into or substitute the Act Church of Sweden assessment. Likewise, our plans need to be informed by and coordinated with any ongoing capacity-building processes within the local ACT Forum or other coordination mechanism. The Act Church of Sweden should also link its capacity-building work to relevant ongoing programs and initiatives within the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation (DMD/DWS, DPPW).

Continuous and mutual learning

Capacity-building processes should be seen as opportunities for mutual learning for both the partner organisation and the Act Church of Sweden. Monitoring of capacity-building initiatives is therefore crucial, and close dialogue with the partner should allow for lessons to be identified in a timely manner.

2. The process for capacity building initiatives

Capacity-building initiatives may vary and need to be adapted to the specific partnership and context as stated above. However, regardless of type of partner and context, all capacity-building initiatives are subject to the same basic cycle of planning, implementation and follow-up.

It is important to note that all teams in the Act Church of Sweden have differing mandates relating to partners and this may impact the types and capacity building initiatives that are supported. The humanitarian team undertakes specific capacity building efforts mainly in relation to the “to do” circle (humanitarian action and community-based psychosocial support). It is not the task of the humanitarian team to carry out the general partner assessment or take responsibility for all three areas of the capacity building mandate of the Act Church of Sweden. However, when specific humanitarian capacity building initiatives are undertaken with organisations that are also country programme partners or longer term humanitarian initiatives, these interventions must be coordinated with and part of the capacity building plan within the particular country programme.

Step1: Organisational Self-Assessment

Dialogue on the role and capacity of the partner organisation is a natural ingredient of the collaboration between the Act Church of Sweden and the partner. It happens through assessment and dialogue on project proposals, specific organizational capacity assessments, and risk analysis as well as through monitoring and evaluation exercises. It is to be seen as an ongoing learning process that helps Act Church of Sweden and its partners identify opportunities to build on existing strengths or to address gaps or weaknesses (risks) that hinder the realization of the organisations’ full potential, as well as where and how the Act Church of Sweden can make a difference in this regard.

Assessment of the capacity of the organisation is the first step of a capacity building process. To this end, the Act Church of Sweden has developed an *Organisational Self-Assessment* tool that specifies the areas around which the Act Church of Sweden would like to focus its dialogue with partners. It is designed to take into consideration the *to be, to do and to relate* aspects of organisational capacity. The partner assessment tool is used for various purposes:

- As a starting point for discussion with and assessment of capacity of *new* partners
- As a basis for a structured dialogue and follow-up throughout the partner collaboration with all partners
- As a starting-point to identify opportunities for capacity building, to defining capacity-building plans, serving as a baseline tool and as a tool to monitor the process of change in capacity
- As a basis for the Act Church of Sweden overall assessment of its partner portfolio at country, regional or global level and an opportunity for mutual capacity building where the partners’ capacity in specific areas supersedes that of the Church of Sweden.

The tool helps the Church of Sweden to work in a coherent and strategic way with its partners across its programmes, and to systematize and learn from the work undertaken with partners. The Organisational Self-Assessment document is used both as a starting point for discussions with new potential partners and as a basis for dialogue throughout an ongoing partnership. It is a way for the Act Church of Sweden to initiate a conversation about issues on quality and accountability and the dialogue around these provide the basis for analysis of cooperation, such as to identify existing strengths or capacity building needs. It is important to note that the purpose of the organisational assessment is *not* to select partners with high capacity in all areas. It is not the actual level of capacity that is central, but the ongoing dialogue and process around these issues. The result of the assessment is analysed together

with other available information⁵ to guide strategies and options for the collaboration between Act Church of Sweden and its partner. It may also be complemented with assessment of the thematic capacity of the partner in relation to the thematic focus of the partner collaboration. In order to define any capacity building plan these assessments need to be carried out and the conclusions agreed with the partner. The ultimate purpose of these exercises is to help to define how the Act Church of Sweden best can support its partner churches/organisations to develop according to their own priorities.

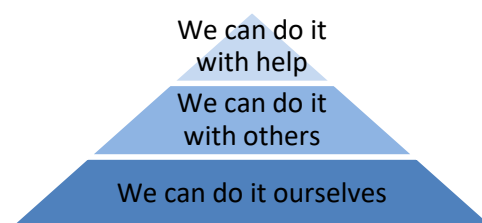
The assessment is designed as a self-assessment tool and should therefore be carried out together with the partner *in situ*. It requires some time set aside and the commitment of key people at different levels within the partner organisation. The assessment could be done in a one-day workshop, with additional time to analyse the information and discuss options and possibilities. The role of Act Church of Sweden in the assessment is to facilitate the discussions, ask follow-up questions and document the conclusions.

Step 2: Definition of priorities and actions – the partner capacity building plan.

Capacity building plans should be defined per partner, country and region. Each regional team needs to have capacity building plans for its partners and thus the possibility to coordinate and find synergies across partners, countries and region. As such, the capacity building plans form part of the annual operational plan of the Country Programmes/Regional teams.

The partner capacity building plan should be the result of the assessment process⁶ that is characterized by the basic principles described above and should, based on the dialogue with and ownership of the partner, define the priorities and actions for capacity building as well as the desired results of the capacity building. The latter is important to be able to follow up on the capacity building actions and assess whether they indeed contributed to improved capacity.

The plan should also take into account initiatives already undertaken together with partner and build on these, as well as those already undertaken by other actors. It is important to note that while the partner assessment and dialogue may show that capacity building would be beneficial in many areas, the capacity-building plan needs to define the areas that are the most strategic for the Act Church of Sweden and the partner to concentrate on. Therefore the plan needs to be based on a thorough analysis of the context in which the partner operates and the risks and opportunities it faces, and address the areas where the Act Church of Sweden may have a particular input or added value to the partner. It is also important to take into account available human and financial resources in order to define a feasible plan. When planning the initiatives, and defining the role of the Act Church of Sweden, it is therefore important to consider what the organisation can do on its own, what it can do with support from other actors, and what requires particular support from the Act Church of Sweden, as illustrated in the model above.



Step 3: Implementation - methods and role of the Act Church of Sweden

The Act Church of Sweden has a variety of approaches and methods to increase the capacity of its partner churches and organisations, depending on the type of capacities that are to be strengthened. For example, *financial support* to carry out a project or programme may contribute to increased capacity of

⁵ For example: Partner description, Strategic plan, Organogram, Last audit report with management letter, Procurement policy, Code of conduct, recent reports etc.

⁶ Partner assessment and risk analysis

the partner organisation, as well as financial support to a project specifically aimed at building a capacity of the partner. In some cases, the way the Act Church of Sweden supports a partner financially and the conditions that come with the support, may either support or hinder capacity development of the organisation. Therefore, it might be defined that a broader *core support* to the organisation would in fact be a good way to increase its capacity.

In specific capacity-building initiatives, the Act Church of Sweden may promote strengthened capacity by facilitating access to and/or organizing *meeting places* and *exchanges of experience* between various actors. We may provide *training* in different topics or methods, either ourselves, by contracting trainers or experts or by facilitating access to trainings organized by others. The Act Church of Sweden collaborates with *resource partner organizations* that can contribute to capacity building in the country programmes. Other methods may include facilitated *workshops & exercises* or engagement in other events, *technical assistance* and *coaching*, *support in developing structures, strategies, policies and procedures*, *peer groups*, *peer reviews* and *joint monitoring/evaluation*, *communities of practise*, etc. The choice of method needs to be based on the context, the capacity that is to be improved and the desired change (the “Capacity for what”-question). The role the Act Church of Sweden plays in a given situation is decided by factors such as the resources of the partner organisation to improve its own capacity, the resources and capacity available at the Act Church of Sweden as well as the conditions presented by the local context.

Step 4: Monitoring and evaluation of partner capacity building

All capacity building plans should define how the capacity building initiatives will be followed up and how this links to the overall results that we wish to contribute to. The Act Church of Sweden and the partner organisation should decide how this monitoring will take place. When the capacity building plan is decided and actions are being carried out, it is important to also follow up on the results of the process. Monitoring should follow up on the expected results of the capacity building initiatives, indicators in programme plans, against the baselines established in assessments and/or action plans developed as a result of evaluations and audits. All capacity-building plans should consider evaluations as a way to increase learning for the partner and for the Act Church of Sweden.

When following up on capacity building initiatives, the Act Church of Sweden is aware that there might be a lengthy period between the capacity building and the desired end results and that capacity development is not a linear process.

At the Act Church of Sweden level, the results of capacity building initiatives with partners are documented and reported within the framework of the Country Programmes. The Act Church of Sweden will also monitor capacity building processes at an overall level to gather lessons learned from the capacity building work undertaken;⁷ what the Act Church of Sweden is learning from rolling out and implementing the capacity building plans as well as what the learnings from capacity building initiatives tell us about ourselves. An internal evaluation of our work against the principles and processes detailed in this document will be undertaken in 2-3 years.

⁷ Phases of the capacity building framework approach: Pilot 2015, Phase 1 2016-2018. Evaluation 2018. Phase 2, 2019 onwards. This is a long term approach and thus does not have to follow the strategic cycle of Act Church of Sweden.

3. Tools for the capacity building process

Capacity building plan templates (Asia)

Capacity Building Plan Regional/Country Level

Country:

Date:

Capacity Building Activity (Act CoS ref.)	Components	Year and month	Partner	Policy area	Role of Act CoS (indicate if the initiative is coordinated with other organisations)	Act CoS staff responsible	Date of completion	Budget SEK/ percentage of total budget ⁸	Role of Liaison Officer

Comments:

⁸ Make a rough estimation of the percentage of the total budget allocated to capacity building of partner organisation.

Capacity Building Planning Tool – Partner Level

Country/Partner(s):

Period: 2014-2017

Partner Assessment Date:

Desired Capacity <i>(as identified in the partner assessment or as otherwise identified)</i>	Current situation <i>(as identified through the assessment)</i>	Expected result	Agreed Capacity Building Activity	Year and month	Implemented how <i>(internally, with others, with external help)</i>	Resources <i>(time, finances, tools, specialists)</i>	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning	Comments

Country/Partner(s): **Example: The Philippines/Kanlungan**
 Period: 2014-2017
 Partner Assessment: 6 December 2015

Desired Capacity (as in the assessment tool or as otherwise identified)	Current situation (as identified through the assessment)	Expected result	Agreed Capacity Building Activity	Year and month	Implemented how (internally, with others, with external help)	Resources (time, finances, tools, specialists)	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning	Comments
4. Staff management and staff competencies	No gender policy.	Gender policy and action plan developed and approved by the board	Process for development of gender policy and action plan: ToR drafted Consultant hired Workshops Policy and action plan drafted	Sep – Nov 2015	With external help	Consultant funded by Act CoS Time for workshop	The progress will be monitored by ... against... through ...	ToR drafted by Kanlungan and shared with Act CoS for approval.
	No job description for communication officer.	Job description for CO in place.			Internally	Time for ED and Exec Com		
	No systematic staff appraisals done.	Staff appraisals done systematically and regularly.			With others	Time to consult with other organisations to identify best practices		