Module 3:

Conducting Capacity Assessments

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3. CONDUCTING CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS

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3. Conducting Capacity Assessments

Links to other modules

Module 1: Definitions, Principles of Good Practice, Dimensions, Components and Themes, Change
Module 2: Working with Stakeholders, Stakeholder Mapping
Module 4: Defining Goals and Objectives
Module 6: Incentives

Introduction

This module introduces the second practical step for getting started on a capacity development initiative: **assessing existing capacity and gaps.** As outlined in Module 1, effective capacity development begins with understanding what capacity already exists and where the gaps lie. A well-planned capacity assessment forms the foundation for any biodiversity-related initiative. It ensures that new efforts build on existing strengths, rather than duplicating or overlooking them. Taking a comprehensive approach, one that looks at multiple dimensions and levels of capacity, provides the basis for developing relevant strategies, programmes, and action plans. It also establishes a baseline for setting indicators and monitoring progress over time.

To be effective, the assessment itself must be carefully designed and implemented, so that the results are reliable and can directly inform sound planning and decision-making.

3.1 Why Capacity Assessments are Important

Capacity assessment will be your foundation for designing effective programmes and projects. It will provide you with a systematic way to understand:

- **What capacity already exists** at the individual, organizational, and sectoral levels;
- **Where the gaps and needs lie** in relation to implementing the GBF and your country's NBSAP; and,
- **What enabling conditions are in place** (or missing) for capacity development to take root and deliver results.

Without such an assessment, capacity development risks being fragmented, supply-driven, or mismatched to actual needs.

Practitioner tips

- **Assessments do not have to provide vast amounts of information about everything.** There can be a danger in producing so much information it becomes overwhelming and therefore not useful. What is needed is 'good enough' information to provide enough accurate understanding to make good decisions about how to proceed.
- **Allow enough time** to complete the assessment process before starting analysis, defining needs, and planning a capacity development response.

3.2 Assessing Existing Capacity

As mentioned in module 1 a core principle of good practice is to start by understanding what capacity is already in place and using that as the platform for moving ahead. This module gives you guidance on what to consider and how to go about assessing existing capacity.

3.2.1 Internal versus External Led Process

There are three ways in which assessments can be conducted: self-assessments, external assessments, or a combination of both. All have advantages and disadvantages, as set out in the table below.

Table 3-1: Who leads the assessment?

Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Self-assessments	• Local ownership • Maximise embedded local knowledge and understanding of context	• Two main risks: • there may not be enough technical knowledge internally to make fully accurate assessments • people might have reasons to present the current situation as more positive than it actually is
External assessments	• Conducted by people who have good technical knowledge, and who can be objective	• External experts often lack knowledge and understanding of local context, especially the political economy

Combination of internal and external assessors	• Helps to maximise the benefits of each approach, while overcoming their weaknesses • Ideally a locally led process, calling on external expertise as necessary	• Needs more time and resources than the other approaches • Different perspectives might result in disagreements about the findings

3.2.2 Setting up the Assessment Process

Before starting a capacity assessment, it is important that you set up the process carefully. This involves reaching agreement on the need for the assessment, securing leadership and stakeholder engagement, and putting in place the support, information, and participation needed to carry it out effectively.

Below is a set of key considerations to guide you in the setup phase. Following these steps will help ensure that your assessment is inclusive, well-supported, and aligned with the broader context in which you are working:

- **Get agreement about the need to do it:** you need to ensure that everyone, especially leadership, agrees that the assessment is needed, because without their agreement you are likely to run into challenges. This links to the political economy and change readiness discussed in other modules, which is more important than any technical consideration that might facilitate or block the assessment process. It also links to the next two points.
- **Ensure local leadership and stakeholder buy-in:** decide how you can get local leadership, ownership and buy-in. How the assessment is done will influence the stakeholder buy-in, so use the best methods to achieve it. For example, the management and staff of a government department might reject a critical report done only by an external expert, whereas any negative findings resulting from self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses will be accepted. Creating an assessment team of local managers and staff, together with external technical experts, each taking on different tasks and contributions will thus likely produce the best results.
- **Think about what other support is needed:** Other agencies might also be involved, for example by: giving financial support; facilitating connections to key informants; giving political credibility; providing managerial or logistic support; or sharing technical expertise.
- **Select and sequence who to involve:** everyone involved will have different interests and roles in capacity assessments. To avoid being overwhelmed in multi-stakeholder settings be practical about who to involve at which stage. If you start with the essential core group identified in your stakeholder map you can expand it and involve others over time.
- **Safeguard marginalized voices:** any assessment process should take care to safeguard the interests of less powerful stakeholders, especially

beneficiaries and traditionally marginalised groups who are often overlooked in consultations. Your stakeholder mapping should have identified any disadvantaged groups, perhaps because of geographic location or literacy issues. You can overcome the challenges with specially designed consultation exercises, or by finding someone mandated to speak on behalf of these groups.

- **Gather core information:** Every assessment needs to be formulated based on some core information, without which it risks being inaccurate, incomplete or a waste of time and resources. The information that you need to get started in the right way is:
    - The **definition of capacity and why it is needed** that is being applied in the context under consideration (see Module 1). First, the definition will identify **broad types and components of capacity needed.** Then the answer to the questions **'Capacity for what?'** will help to determine appropriate entry points for the assessment. In the coastal protection example, the components of the capacity might be: scientific knowledge; ability to negotiate with coastal communities; ability to monitor commercial fishing activities along the coast, etc. Capacity for what could be the product or service outputs that the port and coastal authorities need to deliver to contribute towards the development goal.
    - **The mandate of the entity being assessed:** This only applies to organizations or groups that have a formal status, in which case the mission statement, or goal would provide information about the mandate. Informal groups like communities will not have a mandate.

3.2.3 What to Assess

The core dimensions and themes of capacity explained in Module 1 provide a useful framework for organizing what to assess. These dimensions help ensure that your capacity assessments are comprehensive and take into account all the factors that enable or constrain performance. Table 3-2 below summarizes the main aspects for you to consider.

Table 3-2: A summary of what to assess

Type	Explanation
Levels of capacity	Regardless of the starting point, you need to understand what is happening at all levels, individual, organizational and enabling environment, to get the full picture of the factors enabling or inhibiting performance. The 'zoom in, zoom out' method discussed in 3.5.2 below can help to balance these perspectives. **Note**: Zooming out to understand the enabling environment is especially important, as it shapes what is possible at lower levels.

Enabling environment	The complexity of higher-level systems calls for assessments of multiple factors, including relationships between relevant organisations, governance, legal frameworks, and the socio-political context. Tools for these levels of assessment should always be adapted to the specific context.
Organizational	A comprehensive organizational assessment looks at both functional capacities (to fulfil the mandate) and soft capacities such as culture, values, power dynamics, and internal/external relationships. Data collected should combine both qualitative and quantitative information, using varied methods and tools, rather than relying solely on scoring exercises.
Individual	Assessment at this level goes beyond traditional technical training needs analysis. It should also explore **soft capacities** such as motivation, confidence, and attitudes that affect how technical skills are applied.
Types of capacity	It is important to go beyond assessing hard capacities (technical skills, structures, financial systems and work processes), to include soft capacities such as power distribution, incentives and sanctions, leadership, organizational culture, values and beliefs, and the ability to learn and adapt.
Themes for application	The theme or focus of the capacity development initiative helps determine which areas to assess. For example, an *organizational strengthening* theme may focus on human capacity, systems and procedures, and knowledge management. Alternately a *sector strengthening* theme may focus on mechanisms for coordination and joint action among stakeholders.
Cross-cutting issues	Inclusion and gender perspectives are essential for a comprehensive assessment. This includes examining whether 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approaches are in place, or whether a silo mentality persists. It is also important to consider how gender and marginalized groups are addressed, or overlooked, in the current system.
Incentives	Understanding the incentives that drive behaviour is critical for predicting what might support or block change. Incentives, both positive and perverse, exist at all levels and may not always be obvious. Identifying them can help explain resistance or unexpected actions (e.g. a manager avoiding a logical decision). This is especially relevant at the enabling environment level, where incentives are often shaped by the political economy. See Module 5.2.3 for more information about incentives.

3.3 Choosing Assessment Approaches

There are many ways to assess capacity, but most approaches can be grouped into two broad types. Both aim to identify capacity gaps and opportunities for improvement, but they differ in how they start and what they emphasize.

The **gap analysis** approach begins by comparing existing capacity against an external standard or ideal, highlighting what is missing. The **incremental analysis** approach starts from what is already in place and focuses on the next steps needed to move closer to a desired goal.

Understanding the difference between these two approaches is important because each frames the assessment process, and the resulting strategies, in a different way. Table 3-3 below summarizes their main features, advantages, and limitations.

Table 3-3: Two approaches to capacity assessment: gap analysis and incremental analysis

	Gap analysis: What's missing?	**Incremental analysis: What's next?**
Brief description	• Judges existing capacity against ideal capacity as defined by experts. The difference between them is the 'gap'	• Uses what is already in place as the starting point for those who are working towards a goal to define the next steps
Guiding questions	• What capacity is already in place? • What capacity should be in place? • What is the difference, i.e. what is missing?	• What capacity is already in place? • What is the goal? • What is needed for the next step to move towards the goal?
Advantages	• Clearly sets out benchmark standards to work towards • Good for quantitative data	• Good for participatory self-assessment exercises that build ownership for change • Takes more account of absorptive capacity • What is already in place is the focus for decisions
Disadvantages	• Usually conducted by external experts based on externally defined criteria • Stakeholders may feel the focus on what is missing as critical and negative and be demotivated • Tends to focus on measurable hard capacity • Tends to problematise the need • Can result in planning for targets that are hard to reach	• Can lack technical rigour. • Stakeholders may not have an agreed vision of what they want to achieve • Stakeholders do not always know what they need next in order for things to change

Best used for	• Technical capacity issues and those with a focused scope.	• Issues that are complex and where there is a strong need for stakeholder ownership to support change

Figure 3-1: Visual representation of the differences between gap and incremental analysis

Practitioner tips:

The following tips draw on practical experience from capacity assessments in different contexts. They highlight common challenges and useful reminders to help make your assessment process more effective and realistic.

- **Look at the history:** All organisations, sectors and individuals have a history of capacity development evolution prior to the assessment. Looking at the evolution will help you understand what has or has not worked in the past, which in turn will help you to design better initiatives in future. Also, past performance provides information about the organisation or system's ability to manage change processes. This information can provide valuable insights into any factors that are facilitating or blocking change.
- **Check for assessment fatigue:** Some organisations and people may have been involved in multiple assessments already. Depending on how the assessments were done and what happened as a result, you might need to demonstrate that you have taken previous assessments into consideration and there is a good reason for doing another.
- **Don't forget your respondents have other work to do:** Be sensitive to the fact that engaging in assessment activities takes time and the people you need to contribute to the assessment have roles and responsibilities that they need to fulfil. Try to avoid planning activities in a way that creates a burden for the participants.
- **Look at the capacity to manage change:** Do the key organisations, groups and individuals have the soft capacities like strategic thinking, strong negotiation and communication skills, flexibility and responsiveness, that will be needed to manage the changes that will come into place as capacity is developed. This is important because the lack of change management capacity often results in poor outcomes
- The Further Reading and Resources section has links to some helpful assessment tools and sample templates. Remember that **you do not have to use any tool in a fixed format.** All tools can and should be adapted to local context and needs, either by amending a single tool, or by taking bits and pieces from several and merging them together to fit your need.

3.4 Identifying Factors Affecting Capacity Development Efforts and Desired Results

In addition to assessing existing capacity, you also need to assess factors that may negatively or positively influence desired capacity development results. The relevance of understanding change was discussed in Module 1 but in some situations getting to a deep understanding of what is happening already can be a big undertaking.

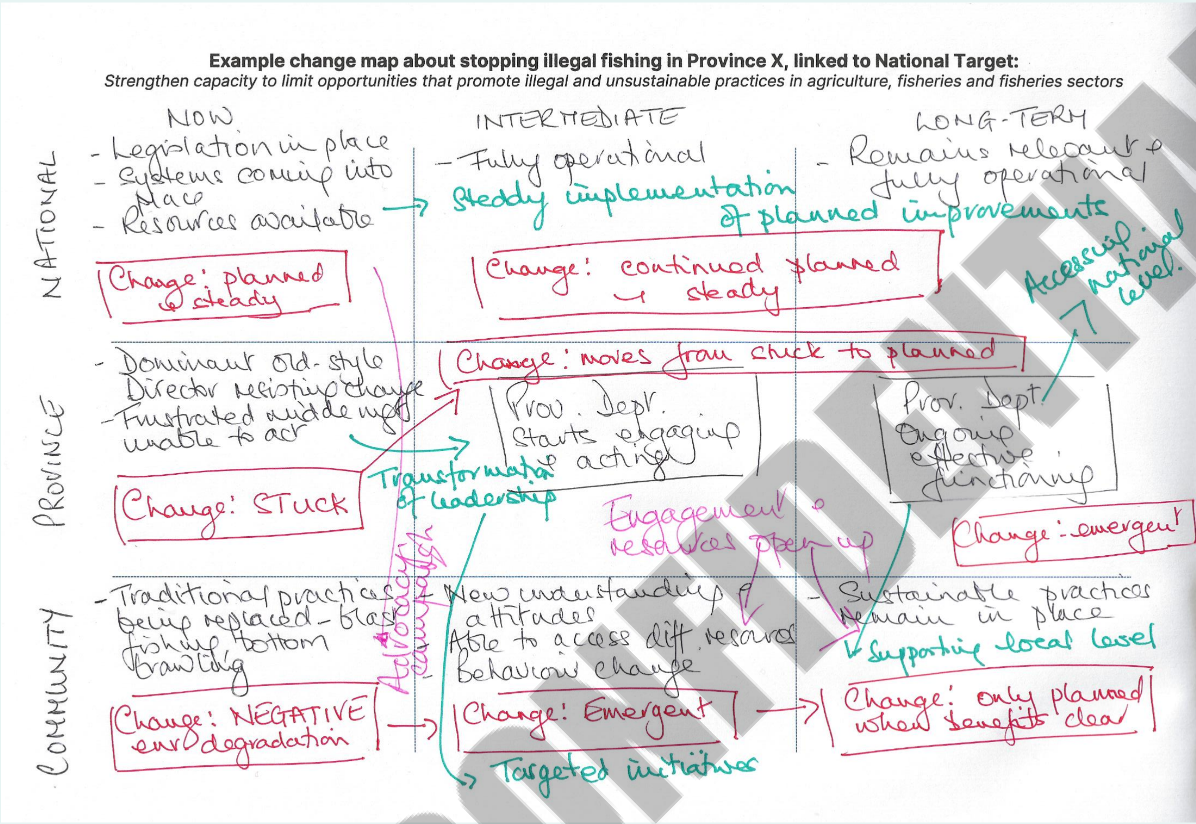
3.4.1 Existing Change

In many biodiversity contexts existing change is not positive. In particular, degradation and loss represent negative changes that need to be stopped and reversed. The planned changes in a capacity development initiative can vary a great deal in scope, scale and purpose, possibly affecting many factors and people. If an initiative is intended to address degradation and loss it is helpful to remember that *'sometimes standing still is progress'* i.e. bringing negative change to a halt would be the first success on the road to recovery.

A pre-planning exercise to map and assess **past and existing change processes** will help you to:

- Identify the **predominant type of change already happening.** If it is positive any new initiative can be designed to build on existing dynamics of change rather than working against or undermining them. If existing change is negative, the forces driving it needs to be understood;
- Identify any possible **drivers that can be leveraged** for positive change. This can be very helpful for selecting appropriate entry points;
- Understand what **constraints** are at work that need to be addressed. Locate where change is stuck and blocks need to be removed;
- See if there are **differences between what people say is happening 'officially' and what is really happening.** If this difference exists it is often an indicator of soft capacity issues in the political economy such as power dynamics in relationships: and,
- Provide information needed to **formulate indicators of change.**

Figure 3-2: Example of a change map



For planning purposes, a future change visioning exercise like a TOC (see module 4.1) is also useful.

3.4.2 Change Readiness and Absorptive Capacity

Beyond identifying current capacities, it is equally important to examine the **willingness and ability of stakeholders and institutions to adopt and sustain change.** This willingness and ability are defined as follows:

Change readiness: The degree of motivation, commitment, and preparedness to engage in new practices, policies, or partnerships. It means being willing and prepared to change the current situation to something different. This is important because there are many situations where people do not want to change themselves, the situation they are in or maybe something they have the power to control. This is called being 'resistant'. For example, a politician with business interests in deforestation, would be resistant to forest protection initiatives.

Absorptive capacity: The ability of organisations and systems to take in, internalise, and apply new knowledge, skills, and resources over time. It is a specific focus of change readiness about the ability to take in and work effectively with new inputs and initiatives. For example, an indigenous people's group may not have any systems or resources for handling project funding grants and the associated donor requirements. Importantly they may not want to have this capacity, preferring to stay as they are, in which case in addition to lacking absorptive capacity they will be both resistant and not change ready.

3.4.3 Why this Matters when Working in Complexity

If you design an initiative that involves or depends on organizations or groups that are not ready for change you will likely run into problems very quickly. This is why it is essential to include these factors as part of your assessments of existing capacity. The greater the complexity of the proposed change, the greater the importance of assessing where there is readiness for change in the system, as this can be critical for deciding if it is appropriate to intervene, and if it is, what entry points and types of intervention would be best. The interrelatedness of all levels and parts in a functioning system means that even though many may be ready, perhaps one small element could block capacity development initiatives from being effective.

The **political economy** is part of complexity of any context, so assessment of the relevant factors in the political economy of your particular situation will help you gain deeper understanding of the high-level factors that will influence your capacity development efforts. Too often initiatives are launched without taking account of these factors resulting in little, if any, sustainable change being achieved. Reasons why powerful stakeholders might choose to resist a capacity development initiative include: they may not see how they would benefit; they may see threats to their own interests; they may have other priorities; they might not understand the need or what the process is about; or, powerful external factors are at work. Only when you have identified and understood these factors will it be possible for you to understand fully whether or not all those involved are ready to engage with change.

If people and conditions are not yet ready any initiative at best risks wasting opportunities and resources, and at worst risks damaging existing capacity. Insisting on the indigenous people's group taking on a donor grant would create problems, including possibly loss of their goodwill to continue working with the capacity development initiative. (This is why change readiness assessments are sometimes referred to as change risk assessments.)

In summary, change assessments are done to analyse the preparedness of the conditions, attitudes and resources needed for change to happen successfully, namely:

- A clear vision and objectives for the intended change;
- The key stakeholders are motived to engage with the change and make it work;

- The right conditions and resources are in place to support the change process; and,
- There is sufficient existing capacity to utilise new inputs for beneficial effect.

3.5 Capacity Assessment Methods and Tools

There are different types of method and tool that can be used for doing assessments, all of which should be adapted for relevance to local needs and context before they are used. This module gives you some guidance on how to decide on the method and select the relevant tools.

3.5.1 Assessment Methods

For any large-scale assessment you will need to define the overall method to be used. This will involve combining a selection of tools, because no single tool can generate all the information you need to get comprehensive understanding of capacity in a complex situation. You will need to choose a selection of tools and decide and how to combine and sequence them. For example, to fully assess the capacity of an existing organisation the following might be used:

- Document review;
- A pre-determined organizational assessment tool;
- Structured interviews with key management;
- Survey questionnaires for staff input; and,
- Focus group discussions with service users.

Box Error! No text of specified style in document.-1: A note about types of data

Both in this module on assessments, and in later modules on measuring results there are references to both qualitative and quantitative data. In this practical guide the working definitions of these terms are:

Qualitative: descriptive, about things that cannot be expressed as numbers, such as characteristics or opinions.

Quantitative: hard facts and figures that can be recorded and measured through numbers – things that are tangible and visible.

Note: Methods for collecting qualitative and quantitative data can be the same, for example surveys and questionnaires. The different types of data will be generated by the difference in the detail of how they are constructed.

Practitioner tip:

Good sequencing helps

The following tips draw on practical experience from capacity assessments in different contexts. They highlight common challenges and useful reminders to help make your assessment process more effective and realistic.

- Make sure that the first steps in the process help you get understanding of the important core issues. For example, if you understand the organizational mandate and plans before you talk to service users you will be better able to assess the level and quality of achievement.
- Key people like senior managers might need to be interviewed more than once. Initially to get their perspectives on organizational functioning, and at the end to deal with issues that have arisen from other parts of your process, for example staff feedback about the level of resources they have available to do the work.

In cases when none of the available tools fit your needs you might have to create one, either by merging parts of other tools or by developing a new one from scratch.

3.5.2 Assessment tools

The purpose of tools is to generate information and data that will enable assessment and analysis of existing capacity and future needs in order to achieve the desired biodiversity change. As each type of tool generates different information selection needs to be made according to the aspect or dimension of the current situation needs to be understood.

Table 3-4: Different aspects of assessment tools

Type of tool	Explanation	When to use
Change readiness assessment	• Systematic assessment an organization or group's preparedness for something new • Examines aspects like leadership, culture, communication, and resource availability • Produces qualitative data • See 3.5.2 below for further explanation	• When planning an initiative that will depend on an organization or group for successful implementation

Document review	• Review of all relevant documents about an organisation or issue • Can produce both qualitative and quantitative data about mandate, strategies, past plans and results • Can be as detailed or light as the needs require	• For organizations and other entities • First steps to get core information
Database interrogation	• Facts and figures about technical or scientific matters • Produces quantitative data • Can be as detailed or light as the needs require	• When there is too much data for manual analysis • When analysis is needed to identify past and present trends
Focus group discussion	• Brings together small groups to discuss key questions in a facilitated process • Group members are selected for their similarities • Produces qualitative data	• When there is a need to understand stakeholder groups' opinions, perspectives and attitudes about an issue
Interviews	• Questions can be structured, semi-structured or the discussion can be open • Produce qualitative data • Only suitable for individuals or very small groups • **Note:** Interview data may need to be cross-referenced with other methods to validate	• To understand key informants' knowledge, understanding and perspectives on an issue, especially if they are decision-makers
Pre-determined organizational assessment tools	• Structured ranking of an organization's strengths and weaknesses in areas like financial and human resource management, and delivery of services, i.e. how well it is achieving its mandate? • Primarily produce quantitative data • **Note:** this type of tool is heavily oriented to hard capacity and rarely addresses important soft capacity like organizational culture and values	• When an organization needs to be strengthened to implement plans • To establish the baseline of how the organization is functioning, and periodic reviews of change
Surveys and questionnaires	• Questions can be open-ended, e.g. asking for opinions (qualitative data), or closed e.g. rank something on a scale (quantitative data)	• To gather peoples' perspectives and opinions in a consistent format for ease of making summaries and doing analysis

	• Can be self-assessment or administered, completed electronically or in hard copy • Useful as a preparatory step for other methods like workshops • Can be as detailed or light as the needs require	• When there are too many people to interview or join a workshop
Workshops	• Primarily produce qualitative data • Facilitated process • Can be used initial fact finding, and for validation of results	• To bring together groups with a shared interest in an issues to elicit their knowledge, hopes and opinions

3.5.2 Change readiness assessment tool

As explained in 3.4.2 above, change readiness and absorptive capacity are really important factors in determining entry points for capacity development initiatives. So, for any plans that are likely to require significant involvement of organizations or groups, this is an essential step for understanding whether they will be able to make the necessary contribution from the start or will first need some capacity development of their own. Some change readiness assessment tools focus on organisations, but the majority are very heavily oriented towards individuals, neither of which provide the holistic analysis of change readiness needed for a capacity development initiative at scale.

The tool below is useful for doing comprehensive assessments because it goes beyond looking at one specific level or point in the system through zooming in and zooming out to other levels and points in the system will provide you with better information, and a much broader understanding of how things are. A matrix such as the one in Table 3-5 below sets out what to look for when assessing change readiness. It shows that within each level it is necessary to assess different dimensions of readiness and absorptive capacity: attitudes, conditions and resources. You can use this to guide inquiries and then for analysis and a visual summary of the overall findings. If relevant the matrix could include a further column for the sectoral level. A worked example of using this matrix in conjunction with the zoom in – zoom out method is given below.

Table 3-5: Change Readiness Matrix Template

Levels → Dimensions ↓	Institutional/ enabling environment	Organizational	Individual
Attitudes: The political economy for change: vision of a different future and the commitment to achieve it. Willingness to embrace change work with something new	1	2	3
Conditions: The laws, structures, systems, etc. necessary to mandate, support and manage the change	4	5	6
Resources: Sufficient human, physical, financial and technical resources needed to absorb new inputs and support or facilitate change	7	8	9

Once the starting point for the initiative has been decided zooming in means looking at smaller units, such as departments, teams or individuals and zooming out means assessing relevant factors in the surrounding environment. For example, assessment at organizational level of a port authority will be more comprehensive if there is a zoom out to the national maritime authority, and a zoom in to the capacities of managers and staff.

What this might mean in practice is shown in the matrix at Table 3-6 below, which looks at an initiative to establish a coastal protection authority to become the lead agency to coordinate and oversee all the agencies, communities and other stakeholder groups, like fishers, concerned with the coast. The starting point might be in box 4 – looking at what laws, policies, strategies are already in place in the institutional environment to mandate creating a new entity. Or if the focus is something smaller, like extending the operational mandate of an existing ministry department then the starting point would likely be boxes 5 and 8, looking at the functional and resource factors at the organizational level.

Table 3-6: Change readiness example

Levels → Dimensions ↓	Institutional/enabling environment	Organizational	Individual
Attitudes	1 **Zoom out** to the political economy for change: e.g. what factors in the environment will enable or inhibit the work?	2 **Zoom out** to the culture and motivation of the ministry, departments, organisations and groups in the coastal protection sector	3 **Zoom in** to the attitude of key stakeholders: e.g. will national and local political leaders give the change their support? Are there any vested interests that would block change?
Conditions	4 **Start here for coastal protection sector reform conditions:** e.g. what laws, policies, structures, systems are already in place?	5 **Zoom in** to the mandates, governance, structures and systems of related organisations	6 **Zoom in** to the civil service job grades and employment conditions for starting a new authority
Resources	7 **Zoom in** to look at what resources might be available to support the change	8 **Zoom in** to specific organizational resources: what, if anything is already in place	9 **Zoom in** to the knowledge and skills of individuals who will be critical to implementation

While a detailed write up of findings would be needed, a simple phrase such as **Ready; Partly ready; or, Not ready** in each box would give a good visual overview of where there are strong elements of change readiness that can be engaged and leveraged for the capacity development initiative, and where preparatory work, perhaps to overcome resistance or create enabling conditions, has to be done before any change process can start with a hope of success.

While the matrix is a useful tool, it would not fit all needs, and you might need to look at more specific components of system readiness. There are some generic tools and resources available for change readiness assessment, mostly from the business world, and there are also a few that have been created for the development sector. See the Further Reading and Resources section for lists and guidance about finding something relevant.

3.6 Analysing Findings to Make Decisions

Once you have completed the assessment you need to analyse the data and formulate conclusions to outline the needs to be addressed. The process steps below should lead you to a clear definition of desired change and the related capacity needs.

1. **Analyse the different data types:** Comprehensive assessment processes will produce both **qualitative and quantitative data** (see Box 3-1) and decisions will need to be made about how to use these two data sets in ways that are complementary to each other.

   You need to analyse the data gathered according to type and how this is done will vary considerably according to what data has been collected, how much of it there is, and who needs to be involved. In general, **quantitative data is most likely to relate to hard capacity and needs, and qualitative data will be about soft capacity and needs.** Analysis methods can range from discussions with key individuals, through desk review, to the use of sophisticated software systems. A big assessment process might call for all of those methods and more.

   Note: Sometimes checklists and scoring mechanisms are useful for drawing conclusions from data, but they can have a lot of pitfalls, the primary one being that a numeric score can never tell the whole story so you would need to look at the results in other ways as well as the scores.

2. **Account for the enabling environment:** Remember that your analysis of data always needs to take the **enabling** environment into account. Just focusing on a data set without looking at the conditions and political and economic factors that affect it will not result in accurate findings.

3. **Formulate focused, actionable conclusions:** When formulating conclusions from an analysis, be sure to avoid broad sweeping generalisations that cannot be translated into practical **actions.** Your conclusions should be sufficiently focused to give good guidance to the design of interventions.

4. **Sequence for short, medium and long-term needs:** When you get to the design phase of capacity **development** interventions the sequencing of different steps is very important, so it will help you to consider time factors during the analysis of the assessment results. Think about what is emerging as needs in the short, medium and long term so you can decide what can or must be done in the near future and which needs can only be considered in a longer-term perspective. (Note that this illustrates the difference between long-term goals and short-term objectives, covered in the next Section.)

5. **Frame needs in terms of capacity to achieve something:** If you keep the '*Capacity for what?*' question in mind it will help you to formulate a well-

planned response in terms of the ability to **achieve** something. This can help ensure that the analysis is holistic, covering soft and hard capacity needs.

Note: It is not helpful to define needs as activities, such as training, which is a common fault of many assessments.

6. **Ensure conclusions are evidence-based but accessible:** Conclusions need to be presented in a way that will be easy for key decision makers and anyone likely to be affected by them to understand. But at the same time the conclusions need to be well back up by facts, figures, and arguments so you can explain why you have reached them.

7. **Validate conclusions with stakeholders:** As discussed in Module 2, it is really important for ownership of future actions that the stakeholders validate conclusions drawn from the assessment process. This can be done in various ways, for example submitting a draft report for comment. But the most effective method would likely be to hold a validation workshop to present and discuss the findings. This has the double benefit of getting a final check on the validity of the analysis as well as getting stakeholder buy-in on the conclusions.

3.7 Summary Checklist

This final checklist can be helpful for ensuring that everything has been considered and put in place for successful outcomes of capacity assessments. They are closed questions needing a yes or no answer. If any answer is no, then the necessary steps should be taken to turn it into a yes.

Table 3-7: Summary checklist for doing assessments

Question	Yes - No	If no, refer to Module
Is it clear and agreed *why* the assessment will be done? Does the assessment focus on the key organisations and groups whose performance is central to the achievement of the goals?		3.1
Are all other relevant stakeholders, including beneficiaries, appropriately involved in the assessment process/es?		3.2.2
Is sufficient attention given to the political and power dimensions within the organisation(s) or context, in addition to the rational, functional dimensions?		3.4
Are previous, parallel or planned assessment processes sufficiently taken into consideration (to avoid assessment fatigue)?		3.3

Do the assessment process/es take account of the participants' other priorities and tasks, or will it place an unreasonable burden on them?		3.3
Are feedback and decision-making process/es related to the assessments specified and made clear to all concerned?		3.6
Are the conclusions drawn from the analysis sufficiently substantiated by facts, figures and arguments?		3.6

Key Takeaways

- Assessing existing capacity is one of the core principles of good practice because it identifies the foundations on which future interventions can be built.
- Assessment activities need to be well planned, comprehensive and conducted for all levels - not just looking at individuals. Different approaches and tools should be used according to who and what is being assessed to identify existing capacity and future needs.
- The change readiness and absorptive capacity of different organisations and groups need to be understood before planning interventions.
- Assessment processes and the analysis of the data they generate need to take account of context and complexity.
- It is really important to engage relevant stakeholders in the assessment activities and in validation of the findings in order to gain and maintain their cooperation for future interventions.

Further Reading and Resources

Documents

EuropaAid (European Commission) (2005) *Institutional Assessment and Capacity Development: Why, What, and How*? Available at https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/spaces/ExactExternalWiki/pages/50108965/Institutional+Assessment+and+Capacity+Development

*UNDP Capacity Assessment Practice Note***.** Available at https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Capacity%20Assessment%20Practice%20Note.pdf

United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] (2010) *UNDP Procurement Capacity Assessment User's Guide***.** Available at https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Procurement%20Capacity%20Assessment%20Guide.pdf

Other resources

BC Healthy Living Alliance (Canadian health sector) video (11.27 mins) on the Community Capacity Building Strategy. There is also transcript available.
EuropaAid Capacity Development Toolkit has two tools for assessment - **Tool 6** is for making a qualitative assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the available capacity to manage change of a team or an individual. **Tool 6a** is for mapping current strengths and weaknesses of the relations of the change team to key stakeholders https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/spaces/ExactExternalWiki/pages/50109020/Capacity+Development+Toolkit

FAO capacity assessment tools are available at https://www.fao.org/capacity-development/resources/practical-tools/capacity-assessment/en/

PESTLE is an acronym for political, economic, sociological, technological, legal, and environmental. This is a well-known assessment tool from the business world that is very effective for doing an analysis of the context and conditions in which any entity exists, especially the political economy. A useful guide is available at https://www.cipd.org/en/knowledge/factsheets/pestle-analysis-factsheet/#:~:text=A%20PESTLE%20analysis%20studies%20the,managers%20in%20strategic%20decision%20making

TED talk (17 mins) by Dr Ernesto Sirolli, a leading economic development expert, has an essential, but frequently forgotten, message about doing assessments.

WorldAgroForestry – capacity needs assessment is available at https://www.worldagroforestry.org/sites/default/files/SRI%20Capacity%20Needs%20Analysis%20-%20Example.pdf

Other examples of Change Readiness Assessment Tools:

- ***Afiniti 6Lever:*** This tool assesses an organization's readiness across six key levers: Leadership, Drivers, Culture, Engagement, Capability, and Method. https://www.afiniti.co.uk/change-readiness-assessment-tool/
- ***Change Power Index:*** Bain & Company's tool evaluates an organization's performance on nine elements of "changeability", see also their Change Readiness Assessment Tool

- ***Prosci ADKAR Model:*** This model and its associated assessment tool focus on five key elements: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement available at https://www.prosci.com/methodology/adkar
- ***Organizational Readiness to Change Assessment:*** This instrument assesses the strength of evidence for a proposed change, the quality of the organizational context, and the organization's capacity to facilitate the change available at https://www.nccmt.ca/knowledge-repositories/search/187
- ***AidaForm*** is an online tool for creating forms, surveys, and questionnaires, including change readiness assessments available at https://aidaform.com/