Civil Society Actors Strengthening Guide

2026

Relief and Development Department –
Civil Society and Inclusive Governance

External version

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Acronyms

CAD	Communication and Advocacy Department at PIN
CAP	Capacity strengthening Action Plan
CFRM	Community Feedback and Response Mechanism
CfP	Call for Proposals
CP	Country Program
CSA	Civil Society Actor
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FSTP	Financial Support to Third Parties
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
HR	Human Resources
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
ITT	Indicator Tracking Table
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTE	Mid-term Evaluations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCA	Organizational Capacity Assessment
OCAT	Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool
ACAT	Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool
OECD	Organisation for Economic Coordination and Development
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
PCM	Project Cycle Management
PSI	Programme Strategy and Impact Department at PIN
RDD	Relief and Development Department
RF	Results Framework
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics
SP	Strategic Plan
ToC	Theory of Change

Foreword

Rooted in our commitment to shifting power and resources to communities, PIN supports civil society to play a key role in social, economic and democratic development, as part of PIN's Civil Society and Inclusive Governance Strategic Pillar. Creating enabling conditions for people empowerment is at the forefront of all our projects. For PIN's interventions to have a sustainable impact on a country's development, it is critical to engage and empower all Civil Society Actors (CSAs), ranging from individual activists to formal Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and to work in parallel with government authorities (in contexts where this is possible) to support accountable, equal-equitable and inclusive democratic systems. To achieve this, PIN implements CSA development projects with a particular emphasis on inclusive governance, youth civic engagement and CSA capacity strengthening. At the same time, in all PIN countries, there are various levels of engagement with local CSAs, ranging from CSAs taking part in projects and benefiting from capacity strengthening and small grant opportunities to partnerships with CSAs for project co-implementation or country-level strategic actions or campaigns.

As part of the more significant push for localization in our work, CSA development and inclusive governance approaches are seen as crosscutting across PIN's 3 Strategic Pillars: Emergency Response and Recovery, Climate Resilience and Civil Society and Inclusive Governance.

Local CSAs and government agencies are seen as active contributors to crafting local solutions and seeking systemic change, and this is reflected in intervention design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation across all Pillars. In this regard, CSA capacity strengthening becomes of the utmost priority.

Intention and Aims of the Guide

This document aims to provide comprehensive guidance to Country Program (CP) teams to design, implement and monitor CSA development projects, by detailing the core principles of CSA strengthening, providing methodological details for project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and project closure stages and providing examples of assessment tools and approaches. The Guide is based on and shares best practices and lessons learned from PIN's extensive experience of designing, delivering and evaluating CSA capacity strengthening projects across its countries of implementation. The Guide was developed following a review of PIN's previous CSA development projects, internal and external project evaluations, and a review of sectoral best practices, as well as consultation and interviews with members of PIN's technical teams and Country Programs. The Guide will allow the Country Program teams to envision and implement capacity strengthening approaches that will contribute to strengthening local civil society systems and communities. The Guide's material is designed for PIN's Relief and Development Department (RDD) countries working in relatively open or narrowed civic spaces and where programming is not affected or put in danger by restrictive, oppressive regimes and humanitarian crises.

The aim of this guidance is NOT to propose a 'one size fits all' approach to CSA Development. Instead, it seeks to outline elements of a technically sound and successful CSA capacity strengthening project. While it is understood that the context of each project is unique and adaptation is always required, nonetheless, this resource is proposed based on the assumption that standardized guidance on core elements of CSA development programming would improve the quality of PIN project teams' work on CSA capacity strengthening.

In terms of terminology, the Guide uses **'capacity strengthening',** which is the same as **'capacity development'**. The terms *'capacity building'* and *'capacity development'* are currently contested by Global South CSAs because of the implication that there is no prior existing capacity, which is, in most cases, false. Hence this Guide will use the term **'capacity strengthening'** to signify PIN's approach of amplifying and enhancing pre-existing local CSAs' capacities and resources.

In response to the need for a concise and accessible resource, this document represents **a shortened external version of the CSA Guide**. It is intended to provide partners and stakeholders with a clear overview of the key concepts, approaches and practical steps underpinning the methodology. To maintain readability for external audiences, some operational details have been streamlined. A more comprehensive internal version of the Guide, containing additional guidance, templates and detailed tools used in project implementation, is available for internal use within the organisation.

Target audience

The Guide provides resources and guidance for Country Program teams, CSAs, trainers, mentors, and facilitators to co-design, implement, monitor, and evaluate CSA development interventions in accordance with PIN's global strategy, principles, and approaches. Connected to PIN's global Partnership agenda, the CSA guide can also provide some references to our partnership teams and be a helpful tool for PIN's strategic partners to enhance their capacity and address any gaps.
It may also be of interest to **donors and other relevant stakeholders** who wish to better understand PIN's approach to civil society capacity strengthening and the principles guiding our collaboration with civil society actors.
As this is a shortened external version of the Guide, it offers an overview of the main concepts and approaches, while the full internal version includes more detailed operational guidance, templates and tools used in implementation.

1 Introducing our approaches

1.1 Background and definitions

Civil Society Development

Civil society is highly heterogeneous and encompasses various actors and aims. It may include all non-state, not-for-profit, independent, and non-violent structures through which people organize to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, religious, environmental, social, or economic.[1] Within the framework of development and humanitarian programming, civil society stands out for its capacity to reach, empower, represent and defend local populations. Civil society is viewed as the bridge between government and citizens, representing their voices, particularly those from marginalised categories (women, youth, people with disabilities, indigenous people, LGBTQI+ individuals, displaced people etc.) and working actively to make sure that the government policies and services accurately reflect their needs.

Civil Society Development supports the strategic development of individuals and organizations to represent various population groups in this civic space more effectively. Similar to other international actors, PIN holds a broader view of CSAs, extending beyond registered, formal Non-Governmental Organizations to acknowledge and tap into the diversity and potential of this ecosystem. Thus, in addition to registered Civil Society Organizations, which are formal bodies with an organizational structure, PIN recognizes that this ecosystem includes individual activists, informal, grassroots groups, civic initiatives and movements. The classification of CSAs for capacity strengthening programming is discussed in the following sections.

In working with this diverse ecosystem of CSAs, PIN integrates the following **key principles** in its Civil Society Development programming:

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[1] EU Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021-2027.

Key principles	
Systems change	Sensemaking with diverse stakeholders to identify, understand, and address more profound causes of the problem(s), combined with acting at multiple levels (local, regional, national) to meaningfully shift the conditions that hold the set of issues in place. This includes working with relevant actors as an inter-connected system: CSAs, the private sector, academia and government authorities, individuals, institutions, and networks, considering and navigating the broader social and political context that shapes any transformative process. Part of this principle is being deliberate about bringing together diverse stakeholders to build social capital and collaborations to influence change within a system.
Resilience of the civil society sector	This includes CSAs having an active role in growing their ability to resist challenges or threats, to respond to shocks (economic, political, etc.) and to renew by rethinking their actions. Part of this is CSAs having the trust of their constituents to respond to their changing needs and priorities effectively. At a broader level, this includes growing the capacity of CSA support systems and influencing the enabling environment (set of conditions, such as legal, informational, political and cultural conditions, that impact the capacity of CSAs to engage in development processes), essential for resilience, regeneration and evolution of civil society.
Facilitation approach	Offering support and creating conditions for local CSAs to forge their capacity strengthening path and enabling them to take an active role in measuring their performance improvement. As the CSAs differ in their experience, maturity stage and goals, there is no one uniform approach to capacity strengthening. Indeed, 'one size does not fit all', so maintaining flexible, options-based, tailored and diverse models is essential. Part of this principle is also appreciating and building on existing capacities. This approach embeds a participatory approach, which is a critical element of PIN's capacity-strengthening work.
Adaptability and learning	This implies flexibility to respond, learn from and anticipate emerging trends, new findings based on the changing political, economic or social environment, or innovative ideas from stakeholders. Part of this includes opportunities for a mid-process course correction of the CSA development approach if the initial project activities uncover unexpected needs or challenges. This approach also includes adapting programming and the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) plan in response to lessons learned and contextual changes or opportunities.

Capacity strengthening of CSAs

There is no single definition for **'capacity strengthening'**. The Organisation for Economic Coordination and Development (OECD) defines it as "the process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and countries develop their abilities, individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems and achieve objectives," thus meeting development challenges on a sustainable basis.

The definition reveals multiple levels at which capacity strengthening can take place.

Community/sectoral/system, related to policy, regulatory frameworks and influencing structures/systems/policies affecting CSAs and their constituents. Can be done through joint efforts of CSAs and other actors working together to achieve change at a larger scale.

Organizational, related to strengthening organizational processes and systems, for example, strategic planning and governance, improving MEAL processes, communication, financial and administrative systems, instituting organizational policies.

Individual, strengthening of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours of individuals to accomplish their organization's mission. For ex. developing technical, operational, influencing, networking capacities to deliver quality services, engage constituents and partners, advocate for citizen rights and hold public authorities accountable.

Image 1. Levels at which capacity strengthening can take place

The objectives of a CSA capacity strengthening project will usually cover the 3 levels (individual, organizational, community/sectoral/system) depending on local CSA needs and Call for Proposals specifications. Whichever level is focused on, capacity strengthening is a dynamic process that interacts and affects other levels simultaneously. Organizations are complex adaptive systems: performance depends upon individuals within an organization, the processes run by those individuals, and the organization's interaction with its external environment. To achieve performance excellence, an organization must adapt and grow capabilities on all three levels.

It is important to consider the **context or enabling environment** (legal, informational, political, socio-cultural, economic, etc.) in which capacity-strengthening interventions happen, which can shape and influence this process constantly. CIVICUS classifies civic spaces as open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed, or closed[2]. Capacity strengthening programming in repressed and closed environments, where civic activists are persecuted for their actions or other characteristics, such as (social) identity (e.g. LGBTQIA+, indigenous population groups, minority groups etc), differs significantly from programming in open, narrowed or obstructed civic spaces. The Guide's material caters to RDD countries working in narrowed, obstructed civic spaces where programming is not affected or put in danger by restrictive and oppressive regimes. It is also valid for countries with a repressed status,

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[2] https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings/methodology/ (CIVICUS Civic space monitor)

provided programming is possible with the mitigation of safety and security aspects. It does not cater to countries where civic space is classified as closed.

A CSA development project must also be aligned with the Country Program Strategy and the specifics of the local and regional context, needs, and existing capacities.

1.2 Measuring improved capacities

The concept of 'capacity' is often narrowly understood, typically focusing on gaps and promoting the transfer of pre-determined knowledge and skills to improve the function of specific areas of an organization to fill those gaps. PIN's experience shows that, in most cases, local civil society actors may have existing capacities that need to be identified, strengthened and leveraged. What makes more sense is a tailored and participatory approach to capacity strengthening, designed to reflect an organization's particular goals, capabilities and the environment in which it operates.

Five aspects of capacity possessed by the most effective organizations are presented below[3].

1. **Initiative/Action:** Capacity to generate plans that reflect its needs and mission and consider changing contexts; and capacity to mobilize financial and managerial resources to execute them (these are covered in PIN Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool.
2. **Link to Results:** Capacity to achieve outputs and outcomes in line with an organization's reason for existing (its mission). This area of capacity is sometimes equated with effective performance management, as seen in better service delivery.
3. **Networking/Relating:** Capacity to work in a coordinated and efficient manner as part of a larger network of interested stakeholders (PIN OCAT section 2). In many cases, capacity strengthening efforts will aim to grow CSA teams' understanding and action to move their organization or group beyond an internal focus to a focus on the local system and, more specifically, on how actors within that system interact, communicate and collaborate, and work together to improve results.
4. **Adaptation:** The capacity to constantly adapt to changing external environments and conditions; greater resilience to shocks and stresses.
5. **Coherence/Integration:** (between the four previous categories, linking the strategic and operational levels): Capacity to put in place policy and management frameworks that build upon one another, respond to current organizational needs and ensure coherence between strategic and operational levels.

Though these are distinct capacities, none is sufficient on its own. The interaction of these creates the most effective organizations.

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[3] Evaluation Methodology & Baseline Study of European Commission Technical Cooperation support (2011)

What is the focus of PIN's global CSA Development Programming?

PIN's global CSA Development programming focuses on strengthening CSAs and government authorities to sustain transparent, accountable democratic processes and effectively serve right-holders[4]. Local CSAs, as key voices for right-holders and liaisons between governments and communities, are supported through **capacity-strengthening projects**. These efforts enhance their ability to represent diverse populations, provide inclusive services, and advocate for rights. PIN prioritizes **organizational development** (e.g., strategic planning, fundraising, governance, MEAL systems, financial management), **core technical skills** (e.g., social accountability, policy dialogue, advocacy, community mobilisation) and **other technical skills** (anti-corruption, environment, women empowerment etc.).

A cornerstone of PIN's approach is **Sub-granting/Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP)**, which empowers CSAs to design and implement their initiatives while applying new skills in real-time. PIN also fosters **horizontal linkages** among CSOs through networks and alliances and **vertical linkages** with duty bearers and communities, enabling dialogue, advocacy, and trust-building to drive local development and humanitarian response effectively.

Please visit the links below for examples of PIN's CSA capacity strengthening projects:

Supporting civil society in the South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova

Two Different Paths, One Shared Goal: Civil Societies in Maguindanao, Philippines

Strengthening Civil Society in Zambia: A Challenging Landscape for Democratic Engagement

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[4] **Rights-holders** include all human beings, not only citizens, individually and in certain contexts as groups. A human-rights based approach to development and humanitarian work entails that individuals and communities are considered not as passive recipients of aid but rather as subjects entitled to the rights enshrined in international and domestic legal frameworks.

1.3 Classification of CSAs

Based on PIN's own long-standing experience in the sector, as well as publications by international actors that support civil society, the Guide will use a classification of CSAs into several broad categories useful for programmatic purposes. The Guide proposes classifications based on a CSA's organizational development stage and its level of institutionalization. The classification is typically done by a combination of self-assessment (by the CSA themselves) and the PIN project team. In each section below, the Guide indicates where particular approaches, tools and indicators are better suited for different categories of CSAs.

According to the Organizational Development Stage:	According to their level of institutionalisation:
• **New (emerging)** • **Growing (mid-level)** • **Mature (established)**	• **Formal** • **Informal**

PIN also considers **Networks** to be a special category of CSAs, because of their significant potential to influence change at scale within a system.

The tables below provide explanations of each CSA category.

According to the Organizational Development Stage	
New	• At early stages, these CSAs can be more influenced by their environment (reactive) and organized around a single issue. In many cases, these are small grassroots-level CSAs. • Their strategic focus is situated at the micro-level, responding to opportunities present in the community or reflecting donor priorities. • They can depend on the drive of one charismatic leader. • They will often need time and additional capacity to develop a coherent vision and strategy. • They may be very resourceful and inventive based on little resources and multiple constraints in capacity. • Staff salaries depend on the existence of projects, and they may volunteer in between projects. • Their operations may have a learning-by-doing feature, and they may need support to establish minimum sustainable internal systems for decision-making and operations, as well as strengthening project management systems. • In some cases, these CSAs are not starting from scratch, their leaders can have a good level of previous experience in the sector. • Often, at the urging of donors—these CSAs will aim to measure input- and output-level indicators focused on the existence and strength of internal systems and staff capacities (such as "number of beneficiaries trained").
Growing	• These CSAs are responding better to existing needs connected to their mission. • Often, these CSAs borrow and replicate processes and knowledge from other actors to achieve stability in internal systems and operations, realizing the value of investing in learning. • They start to employ staff in a more stable manner who are qualified to develop and maintain internal systems, ensure their organization's visibility, secure funding and develop the competencies needed. Although the stability of staffing (and therefore of systems and processes) can be greatly impacted by available funding. • They are starting to explore more transformational, innovative products, services and partnerships.

	• They are starting to measure organizational outcome-level change and relationships. • The teams would benefit from additional support in setting up necessary internal communication and project management systems for the smooth running of activities. • The idea of gradual growth would be suitable, focusing on putting in place more robust structures/systems necessary for their activities, based on their pre-existing capacity. • They may need support to develop strategies to ensure the diversification of funding sources.
Mature	• As the organization adapts, grows and learns, it naturally diversifies its performance portfolio and focuses on a more transformational, innovative, and leading set of products and services. • Its strategy considers its external and internal needs and peer relationships, focusing on driving external change, influencing the environment/system in which it exists, impact, innovation and learning. • Once an organization is stable and more mature, it will begin to expand its talent pool and influence and will eventually employ thought leaders and networkers to generate new ideas, products and services of value to the overall external system. • As the organization matures, so will its measurement scope, which should begin to include organizational outcomes and impact. • Mature CSAs tend to build a brand which yields demonstrable results that attract further support. • Mature CSAs are more likely to have secured a more diversified funding base, but this can also change, putting their stability in terms of personnel at risk.

Although the **New, Growing** and **Mature** stages appear linear, this is not always the case: organizations move back and forth along the continuum. This can be due to changes in the external context (e.g. changes to the funding environment, changes to the CSA operating environment, new partnerships or partnerships coming to an end) and internal changes (e.g. departures of personnel with significant institutional knowledge can have a considerable impact, particularly for smaller NGOs). For example, there can be CSOs that have existed for a long time (over 10 years) but remain at the same level due to intermittent access to resources and interruptions in their activities.

To classify CSAs into new, growing, or mature categories for project-related purposes, consider the following criteria:
- Number of years in operation
- Geographic reach
- Annual budget
- Number of full-time and part-time staff, as well as volunteers
- Previous grant management experience

These criteria may vary by country and should be established by project teams at the project's outset.

PIN does not promote a uniform trajectory of CSA development; rather, its interventions are designed to enable actors (including informal initiatives and social movements) to take different paths in their development that make sense in their context.

Approaches tailored to a specific organization's needs and capacities must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the organization's level of institutionalization. This applies to CSAs at all stages of organizational development: New, Growing, and Mature.

To continue further the explanations of each CSA category, the table below looks at formal and informal actors.

According to the level of institutionalisation (applicable for all stages, New, Growing, Mature)	
Formal	Typically, these are officially registered (depending on context) civil society organizations with a defined governance structure. They operate within pre-defined plans, procedures, and policies, which inform most decisions.
Informal	Civil society groups might decide not to form legally, for example, in countries where registering is costly and overly complex. Some activists want to stay off-grid, practicing more horizontal and flexible decision-making systems based on informal relationships and agreements. These are looser structures, engaging target groups directly and may not be dependent on donor funding. Examples may include initiative groups, community-based social and cultural movements, etc. To enable community development and local activism, it is important to respect these choices and not push a CSA for registration if the team does not deem it necessary.

The level of institutionalization and development stage will determine a specific set of needs for the group or the organization, which will influence the capacity assessment process and results, as well as the capacity-strengthening activities.

PIN considers **Networks** a special category of CSAs because of their significant potential to influence change at scale within a system.

CSA Networks	**Definition: CSA Networks** may be defined as civil society groups, organizations and sometimes individuals that come together voluntarily to pursue shared purposes of social development or democratic governance. These purposes may include exchanging resources, addressing common social goals or expressing their identities as a community or social group. **Autonomy in Civil Society Networks:** In civil society networks, member groups and organizations retain their basic autonomy, with their own identity, mission, and governance, which is their key defining feature. They are not to be confused with CSAs, which have a vast network of individual members (youth representatives, peace monitors, etc.). **Network Types:** Networks can be composed of **informal** social relationships or formal bodies that are legally registered and institutionalized. Civil society networks may be known by different names, **including coalition, alliance, association, movement, federation, communities of practice** etc.[5] PIN dedicates strategic attention to Networks due to their potential to influence a system at multiple scales.

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[5] Source: https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/Supporting%20Civil%20Society%20Networks%20.pdf

1.4 The key stages of a CSA Development project

Below is a description of the main stages of a CSA capacity strengthening project, which can be adjusted based on the needs of the context and type of the project. The main stages are:

- **Identify and select** the pool of civil society actors to take part in the project
- **Assess** capacity
- **Plan** capacity strengthening
- **Develop/strengthen** capacity
- **Reflect** and **evaluate**

An essential glue holding these stages together is a continuous process of relationship, trust, and partnership development with the CSAs, which allows closer understanding and adaptation to their needs, capacities and realities. These stages are explained in more detail in the following sections of this Guide.

2   Project Design Phase

PIN is accountable for ensuring that our interventions are appropriate and relevant to the needs of the communities and people that we serve and that our projects are based on problems identified by our project participants or clients and their interest in resolving them. Below are included key stages of Project Design applicable to a CSA Development project. More information on Project Design in general can be found in PIN's Project Management Manual.

The main stages of this phase are as follows:
- Situational analysis
- Developing the Theory of Change
- Developing the Intervention Logic
- Selecting the capacity strengthening approach
- Sub-granting considerations
- MEAL Planning

Key information on each stage is provided below to help project teams during the Project Design phase.

2.1   Situational analysis (needs assessment)

A strong project design begins with a rigorous situational analysis. Before defining objectives, activities or indicators, we must first understand the ecosystem in which the intervention will operate. This means mapping actors, relationships, power dynamics, past initiatives and structural barriers that shape the capacity strengthening challenge we aim to address. Situational analysis ensures that the project responds to real needs, builds on existing efforts, avoids duplication and positions our intervention strategically within the broader civil society landscape.

For clarity, this process can be understood through three interlinked lenses: (1) mapping the ecosystem, (2) analysing problems and strategic choices, and (3) applying a strong Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) lens. Together, these dimensions provide the evidence base that feeds into the development of a coherent and realistic Theory of Change.

1. Map the ecosystem before designing the intervention

The first step is to analyse the ecosystem of actors — individuals, organisations, networks, institutions and systems — that can positively or negatively influence civil society strengthening. This includes engaging with current, former and potential partners, especially donors, government representatives and civil society actors. Reviewing past and ongoing projects helps identify lessons learned, gaps and missed opportunities, while clarifying what types of CSAs have already been supported and which remain underserved. We examine what worked, what did not, and whether previous structured programmes were effective or whether greater flexibility is required. We also explore the potential design of sub-granting (for example combining core funding and activity grants), the possible involvement of former project CSAs as mentors, and strategic considerations for engagement with government stakeholders.

2. Analyse problems, power and strategic choices

Situational analysis goes beyond identifying stakeholders — it examines their roles, capacities, interests and influence. We analyse the key challenges, barriers and opportunities surrounding priority issues, ensuring that the perspectives of diverse stakeholder groups are represented. Tools such as stakeholder mapping, problem tree analysis or systems-based approaches (for example the Iceberg model) help uncover root causes and structural dynamics rather than only visible symptoms. We assess donors' priorities, review strategic plans of government and other actors, and identify potential synergies or division of labour. This stage also requires clear strategic choices: which problems are realistic to tackle, which interventions are likely to yield sustainable results, what risks are associated with each strategy, and how the project aligns with PIN's broader priorities.

3. Apply a strong Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) lens

All situational analyses and needs assessments must be conducted through a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion lens. This means understanding how different groups — women, men, youth, elderly persons, persons with disabilities, minority groups and other marginalised communities — are differently impacted by and positioned within the issue. We assess gender-specific and inclusion barriers, intersectional disadvantages, cultural norms and power relations. Participation must be meaningful and safe: voices of diverse groups must be heard, data must be disaggregated, and assessment teams must apply GESI-sensitive facilitation. By embedding protection, inclusion and Do No Harm principles throughout the analysis, we ensure that project design is not only evidence-based and strategic, but also equitable, responsible and sustainable.

2.2   Developing the Theory of Change

Theory of Change (ToC) is the set of ideas, views and assumptions about how change will occur due to our project. ToC starts from the premise that social change processes are complex and unpredictable and that different perspectives exist on what needs to change and why. It is crucial to undertake a full analysis of the context of the planned project (and the planned change) and to identify and unpack the assumptions underlying the project design. This analysis should be GESI-sensitive to ensure that equity/equality and inclusion/exclusion elements and dynamics are also understood and addressed to achieve more sustainable and longer-term social change.

Hence, a project-level ToC is a team effort that focuses on the contextual analysis and the planned intervention logic by which the project or intervention is expected to achieve a specific change objective in a particular context. This includes considering the assumed contribution of the specific change objective to longer-term social change.

The ToC, therefore, entails a broad GESI-sensitive analysis of the context and system that needs transformation, identifying and involving key actors, identifying key elements for initial project design and strategic choices, and identifying critical assumptions. Based on this, more detailed pathways of change can then be fully developed, with the logic between different steps (e.g. the linkages between different components of a project and between inputs/activities, outputs and outcomes) clearly explained. Assumptions about cause-effect relations must be clearly articulated and underpinned by evidence or other relevant information.

ToC forms the basis for adaptive management and MEAL during implementation and serves as a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of project strategies and understanding how change is achieved. The ToC products can also be used for internal and external communication about the project.

Some key steps for developing a Theory of Change:

- ✓ Focus on the high-level change that PIN and the donor intend to contribute to in the context of any country analyses available, including the CSO Roadmaps of EU and Member States. What is the change, why, and for whom?
- ✓ Identify what is needed for the desired development change to happen, informed by the problem tree analysis, GESI-sensitive stakeholder analysis, power analysis and other evidence (more guidance included in the next part). This is known as mapping the pathways of change.
- ✓ Establish and make explicit key assumptions underpinning the theory of how change happens and the major risks that may affect it.
- ✓ Identify partners and stakeholders who will be most relevant for achieving each result, considering the related risks and assumptions.
- ✓ Identify the best way for PIN to contribute to achieving this change and its role.
- ✓ Identify the key actions needed (see the section on Intervention Logic below).
- ✓ Monitoring, evaluation and learning framework and process: Identify how the change process will be documented and monitored, how learning will be reviewed, and how the ToC will be regularly reviewed, tested and updated.

In developing a ToC for a CSA development project, it is important to take into consideration the type of civil society organizations targeted by the project, because different stages of organizational development (new, growing, mature) and different types of organizations (formal, informal, as well as networks) have different needs, and therefore the goals and interventions will vary. Gender, Inclusion and Power Considerations

Awareness of gender and inclusion/exclusion dynamics goes beyond counting men and women. Throughout the project design and ToC process, gender and inclusion-differentiated needs, benefits, capacities, barriers, risks, representation, opportunities and influence in decision-making, division of labour, etc., must be considered. Questions about strategic gender interests (access to and control over resources, changes in laws, policies, socio-cultural norms, values, beliefs and practices) need to be considered and integrated in a ToC.

The following types of questions should be answered at the project design stage:

- What gender inequalities and social inclusion/exclusion dynamics influence the system? What gender dynamics are at play here?
- Do the project objectives explicitly aim to address gender inequalities and social exclusion?
- How will the project contribute to empowering women and marginalized groups?
- Does the desired change benefit women, and is it significant for them?
- To which strategic gender interest(s) does it contribute? Why? (The answer to this question should come from the GESI sensitive context and stakeholder analyses that were conducted).

ToC Structure

There is no set standard in terms of what a ToC should look like. It can be expressed as a visual image or text. Often there is a visual representation of the project ToC and an accompanying narrative that explicitly explains the causal linkages and the underlying assumptions.

The Theory of Change part included in project proposals shows a causal logic of expected changes and is usually based on *if…then…* statements, with additional explanations, reflecting the detailed work performed in the above-described steps and the project logic. Some donors may have specific guidance on the theory of change structure, whilst other donors do not specify the structure or formats for theories of change (e.g., EU and FCDO (UK)). It will be important to check donor guidance when developing the Theory of Change.

Below are included some visual examples of ToC showing the logical progression from **barriers, problems and constraints to intervention strategies to outputs, outcomes and impact/vision**:

Image 3. ToC developed for a Regional Project in Eastern Partnership countries aiming to increase the role of CSAs as drivers of democratic change.

2.3 Developing the Intervention Logic

Based on the previous work carried out related to the situational analysis and ToC, as well as guidelines from the Call for Proposals, the project team proceeds to develop a more detailed intervention logic or the results chain, specifying the project's intended:

- Impact, also known as Overall Objective
- Outcomes, also known as Specific Objective
- Outputs
- Activities

The intervention logic is created by making sometimes difficult decisions about which theory of change components will be included in your project. This requires thinking about:

- Which needs have the highest priority in the context?
- Which needs does the PIN Country Program (CP) have the capacity and resources to tackle?
- Which needs fit with PIN CP's strategic priorities?

A key feature of the results chain is that it requests intervention designers to start with the impact and outcomes to be achieved and then work backwards through outputs and activities to inputs.

Types of CSA Development projects

A critical part of identifying the project's impact/goals and outcomes is considering whether the project is **a standalone CSA development project** in which strengthened CSA capacity is one of the overall goals as an end in itself or whether the project embeds **CSA development as a cross-cutting approach** to achieving other development or humanitarian goals. The present Guide can support both approaches.

A **standalone CSA development project** would involve carrying out capacity assessments and targeted capacity-strengthening activities for selected civil society actors. Usually, the project would create possibilities for CSAs to apply the strengthened capacities through implementing activity grants and/or building coalitions to advocate for their target groups.

Projects which embed CSA development as part of a **cross-cutting approach** involve analysing which CSAs and local government agencies (or other relevant stakeholders) are part of the solution/proposed intervention and how to best approach them in the context of the overall goal of the project. For example, a project aiming to develop, implement and monitor improved nutrition services focused on women, children and adolescents and to advocate for scale-up of successful community-driven nutrition models will integrate strengthening the capacities and cooperation among local civil society actors, local public authorities and other key stakeholders to improve the delivery of multi-sectoral nutrition services.

When determining the scope of CSA development embedded in a project as a cross-cutting approach, it would be useful to answer the following set of questions:
- Who are our main stakeholders, and what is their level of interest and influence on our project, based on our stakeholder analysis?
- Who are the local civil society actors and local government agencies that are part of the solution, more specifically, and how do we plan to engage them?
- What are their capacity-strengthening needs in line with our project and the impact sought? What knowledge, competencies and behaviours do they need to strengthen and apply based on our project objectives? Based on our project timelines and available budget, what are the most suitable methods and approaches to achieve this?
- Are there any relevant multi-stakeholder collaboration mechanisms that should be integrated into project design, depending on the theory of change?

From the CSA development perspective, to ensure that sustainable capacity remains as a result, the logical chain will reflect how activities performed lead to developed capacities, which in turn contribute to outcomes and impact, as shown in the figure below.[6]

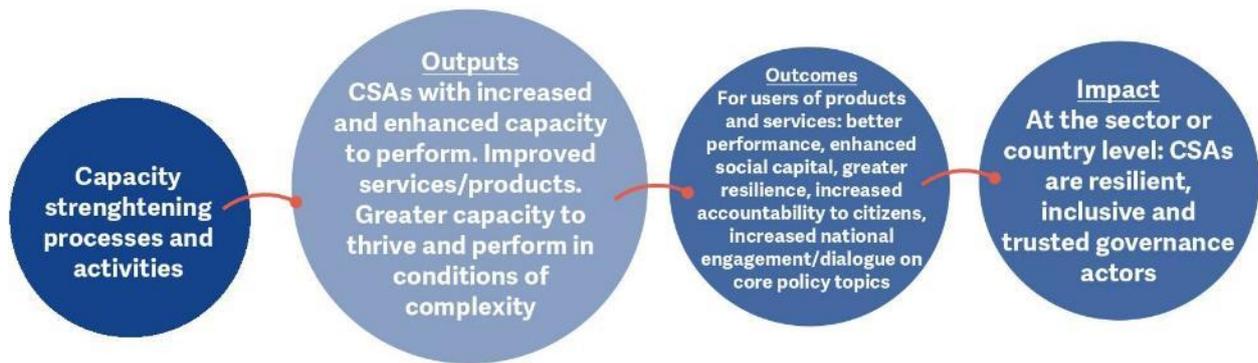[6] EC Toolkit for capacity strengthening (2010)

Image 5. CSA capacity development logical chain

When designing the intervention logic, the project team needs to make sure that the way they define each element corresponds to the donor framework and requirements. Very often the additional explanations and guidance will be supplied by the donor in the Call for Proposal. The intervention logic/result chain will feed into Logframe development, which is a management tool used to improve the design, management and reporting of projects.

It is important to note that capacity strengthening intervention models should not become static and linear, focusing on details of the direct "outputs" that need to be generated or the narrative description of the "outcomes" of an intervention. Instead, they should reflect the dynamic change processes that take place within the participant CSAs as a result of a process that is relevant to and 'owned' by them.

2.4 Key stages for capacity strengthening

To develop the project result chain, the teams will need to consider various capacity strengthening approaches that can be used for a CSA development project. In this section, the Guide presents various options that the project team can select, based on the specific needs of the project, and based on the 5 main stages of the capacity strengthening approach:

1. **Identify and select** the pool of civil society actors to take part in the project
2. **Assess** capacity
3. **Plan** capacity strengthening
4. **Develop/strengthen capacity**
5. **Reflect and evaluate**

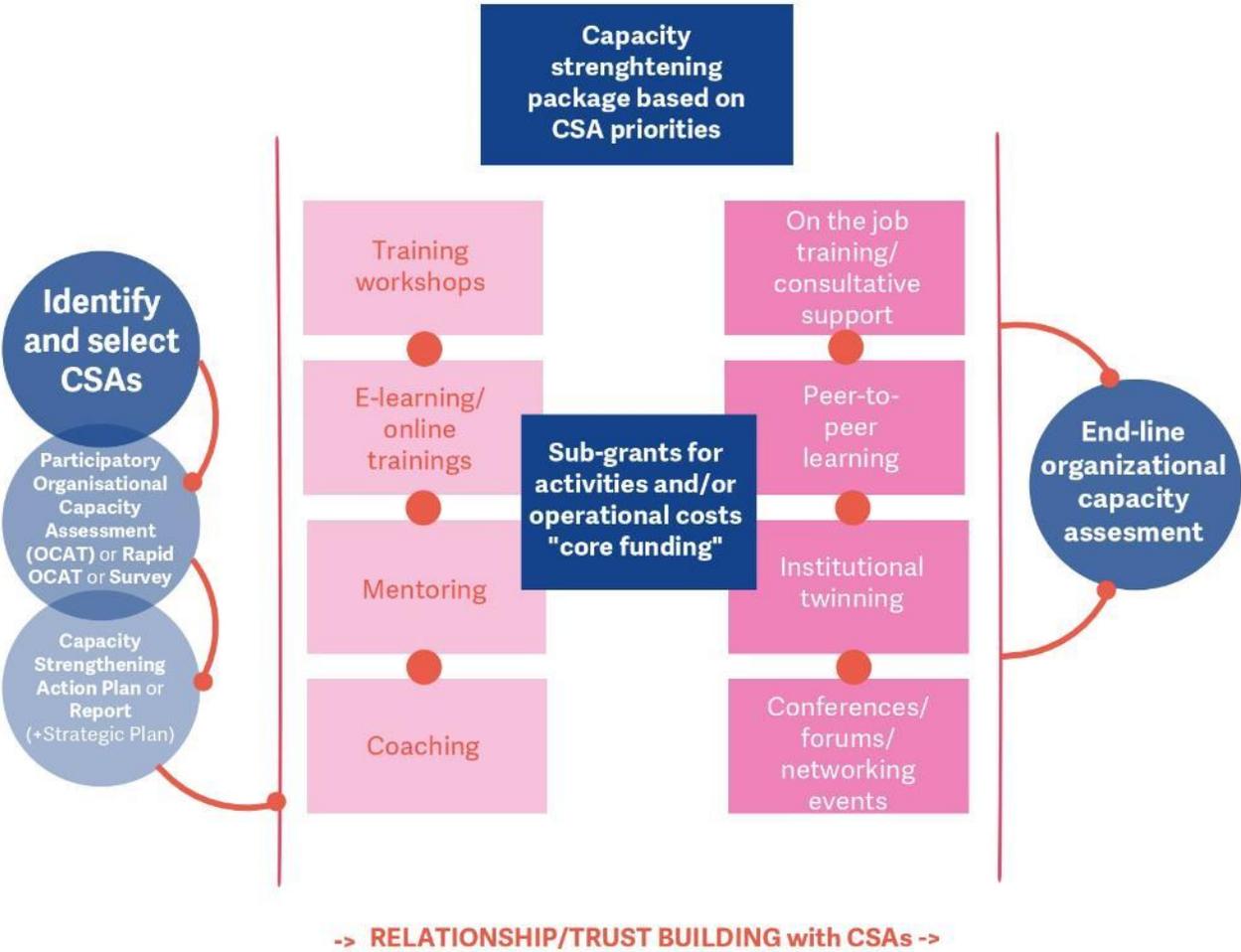The capacity strengthening process is represented visually in the figure below.

Image 6. PIN's capacity strengthening process

More details about each main stage are included in the expanded version of the Guide.

2.4.1 Identify and select the CSAs

Depending on the project's scope, CSAs can be identified based on type, geographic distribution and outreach, thematic focus and expertise, using existing databases, online web channels and organizing regional meetings /interviews. Depending on the context and project specifics, the project team can hold a call for proposals, using an open call, a restricted call or mixed approaches to select its pool of project participants.

The table below provides an overview of different types of calls for proposals.

Approach	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Open calls	A call for applications which is open to all CSAs, with eligibility criteria communicated in the call. These calls tend to be broadly dispersed among a wide range of actors at a local, regional, or national level. They may be less demanding and/or with flexible procedures. Calls are designed with clearly defined priorities, based on the project objectives/priorities.	**Inclusivity**: Promotes inclusivity, allowing for a wide range of CSA participation; provides equal opportunities for organizations to showcase their ideas and projects. **Innovation and diversity**: Encourages diverse perspectives, with a more varied and creative pool of applicants. **Broader reach:** This includes reaching organizations that may not be part of established networks or have direct connections to funding sources, including new and emerging CSAs. **Accountability and Transparency:** Open calls promote accountability and transparency in the selection process, minimising favouritism, or bias.	**Overwhelming response:** Open calls may receive a large number of proposals, which requires additional resources and time to review. **Quality variation:** The quality of proposals can vary significantly, making the evaluation process more challenging and potentially favour growing/mature organizations with more experience with calls for proposals. **Missed target organizations:** Open calls may not effectively reach specific target groups or organizations working on specialized or niche issues.
Restricted calls	Focus on a pre-selected group of organizations, even members of a particular network, capacity strengthening of targeted grassroots organizations, usually identified through needs assessments or other types of analysis. Donors have shown openness to accept restricted call approaches if this was well justified (e.g. by the particularly restrictive	**Targeted Focus**: This allows projects a more focused approach, which can target specific thematic areas, geographic regions, or types of organizations that align with their priorities or objectives. **Quality Control**: By restricting the call to a select group of organizations, the project can ensure that a certain quality and focus of applications are received. This can be beneficial when aiming for high-impact projects or initiatives that require a specific type of CSA or track record. **Resource Efficiency**: The number of applications received is	**Exclusion of Potential Innovators**: Restricting the call may inadvertently exclude organizations that have innovative solutions or approaches outside the predefined criteria, limiting the potential for discovering new ideas or unconventional methods that could bring about change. **Limited Diversity**: A restricted call may result in a limited diversity of perspectives and approaches. The predefined criteria may favour organizations with established networks or a strong presence

environments or the significant representativity of a network membership). Restricted calls and preselection of applicants may be preferable to protect CSA participants and to target a specific group.	generally more manageable, reducing the burden on the evaluators and allowing for a more efficient allocation of resources. **Tailored Support**: By targeting specific organizations or thematic areas, a restricted call enables the project team to provide more tailored support with deeper engagement, customized capacity-development assistance, and targeted monitoring and evaluation efforts to maximize the impact of the selected CSAs.	in the sector, potentially excluding less well-known organizations or informal groups. **Perception of Bias**: A restricted call may raise concerns about fairness or bias in the selection process, particularly if the criteria for inclusion are not clearly defined or if the process lacks transparency. It is important to ensure a robust and transparent evaluation process to address such concerns.

Mixed approaches try to reach different target groups from different categories in societies where the context is more sensitive. It should be noted that designing a call for informal groups or individuals or those without access to the internet can be challenging and may require more focused targeting via existing contacts or networks. Ultimately, the decision to use an open, restricted or a mix of these approaches depends on the civil society development project's specific context, objectives, and available resources. Clear criteria, transparent processes and a willingness to consider exceptional cases can help mitigate some of the drawbacks and ensure a fair and inclusive selection process.

It is essential to plan strategically for the types of CSAs targeted - is the project targeting only new/grassroots actors or a mix of new, growing and mature, formal or informal CSAs depending on the Call for Proposals and needs identified during the situational analysis? If a mix of organizations is targeted, the organizational capacity assessment tool used, and capacity strengthening process will have to be thoroughly tailored to the size and level of experience of the CSA categories.

When designing a call for proposal process, the following general elements should be considered:
- **Call for participation announcement and application form:** The call for participation announcement should include the following information: details about the project, PIN and Partners, objectives of the call for participation, CSO eligibility criteria, scope and CSO activities envisaged within the project, evaluation criteria and scoring grid, information session date and sign-up details, basic timeline of main activities, email address (for questions and sending of applications), deadline for applications. The Application format should find a balance between enabling applicants to provide details that demonstrate their knowledge and planned approaches and giving space for flexibility.
- **Level of assistance offered during a call for proposals:** Assistance can be offered as an additional capacity-strengthening approach for potential CSAs. This could be in the form of information sessions (online or in-person), detailed guidance, or coaching/training CSAs to improve the quality of their applications/project proposals.
- **Channels to communicate the call for proposals:** These will include project websites, social media, print media, digital media, and outdoor media (including posters) through different platforms and networks and by direct invitation to target CSAs.
- **Selection process and criteria:** An evaluation committee should be formed. The committee and its members can either evaluate applications independently (ensuring different members do not influence each other in their assessments) or collectively, discussing each application together. A collective evaluation may ensure more transparency in the process.

- **Background checks**: CSA background checks may be integrated into selection criteria. Background checks must not run against the principle of impartiality. Therefore, the project team must provide information regarding the nature and criteria of such background checks in their proposal.
- **Feedback to non-selected applicants**: Project teams should provide detailed feedback to applicants as part of their capacity strengthening.

2.4.2 Assess capacity

An organizational assessment is a systematic review of an organization's processes, work environment, and structure. It is a diagnostic tool that focuses on the organization as a whole rather than specific individuals. An organizational assessment can measure organizational capacity, but it is also a process through which the organization can gain a greater understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and its existing capacities and capacity gaps. This approach is more inclusive and locally led compared to merely providing training programs for CSA development, as it empowers CSAs to identify their specific needs and tailor their capacity-strengthening package accordingly.

Organizational Assessments can be:
- **Externally-driven:** engages an outside expert who leads the process, analyses results and makes recommendations. Typically, the assessment is done based on a pre-established set of standards against which the CSAs are compared, generic gaps are identified, and solutions are proposed.
- **Self-assessment:** an independent or facilitated process of using an assessment tool for self-assessment, self-scoring and capacity strengthening plan development, according to the relevant parts of the assessment tool. This type of assessment allows for customised approaches in the sense that the CSAs are not compared or competing against externally imposed standards but set their performance benchmarks connected to the needs of their community/constituents and the capacities they want to develop further. Self-assessments also enable CSAs to better measure their change in capacity and performance over time.

PIN's added value lies within the organizational self-assessment category. Participatory Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT) is an organizational capacity **self-assessment** tool that matches the principles of PIN's CSA capacity strengthening. PIN has developed a series of OCATs which are adapted for different types of CSAs:
1. **OCAT for Informal/New CSAs**
2. **OCAT for Growing CSAs**
3. **OCAT for Mature CSAs**
4. **OCAT for Network CSAs**
5. **Rapid OCAT**

It should be noted that the OCAT for Mature CSAs is more suitable for organisations that are on a pathway towards ensuring that they have the necessary systems and processes in place to access institutional funding. It is likely to be more appropriate for Formal Mature CSAs than Informal Mature CSAs.

As part of the project design, when time and budget allow, project teams can include an opportunity for each selected CSA to self-assess their organizational capacities using the OCAT, developed and tested by PIN in various contexts.

PIN has also developed an **Advocacy Capacity Assessment Survey (ACAT)** which can be used specifically to measure organisational capacity in advocacy.

PIN focuses on self-assessment tools as we consider that diverse CSAs should have a decisive voice in shaping their assessment, engage with teammates in discussions about organisational capacity, and develop plans to strengthen their capacity. Their commitment and buy-in in the process is therefore critical. When a CSA actively engages in an assessment using the Participatory Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT), described in detail in this Guide, they receive more relevant and deeper insight into their capacity than an external expert review would provide. PIN supports a process of facilitated self-assessment: the role of PIN as a facilitator, and not as a judge, allows a high level of trust to be developed with the CSA, promotes dialogue and suggests necessary capacity improvements that are not externally imposed. However, while this approach allows CSAs to drive their assessment and capacity-strengthening processes, PIN project teams and facilitators also have an important role in providing a necessary 'reality check' based on international best practices and organisational performance standards.

The OCAT focuses on the organisation's internal capacity linked to structures, systems, policies and practices organised based on 4 main sections:

1. **Purpose and Strategy**
2. **Relationships**
3. **Projects and Resources**
4. **Internal Governance and Administration**

Each part of the OCAT assesses a set of capacity areas and is connected to the elements of organisational capacity outlined in the previous sections:

Sections	Capacity areas in the OCAT	Elements of organisational capacity
1. Purpose and Strategy	1.1. Purpose 1.2. Context and Strategy	**INITIATIVE/ACTION:** The capacity to generate plans that reflect its needs and mission, consider the changing contexts, and mobilise financial and managerial resources to execute them. **ADAPTATION:** The capacity to constantly adapt to changing external environments and conditions.
2. Relationships	2.1 Quality of teamwork 2.2 Stakeholder engagement 2.3 Communication Plan	**NETWORKING/RELATING:** Capacity to work in a coordinated and efficient manner as part of a more extensive network of interested stakeholders.
3. Projects and Resources	3.1 Projects, activities and services 3.2 Influencing the public sphere 3.3 Capacities of team 3.4 Resource mobilisation	**INITIATIVE/ACTION:** The capacity to generate plans that reflect its needs and mission, consider the changing contexts, and mobilize financial and managerial resources to execute them. **LINK TO RESULTS:** Capacity to achieve outputs and outcomes in line with an organisation's reason for existing. This area of capacity is sometimes equated with effective performance management, as seen in better service delivery.
4. Internal Governance and Administration	4.1 Organizational structure and decision-making 4.2 Organizational management – finance and administration 4.3 Change management	**COHERENCE/INTEGRATION** (between previous categories; linking the strategic and operational levels): Capacity to put policy and management frameworks that build upon one another, respond to current organizational needs and ensure coherence between strategic and operational levels. **ADAPTATION:** Capacity to constantly adapt in response to changing external environments and conditions.

When it comes to project design, we can take several types of approaches, shown in the table below, to assess the organisational capacity of selected CSAs, depending on the number of participating CSAs, time available and budget considerations. The following table is designed to enable project teams to identify, at the design stage, the most appropriate tools for their needs and to allocate sufficient budget and time accordingly.

	Rapid organisational capacity self-assessment: Rapid OCAT or Capacity Assessment Survey	Classic organizational capacity self-assessment: OCAT
Pros and cons	Allows us to save time but does not generate as much quality and quantity of information regarding CSA capacities. This approach is not recommended in the case of new CSAs or informal/not registered community-based organizations, because if they have not	Requires more time and assistance from a facilitator, but the positive side is that CSAs are clear, motivated and engaged in their own capacity-strengthening process.

	gone through similar processes before, it runs the risk of being misunderstood or done as a superficial 'tick the box' exercise.	
Project time frame	12 - 18 months	Over 18 months
Type of CSA	Growing and Mature CSAs	Informal/New, Growing, Mature CSAs, Network CSAs
Modality	- CSA individual work + follow-up discussion (2-3 hrs) - Or meet the CSA and fill out together (2-4 hrs)	For Growing CSA, Network and Informal/New CSA OCATs: - CSA individual work + facilitated workshop (5 – 6 hrs, can be split into a few sessions) - Or facilitated workshop (1 day, can be split into a few sessions, with reflection time or homework assignments in between) For Mature CSA OCAT: 2 day facilitated workshop + 0.5-day action planning
Place	- Onsite - Online - Hybrid	- Onsite - Online - Hybrid
Who participates	- Individual CSA - Group of CSAs together	- Individual CSA - Group of CSAs together
Who delivers	- Hired consultant - Project team	- Hired facilitator - Project team - A mix of both
Outputs and templates available	Rapid OCAT Capacity Assessment Survey*	Use the adapted versions for: 1. OCAT for Informal groups and New CSAs 2. OCAT for Growing CSAs 3. OCAT for Mature CSAs 4. OCAT for Networks

*The Capacity Assessment Survey is not strictly a type of OCAT, but rather, it is a lighter-touch survey that can be used to prioritise capacity strengthening needs for an organization. It is more likely to be used when the project is not under the Civil Society and Inclusive Governance pillar, but where capacity strengthening or civil society development has been mainstreamed into another pillar, when it is one of the project components among others, or when there is less time available for applying of an OCAT or a Rapid OCAT.

It is important to reflect in the project design that OCAT is not a one-time process. Ideally, it offers 2-3 rounds of facilitated assessment: baseline, end of the first year (if applicable), and project end. This will allow the project team to track changes in capacity scores and achievement on tailor-made progress markers.

2.4.3 Plan capacity strengthening

Depending on the approach taken in the previous stage, the main output is either a **Capacity Assessment Report** if the project team undertook a Capacity Assessment Survey or a **Capacity strengthening Action Plan** if a classic OCAT was applied. In the case of the Rapid OCAT, the Action Plan is already embedded in the OCAT document (it is important to fill out the summary grid at the end of the document outlining CSA's immediate priorities).

The Report and Action Plan outline capacity-strengthening tasks and priorities (connected to the main organizational capacity areas assessed). The Action Plan will be more specific, mentioning the timeframe (1-2 years), resources, and person responsible for coordinating the respective task. The Report or the Action Plan is the standard output required by PIN after an organizational capacity self-assessment.

Strategic Plan

Each CSA undertakes a set of activities and projects to accomplish its mission. That is why, within a capacity assessment process, it is recommended to include in the project proposal an activity related to developing or reviewing (if applicable) the CSA strategic Plans, comprising the organisation's strategic directions and tasks connected to its reason for existing. Ultimately, a Strategic Planning process aims to establish an organic connection between the CSA's daily decision-making and operations and its longer-term strategic vision and plans. This Strategic Plan option is recommended when strategic planning and management are included among the types of action examples in the Call for Proposals, and there is a budget and time available within the project. Otherwise, more time can be allocated for Section 1 of OCAT to look at CSA strategy for the next 3 years.

The table below reflects the options for producing the main output after the capacity assessment stage for project design purposes.

	Rapid organizational capacity self-assessment	Classic organizational capacity self-assessment
Purpose	Confirm **Capacity strengthening Action Plan** (embedded in Rapid OCAT) or develop a **Capacity Assessment Report** (based on the Capacity Assessment Survey) (PIN's minimum required standards)	Develop **Capacity strengthening Action Plan** (PIN's minimum required standard) and, if relevant, **Strategic Plan** (optional, depending on the time and budget available as well as project objectives, but can be effective, especially for CSAs who have never done one; it can propel them to the next level of development).
Modality	Developed by project team/consultant with validation from the CSA (2-3 hrs)	• CSA individual work+ facilitated workshop (2-3 hrs) • Or facilitated Action Planning workshop (2 - 4 hrs) • At the end of the project: End-line OCAT/Action Plan evaluation workshop • Optional: Facilitated Strategic Planning workshop (8 hrs minimum)

Place	• Onsite • Online	• Onsite • Online • Hybrid
Capacity strengthening needs level	• Capacity strengthening needs are clear for each CSA • Common capacity strengthening needs are generalised per cohort of CSAs	• Capacity strengthening needs are clear for each CSA • Common capacity strengthening needs are synthesised for the cohort of CSAs
Who delivers	• Hired interviewer • Project team	• Hired facilitator • Project team
Outputs and templates available	*Capacity strengthening Priorities* (embedded in Rapid OCAT, summary grid at the end of the document) *Capacity Assessment Report* (based on the Capacity Assessment Survey)	*Capacity strengthening Action Plan template* integrated into each OCAT document depending on CSA type *Strategic Plan template for New CSAs* *Strategic Plan template for Growing CSAs*

Because various parts of the CSA team are engaged in the assessment, the organization's commitment to implementing these plans should remain high even after the assessment ends.

2.4.4 Develop/strengthen capacity

Below is included a brief description of the three main general approaches towards capacity strengthening used by PIN globally: (**i) Capacity strengthening on its own, (ii) Incubator/catalyst-type approach**, and **(iii) Capacity strengthening plus Sub-granting**. The choice of approach should be decided during the project design phase, depending on objectives, available budget and CSA needs, clarified during the steps above.

Type of approach	Capacity strengthening on its own	Incubator/catalyst-type approach	Capacity strengthening plus Sub-granting
What is it	To support CSAs' capacity-strengthening needs, a range of different methods (described below in more detail) are employed, including training workshops, peer learning exchanges, mentorships, and networking events.	This is a more focused framework, which can be named, for example, "CSA4Development Program. " It may include structured capacity strengthening in the form of customized learning labs/workshops, connections to mentor experts, administrative guidance, etc., particularly suitable for new CSAs.	Using a learning-by-doing approach, small grants are integrated into the project design, so that CSAs pursue their internal capacity strengthening priorities and external programmatic objectives, as indicated in their Action Plans.
Pros	It gives the opportunity to develop, strengthen and measure capacity improvements within a particular project. This	This is an excellent approach to building the selected CSAs into a cohesive cohort or community that may continue communication	This is an excellent approach to offering the CSAs resources in order to implement their Capacity strengthening Action Plan, thus providing continuity to the process and justifying their investment of

	approach will be suitable for all types of CSAs.	even after the project's completion.	time. Often, the donor's call for proposals will require financial assistance as part of the project design. This approach can also follow an Incubator/catalyst-type program. It is suitable for all types of CSAs.
Cons	Considering multiple capacity-strengthening opportunities that may be available, CSAs can be low-motivated to participate and decrease their participation over time.	It will be less suitable for mature CSAs, who may already have those capacities developed but can be involved as mentors, for example.	Additional planning and implementation time is needed if small grants are awarded to informal, non-registered groups.
Cost	Low to medium, depending on the needs and length.	Medium	High

Within each approach, the project team must select a combination of **capacity strengthening methods** to serve the CSA needs best. The Capacity Strengthening Action Plan or Capacity Assessment Report will offer sufficient information about CSA capacity strengthening needs. During the project design phase, the methods that will be used to offer a comprehensive capacity-strengthening package to the CSAs will have to be clarified and clearly described in the project proposal.

Capacity strengthening methods
It is important to take into consideration the methods that will be effective for individual and organizational capacity strengthening, such as training workshops, mentoring and those that will help the CSAs to strengthen their capacities to partner, network, learn from and collaborate with other stakeholders to achieve results, such as peer to peer learning sessions and networking events. From this perspective, different capacity-strengthening methods can be grouped as shown below:

Group learning	Customised learning	Peer-to-peer learning
a. Training workshops	a. Mentoring	a. Peer-to-Peer sessions (including CSA-led workshops, study trips, and unconference events)
b. Boot camps	b. Coaching	b. Institutional Twinning
c. E-Learning/Online Training Courses	c. On-the-job training/consultative support	c. Conferences, Forums, Networking Events

The following table provides a brief overview of each capacity-strengthening method and the requirements in relation to time, budget and resources (e.g. facilitators) provided to help with project design and budgeting[7].

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[7] Adapted from *Capacity strengthening Interventions: A Guide for Program Designers, FHI 360, SI, and USAID.*

Capacity strengthening method	Goal	Cost requirements	Facilitation requirements	Time requirements	CSA type
Group learning					
Training workshops/ Bootcamps	To increase participants' knowledge/skill base and foster an environment where they can network and engage with each other	Low to high; costs associated with logistics for and facilitation of the event, for example, meeting space, facilitator fees, equipment (computers, projector), materials, food	Knowledgeable, experienced trainer(s); boot camps also require experts in their respective fields	Duration depends on the objectives, content, and skill level of participants; it can range from a half day to one week Budget 7 days of group training workshops (4 days in-person and 3 days online) for a 2 – 2.5-year project	Informal, New, Growing, Mature, Networks
E-Learning/ Online Training Courses	To support target organizations in accessing information online, to support their capacity strengthening, can be on-demand	Depends on the course. More than an in-person training course if it uses an e-learning platform for a self-paced course but less if it is taught online by a trainer.	Can be facilitated in real-time or can be pre-recorded by relevant course instructors/ trainers	Depends on the course/expertise needed to develop the curriculum or deliver the training Budget 3 days of group training workshops (online) for a 2 – 2.5 year project	Informal, New, Growing, Mature, Networks
Customized learning					
Mentoring	An approach oriented toward providing task-based, skill-focused, directed and time-bound support	Medium, personnel time only	Conducted mainly face-to-face or online, with some preparatory work and diagnostics that involve the collection of relevant information about the CSA's previous activities	Continuing relationship that can last for a long period of time Budget 3 days of mentoring per CSA for a 2 – 2.5 year project	Informal, New, Growing, Mature, Networks
Coaching	To improve an individual's performance on the job through enhancing current skills or	Medium, it can vary, depending on the cost of the expert and length of the coaching series	Conducted via face-to-face or online instruction by a coach	Coaching sessions are short-term and task-based. The coaching series lasts for as long as is needed,	Informal, New, Growing, Mature, Networks

	acquiring new skills			depending on the purpose of the coaching relationship Budget 6 hours of coaching per CSA for a 2 – 2.5 year project	
On-the-job training/consultative support	Intervention of an external consultant working to a specific Terms of Reference related to the internal functioning of the organisation, or helping the organisation through a change process.	It varies depending on the expert's cost and the length of the consultation. PIN internal expertise can also be used here.	Conducted mainly face-to-face, although some follow-up may be conducted online. Requires careful matching of consultant to client CSA and realistic Terms of Reference.	It may be short-term and task-based or long-term based on the results of a needs assessment	Informal, New, Growing, Mature, Networks
Peer-to-peer learning					
Peer-to-Peer sessions/ Study trips/Unconference events	To create a forum where individuals or organizations sharing similar skill sets or capacity levels can share ideas and knowledge for a mutually beneficial outcome	Low to medium, travel/venue costs associated with convening peers, facilitation costs	A trained facilitator is recommended	Varies based on organizations and objective Budget at least 2 peer-to-peer dedicated events of 1 – 3 days and 1 study trip for a 2 – 2.5 year project	Informal, New, Growing, Mature, Networks
Institutional Twinning	To build a partnership between two parties at the institutional level for mutual benefit; to increase operational capacity of organizations	Higher costs due to multiple support services	None	Arrangements tend to occur over a year at a minimum Budget 2 days of work per month for the host CSO for a period of 10-12 months within a 2 – 2.5 year project	New, Growing
Conferences/ Forums/ Networking Events	To increase the knowledge base and foster an environment	Depending on the distances involved and	Networking events can be facilitated by professional	Networking events usually last from a few hours to 1 to 2 days; exposure	Informal, New, Growing,

where participants can network and engage with each other	associated fees or other costs	facilitators or knowledgeable peers, depending on the context	visits' duration depends on the objectives and can range from half a day to one week	Mature, Networks
			Budget at least 1 conference/ networking event of 2 days for a 2 – 2.5 year project	

It is important to ensure that training events are inclusive and accessible, considering factors like physical space access for wheelchair users, content/jargon overload, language interpretation, and accommodations for diverse needs (sign language interpretation, adaptations for visually impaired individuals etc.). These needs and accommodations need to be reflected in the project budget.

Sub-granting as a capacity strengthening tool

The section below provides additional guidance on integrating Sub-granting as a capacity-strengthening tool at the project design stage.

If we approach CSA capacity strengthening more systemically, well-designed and delivered learning activities are insufficient. CSAs must have the opportunities and resources to integrate, apply and implement what they have learnt in their workplace and activities to enhance learning efficacy. This is a critical element of 'learning by doing'. In this regard, Sub-granting is a useful capacity strengthening tool. It will also ensure a consistent link between the Capacity strengthening Action Plan developed by the CSA and the access to resources to implement it.

Sub-granting as part of a CSA capacity strengthening project can serve several purposes, aimed at supporting the organizational development of civil society actors and improving democratic governance. For example, awarding small grants for:

- **Organizational development funding**: Thus, the recipient CSAs can dedicate resources to their organizational development (for example, creation and introduction of internal policies and procedures, communication/promotional platforms/materials, IT systems improvements, etc., also other operational costs, important to check with donor restrictions).
- **Activity funding**: This enables CSAs to conduct activities that build their technical skills, such as service delivery, advocacy work, research, participatory policy-making initiatives, awareness-raising campaigns, etc. The type of activities funded is connected to the CSA mission and PIN project objectives.

Together, these two forms of Sub-granting aim to support the overall development of the target CSAs. It should be noted that in the case of EC funded projects, **Sub-granting** is called **Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP)**.

2.4.5 Reflect and evaluate – planning for MEAL

Monitoring, reflection and learning should be integrated at all stages of the capacity strengthening process as much as possible to build awareness on the importance of MEAL and integrate useful feedback and lessons learnt into the next implementation stage(s). As part of project planning, the project team must consider MEAL requirements **during the project design and implementation** to inform learning, adaptive project management, accountability to stakeholders, and capturing results on an ongoing basis and at the **project end**. The **Reflect and evaluate stage** will be addressed in more detail in the MEAL chapter of this Guide, where further detail is given on the types of evaluation approaches that could be used in projects envisaging CSA development. This section below provides guidance on what to consider when planning for MEAL in a CSA development project, guidance on developing the Logframe, including information on indicators and means of verification, and Community Feedback and Response Mechanisms (CFRM).

Planning for MEAL

According to PIN's MEAL manual, MEAL should be considered, and MEAL staff should be involved, in all of the following processes during the planning and formulation of the project:
- ✓ Logframe design, particularly when deciding which indicators to use and how to measure them;

- ✓ Preparation of the MEAL sections in narrative documents;
- ✓ Planning and budgeting for surveys and evaluations;
- ✓ Budgeting for MEAL staff according to the estimated workload in the project[8];
- ✓ Budgeting for the necessary equipment (e.g. tablets for data collection, cameras, laptops);
- ✓ Budgeting for transportation and accommodation during monitoring visits;
- ✓ Budgeting for the CFRM (e.g. CFRM officer/focal point, phone lines, software, suggestion boxes);
- ✓ Conducting Value for Money analysis.

MEAL for what

When considering the MEAL approaches for a project, it is important to know what will be measured, and why. For a stand-alone capacity strengthening project that has increased capacity of CSAs as its primary objective, and its ultimate goal, then MEAL tools and approaches will need to focus on how to measure changes in this capacity. For a capacity strengthening project that considers the increased capacity of CSAs as a cross-cutting approach and as a means to an end, where the end may be, for example, improved nutrition or improved provision of basic services by local and national authorities etc., then MEAL tools and approaches will also need to consider how to measure this wider impact.

It is important to conceptualise the capacity progress we would like to capture and design for within our project, depending on the needs assessment results and call for proposal objectives. An important principle for the MEAL methodology design is not just to measure CSO internal organizational growth, or strengthening of internal processes and capacity (e.g. internal systems, process, staffing) but also their external work and impact as a result of that (e.g. how are they improving their engagement with other CSAs (networks, coalitions and informal cooperation), how are they engaging on advocacy issues, policy dialogue, monitoring of government policies, constituency engagement etc).

A project's MEAL design will need to consider the progress of capacity strengthening based on the project structure while recognising that organizational change does not always follow a linear trajectory.

Logframe

The work done in the previous stages, including assessing needs, assets, coping strategies, barriers and enablers, relationships, priorities, and suggestions, as well as the formulation of the underlying logic and outline of a project represented in the ToC, helps to develop the project's Logical Framework (Logframe). This is a summarized representation of the logic of the project, which shows the connection between **inputs** (activities and resources) that go into a project and its **outputs**, **outcomes** and **goals/impact**, all of which are influenced by the **assumptions** made during the project preparation. Moreover, to provide a framework for results measurement, the Logframe should include SMART indicators that measure key elements of change desired at each stage of the project logic.

Indicators

To demonstrate that the project's intended results have been achieved and that the envisioned change has occurred and is sustainable, we must define SMART indicators and measure them regularly and accurately throughout the project. **"SMART"** stands for "Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound."

Indicators should be designed to measure the project's desired changes at output, outcome or impact levels.

Results chain	Indicators
Impact	Show the long-term effects the project achieved or contributed to, such as strengthening democratization processes
Outcomes	Show the short- and medium-term effects of the project's outputs, such as adoption of a new behaviour or improved access to a service
Outputs	Demonstrate the immediate benefits of your activities, such as increased knowledge, new skills or delivery of certain services and products

Indicators can be categorised in different ways. One way is to differentiate between quantitative and qualitative indicators. Whereas quantitative indicators provide numerical information that can be measured and analysed mathematically or statistically to describe quantities, proportions, frequencies or rates, qualitative indicators use thematic or narrative analysis to offer descriptive insights into experiences, attitudes and perceptions.

Example of indicators: Quantitative

Quantitative indicators expressed in numbers	Example
Unit	The number of staff trained
Proportions	The proportion of the community that has access to the service
Rate of change	The percentage change in average household income over the reporting period
Ratios	The ratio of teachers to pupils in a school

Example of indicators: Qualitative

Qualitative indicators expressed through a narrative	Example
Satisfaction	How participants describe their levels of satisfaction with the project's activities, (if it was a score, it would be quantitative)
Standards	Whether and how training is recognised by the appropriate authorities
Attitudes	How participant's attitudes towards gender equality changed
Practices and behaviours	How practices have changed since the completion of hygiene education
Institutional change	The effect of new measures introduced to improve the NGO's accountability to project users

For additional help formulating indicators, PIN's **IndiKit webpage** provides practical guidance on using hundreds of internationally recognized project indicators. All indicators listed in this database are accompanied by explanations of their purpose, guidance on how to collect and analyse the data and links to additional resources.

Relevant links:
INDIKIT
Rapid Guide on Designing SMART indicators

Means of Verification

According to PIN's MEAL manual, **Means of Verification (MoV)** are sources of information which help us measure each indicator. They must be practical and cost-effective, using a mix of primary (collected directly by PIN or its partners in the project) and secondary (collected by other actors) data, as well as quantitative and qualitative data. Some of the key questions to be asked when deciding which MoVs to use are:

- ✓ How are we going to measure the indicator?
- ✓ How long will it take to measure it?
- ✓ How is the baseline defined? Do we need a survey?
- ✓ Who can do it? Do we have expertise in the team, or do we have to outsource it?
- ✓ How much is it going to cost?

Some examples of the most commonly used MoVs are:
➢ **Secondary sources:** statistics by the national or local government, studies conducted by INGOs, NGOs or academic institutions etc.

➢ **Primary quantitative sources:** surveys (baseline/end-line, Knowledge Awareness and Practices (KAP), satisfaction surveys, formative research etc.), distribution- and post-distribution monitoring, pre-/post-tests etc.

➢ **Primary qualitative sources:** focus groups, key informant interviews, outcome harvesting, positive deviance inquiry etc.; these will often be employed during evaluations, but can also be used by MEAL teams to add a qualitative aspect to their monitoring work.

A certain degree of technical MEAL knowledge is required to determine whether the team can collect and analyse data according to the guidance and to estimate what budget may be necessary. For some indicators, progress can only be measured once or twice during the project, requiring more than quantitative data. Most outcome- and goal/impact-level indicators fall into this category. To determine progress towards these indicators, as well as to ascertain to what extent the results are sustainable and to identify any unintended results, projects must be monitored and evaluated regularly by someone with sufficient distance to be objective and unbiased.

3 Implementation Phase

This chapter seeks to review the key stages of capacity strengthening and offer guidance to support teams in effectively implementing each stage during the Project Implementation Phase. The main stages for capacity strengthening, as mentioned above, are:

1. **Identify and select** civil society actors to take part in the project
2. **Assess** capacity
3. **Plan** capacity strengthening
4. **Develop/strengthen** capacity
5. **Reflect** and **evaluate** – MEAL

Below are included key considerations for each stage important during project implementation.

3.1 Identify and select CSAs

Selecting the right type of motivated CSAs to participate in the project is essential, as it will play a crucial role in the success of later stages, including effective capacity assessments, capacity-strengthening initiatives, and potential sub-granting.

Opening a call for participation for CSAs to take part in a capacity-strengthening project can be done in a few steps.

The key steps are as follows for an open Call for participation:

Step 1. Preparation of Call for Participation document and Application Form.
Step 2. Launch and promotion of the Call for Participation. Information sessions.
Step 3. Selection of CSA participants.
Step 4. Communication of selection decision and publication of results.

The information about each step is included in the expanded version of this Guide.

Ensuring CSA commitment and ownership during Project Implementation

To ensure the commitment of CSAs in the capacity strengthening process, it is essential to employ various approaches that promote active engagement and ownership. Here are some effective approaches to consider:

- **Participatory and Tailored Capacity strengthening Approach**
- **Build Trust and Relationships**
- **Provide Ongoing Support**
- **Promote Learning by Doing**
- **Recognize and Celebrate Achievements**
- **Foster Peer Learning, Exchanges and Networking**
- **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation**

By implementing these approaches, project teams can foster a strong commitment from civil society actors in the capacity-strengthening process. The key is to ensure their active involvement, provide tailored support, foster trust and collaboration, and recognize their achievements along the way.

3.2 Capacity assessment stage – key considerations

The key steps for organizational capacity assessment are as follows:

A. Preparation/adaptation of the Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT)
B. Project kick-off meeting and preparation of CSAs for the assessment
C. Preparation and delivery of OCAT workshops

Additional details for each step are included below.

A. Preparation/adaptation of the Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT)

This step is typically performed by the project team, often assisted by the relevant PSI advisor. A balanced assessment will create space for the CSA team to discuss and critically analyse their existing capacities, as well as those which need to be developed further. It can be assumed that CSAs are not starting from scratch in terms of capacity strengthening. In many cases, those who started a civic initiative or an NGO will have certain knowledge about their context, the problems they want to tackle, community connections and possibly even experience in the field.

PIN developed and tested an organizational capacity assessment tool (OCAT) in multiple contexts to help CSAs self-assess their organizational capacity. PIN has developed and adapted four OCAT templates corresponding to the CSA level of development: New**,** Growing**, and** Mature **CSAs and** Networks. The OCAT for New and Growing CSAs are applicable to both formal and informal actors. Being both a document and a process at the same time, OCAT creates a container for a facilitated, participatory assessment of organizational practices based on pre-defined capacity areas, allocating a score for each area to indicate development potential. The OCAT is used as a baseline of organizational development and as a basis for Capacity strengthening Action Plans which will be explained in the further sections.

Creating a healthy atmosphere where growth and development are perceived as a natural necessity is paramount in this process. The added value of the OCAT is in the quality of team discussions, reflections, and critical analysis. In this regard, self-scoring is an **act of empowerment**, where teams set their baseline and establish ownership over their capacity-strengthening path. While it may be perceived as time-consuming by the CSAs at the beginning, OCAT offers an opportunity for more nuanced levels of reflection and self-assessment, which initiatives or organizations may not usually dedicate time and attention to. For example, growing CSAs may be thinking about their communities, but their reflections may not be as detailed as those they are invited to explore as part of the OCAT sub-sections on stakeholder engagement and influence on the public sphere. It should be noted to the CSAs that OCAT self-assessment is an internal exercise for them and aimed at identifying the areas where they can grow and strengthen. It should be made clear to CSAs that their access to grants and other development opportunities within a project will not be, in any way, influenced or determined by their answers in the OCAT process.

More details about the OCAT structure are included in the expanded version of the Guide.

3.3 Planning capacity strengthening stage

The next phase in the capacity strengthening process is developing the **Capacity Strengthening Action Plan** (in the case of the classic OCAT process, integrated into each OCAT type: New**,** Growing**,** Mature **CSAs and** Networks), **Capacity Strengthening Priorities** (in the case of Rapid OCAT,

integrated into the document), and Capacity Assessment Report (in the case of the Capacity Assessment Survey).

In the case of classic OCAT, its part, asking "What would we like to work on?" becomes the foundation for the Action Plan for each CSA. The Action Plan document mirrors the sections and sub-sections of the OCAT, outlining Capacity Areas, followed by proposed Tasks, as set by the CSA during the OCAT workshop. To make it actionable, the Plan includes **timeframes, the budget needed and the person responsible** for the coordination of the capacity strengthening Task, as well as a progress tracking tab. Additional elements can be included in the Action Plan based on CSA needs, including capacity strengthening needs and the preferred delivery modality (training, mentoring or peer learning formats) for a more tailored approach.

The tasks developed due to the OCAT workshop and included in the Action Plan should follow SMART criteria. They should be:
- **Specific:** The capacity-strengthening task needs to be concrete and practical; otherwise, the following criteria will not apply.
- **Measurable:** There should be a way to verify that the task has been met or addressed. How will the organization know that it has grown in that OCAT capacity area?
- **Achievable:** Each task should be realistic within the context of everything the organization has to do in the next period, such as training, project implementation, etc.
- **Relevant:** Each capacity-strengthening task should be directly related to a challenge or need that the organization is currently facing. How does the organization need to get stronger to ensure its survival a year from now? How does the organization need to develop to successfully implement its activities?
- **Time-bound:** The capacity-strengthening tasks should be achievable within the identified period.

Encourage CSA teams to include in their Action Plans capacity tasks that they can accomplish to build capacity **internally** with their resources and those that require **external assistance.**

Each OCAT has an Action Plan integrated into the same document. For convenience, the OCAT results are included in the first part of the Action Plan template to create a visual connection between these and the capacity-strengthening tasks to follow.

There are a few options for developing the Capacity Strengthening Action Plan:
- CSA teams work individually and then meet with a facilitator or a relevant project team member to reflect and discuss it.
- CSAs develop the Action Plan within a facilitated workshop.

This type of exercise enables the project teams to identify where different CSAs have similar capacity needs and, based on project objectives and planned budget, confirm the project's capacity strengthening package.

3.4 Delivering capacity strengthening stage

Three main general approaches towards capacity strengthening used by PIN globally were explained in the Project Design part of the Guide depending on project objectives, available budget and CSA needs:

1. **Capacity strengthening on its own**
2. **Incubator/Catalyst programs**
3. **Capacity strengthening plus Sub-granting**

The table below provides key considerations for each of these approaches, along with a consideration of suitability for different types of CSAs. The following section provides further detail on different capacity-strengthening methods, including financial support to third parties from the capacity-strengthening perspective.

Type of approach	Key considerations for the project implementation phase	Suitability for different categories of CSAs
Capacity strengthening on its Own	• Ensure a tailored approach: Develop a capacity strengthening plan that is tailored to each organization's identified needs and goals, considering its size, mission, and target beneficiaries. • Offer training workshops: Cover relevant topics to build knowledge and skills among participants. Work in advance with trainers to agree on objectives and session design, ensuring their relevance and interactive features. • Include coaching and mentoring: Provide ongoing coaching and mentoring support to help organizations implement and apply the skills and knowledge gained. • Ensure learning and sharing: Design for learning and knowledge sharing among participants through regular meetings, and peer exchange sessions (either integrated in regular training events or as separate events). • Monitoring and evaluation: Establish mechanisms to track and monitor the progress, quality, and impact of capacity-strengthening efforts.	Its tailored nature makes it suitable for new, emerging, and mature CSAs, as well as formal and informal CSAs and networks. Although newer CSAs may benefit from more structured support (incubators/catalyst programs) and opportunities to learn by doing (plus Sub-granting)
Incubator/ Catalyst type programs	• More focused framework, providing a safe space for learning and application for a specific CSA cohort)**:** • Selection Process: Develop clear criteria and a transparent selection process for identifying participants who have the potential to benefit from the program. • Offer tailored support: Provide customized support and mentorship to participants based on their specific needs and organizational goals. • Include networking opportunities: Foster opportunities for networking and collaboration among participants, including peer learning and knowledge sharing. • Monitoring and evaluation: Establish mechanisms to monitor the program's progress and impact, both in terms of individual participants' growth and overall program effectiveness.	It can be adapted for all types, but it is well suited for new and growing CSAs that require more intensive support. Suitable for formal and informal CSAs. Potentially less suited for networks when the needs of different members will be different.

Capacity strengthening combined with Sub-granting	• Needs Alignment: Ensure that the capacity-strengthening activities are aligned with the requirements and objectives of the Sub-granting projects. • Developing grant management capacities: Provide the necessary training and mentoring to CSAs to enhance the capacity of organizations to implement their sub-grant projects effectively. • Clear Guidelines: Establish clear guidelines and expectations for using sub-grant funds, reporting requirements, and compliance with project objectives. • Monitoring and Support: Implement a robust monitoring and support system to track the progress of sub-grant projects, provide guidance, and address the organisations' challenges. • Learning and Sharing: Encourage learning and knowledge sharing among sub-grant recipients through regular meetings, workshops, and peer exchange platforms.	Grant requirements would need to mirror the capacity of the CSA. Mature / emerging CSAs and formal CSAs may have more systems and processes in place to manage funds, so newer and informal CSAs are likely to require additional mentoring support so that they are not discouraged from taking part.

Irrespective of whether the project delivers capacity strengthening on its own or includes a more focused framework like an Incubator/catalyst-type program, it is important to consider and include a diverse range of capacity-strengthening methods which complement and build on each other. The section below provides additional information and guidance on the methods that can be used to ensure that the capacity-strengthening package is comprehensive and responds to participants' learning and development needs. It is recommended to use at least one methodology from each category presented below:

Group learning	Customised learning	Peer-to-peer learning
Best for general topics that are most common and prioritised by CSAs.	Best when the topic and need are 'niche' and specific to a particular CSA, but these approaches are more expensive than other categories.	Best when the learning needs are context-specific and when building trust, networks and practical skills exchange is important.
a. Training workshops	a. Mentoring	a. Peer-to-peer sessions/Study trips/ Unconference events
b. b. Boot camps	b. Coaching	b. Institutional Twinning
c. E-Learning/Online Training Courses	c. On-the-job training/consultative support	c. Conferences/Forums/ Networking Events

Additional information about each method is included in the expanded version of the Guide.

3.5   Key points for Sub-granting as capacity strengthening

Sub-granting is a fundamental element of PIN's CSA capacity strengthening approach and is typically integrated into all civil society development programming. Via Sub-granting, PIN creates opportunities for CSAs to participate and design actions that bring right-holders voices to the table and contribute to greater social inclusion by addressing their relevant problems. PIN's approach to Sub-granting has a strong 'learning by doing' component to enable CSAs to apply the newly acquired

skills, management practices and priorities identified in their Capacity Strengthening Action Plan, or to address needs identified through the OCAT process.

In the scope of a CSA capacity strengthening project, it is recommended that developing the sub-grant proposal is a capacity strengthening exercise for CSAs which require this support. PIN can offer its support in the process as long as it is available to all applicants equally. Furthermore, it can be decided that the PIN staff member who directly supported the applicants can be excluded as a member of the Evaluation Committee to ensure there is no conflict of interest. In some cases, PIN can hire mentors to guide CSAs in the development of their project proposal, which is particularly helpful for new CSAs who have little or no relevant experience. The scope of the support provided by PIN during the application process should be clearly outlined in the guidelines so that the process is transparent.

All PIN sub-grant recipients must attend a mandatory training session covering several core topics before being awarded the funds. Depending on the context, the training can occur over one day in person or remotely and is led by PIN's project and finance team. At a minimum, the training includes the following core modules:

- **PIN Policies** – Training on and Signing PIN's Code of Conduct Essentials (incl. PSEA and Child Protection Policies) is required of all sub-grant recipients. All recipients must adhere to the relevant PIN policies and will be part of their formal contract with PIN.
- **Sub-grant Management** – The training will also cover key elements of sub-grant management, including review of contract details and obligations, sub-grant financial and administrative management, ineligible costs, financial and narrative reporting procedures, donor regulations, etc.
- **External Communications and Visibility** – Depending on the context, sub-grant recipients are required to adhere to the donor and PIN's visibility requirements. The requirements will be outlined in the contract and explained in detail during the sub-grant training. Any exception to the requirements outlined in the contract must be approved in advance via a written official derogation. Depending on the donor, the derogation can be comprehensive and cover entire geographical areas, recipients, activities, etc., or it can be done on a case-by-case basis.

It is recommended to also include in the training, when relevant:

- **Basics in Humanitarian Response and Service Provision Standards** — A training session on basic humanitarian service standards, including CHS and adherence to Do No Harm principles, is not required but is recommended for all sub-grant recipients. Such training works to develop local capacity and support PIN-funded sub-grants, which aligns with basic humanitarian, accountability, and service provision standards.

All of the above sessions will contribute to strengthening the recipients' grant management capacity. Therefore, treating the sub-grant stage as a capacity strengthening opportunity and integrating the necessary training, mentoring, information sessions and step-by-step support establishes a trusting, collaborative environment between CSAs and PIN team, where CSAs feel more comfortable asking questions and sharing challenges during the sub-grant implementation process.

The step-by-step process of managing sub-grants during the project implementation phase is included in the PIN's **CSO Sub-Grant Manual**.

4 Advocacy component in CSA Development Projects

This chapter is designed to guide PIN CP staff in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of CSA strengthening projects, with a particular focus on enhancing the advocacy capacities of CSAs or incorporating a substantial advocacy component. This guidance should thus support PIN CP staff in **effectively integrating an advocacy lens across all relevant stages of the project cycle management (PCM):** project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

The chapter includes an overview of key concepts about advocacy, policy, influencing, and related areas. It then outlines critical elements to facilitate the integration of an advocacy approach across all PCM phases.

This chapter does not propose a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, each CSA advocacy capacity-strengthening project must adapt its approach to reflect the specificities of the CSAs involved and the operational and programmatic needs arising from the given context.

4.1 Key definitions

Advocacy

There is not a standard definition of advocacy across development and humanitarian actors. Instead, each actor defines advocacy based on their specific identity, mandate and approach. However, we can identify several features that are typically used to define advocacy.
These include:

- Pleading in favour of a particular idea, belief or action;
- Speaking up in support of specific groups, often those who are not heard, or amplifying their voices;
- Having an impact or effect on political processes and policies, including within restrictive civic spaces;
- Reforming policies or institutions;
- Creating enabling conditions for people and CSAs' empowerment;
- Strengthening people and CSAs' participation in the management of public affairs;
- Informing and mobilising rights-holders and holding duty-bearers to account.

> **Rights-holders** include all human beings, not only citizens, individually and in specific contexts as groups. In line with **PIN's Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) policy**, integrating an HRBA approach to development and humanitarian work entails that individuals and communities are not passive recipients of aid but rather subjects entitled to the rights enshrined in international and domestic legal frameworks.
>
> Rights-holders can be **people or groups** systematically discriminated against or particularly vulnerable to human rights violations. They include women and girls, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and people belonging to racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities.
>
> From a human rights-based approach, civil society actors are both rights-holders and rights-defenders. Supporting civil society actors as rights-holders means PIN supports their enjoyment and exercise of their rights to association, assembly, and expression.[9] At the same time, supporting and engaging local civil

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[9] For further details on PIN's approach to civil society actors' support, see PIN Common Understanding on Civil Society Support and Engagement, January 2024.

society can have a multiplier human rights effect. At the very core of their contribution to local governance and development processes, civil society defends or promotes a variety of human rights, ranging from social, economic, and cultural rights—such as the right to water, health, or education—to civil and political rights—such as the right to information.

Duty-bearers are primarily states and their official authorities at all levels. The state is the ultimate duty-bearer as it voluntarily ratifies international human rights treaties, thus binding itself to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights for all human beings within its territories.

In more concrete terms, advocacy can be defined as a set of activities aimed at influencing those who have the power to achieve policy and practice changes in line with PIN's mission, mandate and strategic objectives. In other words, advocacy is about bringing positive change to the lives of vulnerable individuals and communities by purposefully engaging with decision-makers through various tools and approaches.

It is essential to highlight the following elements of the above definition:

- **Advocacy is always a deliberate process.** Defining advocacy goals and objectives is, therefore, crucial. Any advocacy activity must be geared towards realising pre-defined goals and objectives, supported by various tools and techniques.
- **Advocacy is a systematic process** —often a long-term one— rather than a one-off activity. As such, it requires strategic thinking and careful planning, as well as sustained efforts over time, often well beyond the lifespan of a specific project.
- **Advocacy targets those who have the power** to make the changes we want to achieve, whom we refer to as policy or decision-makers. Indeed, policy/decision-makers will be the primary targets of our advocacy efforts. At the same time, other individuals and groups can also be considered in our advocacy efforts as they hold a certain level of influence over decision-makers.
- **Advocacy is propositional,** meaning it must offer an alternative or solution to effectively address the issues posed by the inadequacy of the policies or practices that we want to challenge and affect.
- **Advocacy is rooted in direct experience and evidence.** We must collect solid evidence to demonstrate that the alternatives and solutions we propose can work best. Collecting examples of best practices, documenting and gathering testimonies from individuals and communities, and conducting research are thus essential components of advocacy work.
- **Advocacy can be conducted through different tools, techniques and approaches.** In each case, and considering the resources available, we must select those better suited to our context.
- **Advocacy can be public or private.** Examples of public advocacy include media outreach, social media campaigns, press releases, and public events. Examples of private advocacy are bilateral or other direct meetings with policymakers.

Moreover, as PIN, our approach to advocacy is bottom-up, meaning we advocate to address the root causes of the challenges faced by all members of the communities we work with, particularly marginalized groups such as women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and other vulnerable populations, ensuring that we respond to their specific needs and priorities. When it comes to our collaboration with CSAs on advocacy, a bottom-up approach means that we must

provide CSAs tailored capacity-strengthening support for them to be able to advocate on the issues they and the communities they work with prioritise, in full respect of the identity and mandate of each CSA.

Policy Dialogue is an advocacy technique through which stakeholders interact directly with decision-makers to develop, improve, or monitor the implementation of a particular policy. It is based on the analysis of evidence gathered and includes concrete recommendations on how to address challenges for policy development and implementation. Some concrete examples of policy dialogue activities include convening and facilitating dialogue on policies in the form of policy roundtables, including governmental authorities and civil society stakeholders, and producing policy briefs highlighting key recommendations for decision-makers.

CSAs willing to engage in policy dialogue must have a sound understanding of the policy process or policy cycle, which is often highly formalised. Alongside formal aspects, informal aspects such as interpersonal interactions and societal, cultural, and religious beliefs also play an important role in the way policy processes are conducted in practice, and CSAs must be equipped with the necessary skills to navigate those.

It is essential to distinguish advocacy from other related but distinct areas of work, some of which are listed below:

- **Behaviour change communication (BCC)** is the use of communication to change behaviours and social norms. Through awareness-raising and other techniques, it primarily targets individuals, households, and communities. Thus, BCC is distinct from advocacy in terms of scope and targets.

- **Public communication** comprises all activities aimed at providing information and sensitising an identified audience (typically the general public) on the work undertaken by a CSA and its impact on the communities it serves. Examples of public communication include featuring articles in traditional and online media, interviews, audiovisual and written materials, social media posts, public events, etc. When strategically designed, public communication can be a powerful tool for advancing our advocacy goals and objectives by shaping public opinion.

- **Public relations** refers to all efforts to strengthen the profile and visibility of organisations externally and build trust and credibility with a wide variety of stakeholders, including donors, partners, the media, and the general public. As in public communication, a well-planned approach to public relationships can reinforce our advocacy work, as advocacy success relies heavily on the ability to present ourselves as a trustworthy and knowledgeable actor within our areas of work.

- **Fundraising** can be defined as the process through which an organisation can access the necessary funds to carry out and sustain its activities. This process is distinct from advocacy as it has a narrower scope: securing financial resources from different sources (such as state departments and agencies, international organisations, private foundations, companies, and individuals) for organisations to operate. However, in some instances, our advocacy goal can be making financial resources available or accessible to address a particular issue. In such cases, fundraising and advocacy efforts will go hand in hand.

4.2 Project Design Phase

The section below intends to provide insights into critical aspects that should be considered to adequately integrate advocacy as a project component at the design stage of our CSA strengthening project.

4.2.1 Advocacy context analysis

The environment in which our project will be implemented will significantly impact the success of our advocacy interventions and the overall realization of our advocacy goals. Thus, it is crucial at the design stage to conduct an advocacy context analysis that includes all major political, legal, economic, societal, and gender-related features, paying particular attention to the specific challenges and opportunities faced by marginalized groups such as women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and other vulnerable populations. Essential questions to include in our advocacy context analysis are the following:

- How does the overall **political landscape** in the country look at the present? Are there any relevant trends that could positively or negatively affect our project implementation? In answering these questions, we should examine the current government structure, opposition, and other leading political forces and pressure groups.

- What is the **role of media** in the country? How can media autonomy and independence be described? What are the main communication channels, and how can they be leveraged for advocacy?

- What are the country's key **economic factors and trends**, including wealth distribution and poverty rates? What are relevant **social factors** and trends? To answer this question, we should reflect on relevant demographic information, literacy and education rates; access to healthcare, employment rates; gender equality and sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) diversity; inclusion of religious, ethnic, linguistic or national minorities, as well as refugees and other people on the move.

- What does the **legal framework** look like, including freedom of association, online and offline speech, and other civil and political rights and freedoms? Does the legal framework incorporate and align with internationally recognised standards? How does the legislative process work, and does it allow for transparency, public consultations, and participation of CSAs? Are there legal constraints and barriers that limit the possibility of carrying out advocacy work or certain types of advocacy work?[10]

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[10] For projects focusing specifically on human rights advocacy interventions, PIN's Handbook on Human Rights-Based Approach to Development and Humanitarian Programming provides more comprehensive guidance on legal and policy analysis.

4.2.2 Target groups

When it comes to advocacy, we generally distinguish between two main types of targets: **primary and secondary.**

- **Primary targets** are those who have the power to make the change we want to see. They are typically called policymakers or decision-makers.
- **Secondary targets** are those who, although not having the power themselves, have the capacity to put pressure on and influence the primary targets.

The correct identification of both primary and secondary targets is essential to maximising our advocacy efforts and saving time and resources by targeting the right people. It requires a thorough understanding of the policy and decision-making processes related to the issue we want to address, whether at national, regional, or local levels, depending on our selected area of intervention. For the correct identification of our targets, we must also understand how decision-making processes work in practice rather than just how processes are designed on paper, as there could be significant differences sometimes.

Below are some examples of primary and secondary targets (non-exhaustive):

Primary targets	Secondary targets
Government representatives and officials (at national/regional/local levels)	International/National media and journalists
Member States and International Organisations (whether at the capital level or in the country)	United Nations agencies, International and National NGOs
Policy advisers	CSAs, trade unions
Religious and community leaders	Academia, research organisations and think tanks
	National and local businesses
	Non-formal community leaders
	Public opinion

The exact targets will be determined by the specificities of the context and the ultimate advocacy goals and objectives we aim to achieve according to our Theory of Change (see section 5.2.4 below).

4.2.3   CSA Advocacy Capacity Assessment tool (ACAT)

To best tailor advocacy support towards CSAs, we must first understand their actual capacities, priorities and needs in this area. From the PIN CP staff's perspective, the CSA advocacy capacity assessment tool (ACAT) allows to gather detailed quantitative and qualitative information about our partner organizations' mandate, scope of interventions, structure, financial and human resources, and areas of expertise. From a CSA perspective, the ACAT provides an opportunity to reflect on, assess and prioritize their needs in advocacy, laying the foundations of any future capacity strengthening activities to be implemented, within the scope of PIN's project and potentially beyond it.

Similarly to other PIN organizational capacity assessments, the ACAT is a **self-assessment tool**. Regarding compatibility with other PIN capacity assessment tools, it is not recommended to use OCAT/Rapid OCAT and ACAT together with the same CSA. While OCAT is a comprehensive assessment tool that looks at overall organizational and technical strengthening aspects across various areas, including public sphere influencing, the ACAT tool has a narrower focus, allowing, in turn, for a more in-depth assessment of the CSAs' advocacy capacities. Thus, ACAT is better suited for projects focusing primarily on advocacy or that include high-quality advocacy outputs (campaigns, actions, interventions). As both tools would require a time investment from the project team and CSAs, PIN CP project staff must choose the tool that better matches the project focus, objectives and activities. Three different options are proposed below:

	Option 1 (greater time availability)	Option 2 (limited time availability)	Option 3
Projects with an advocacy component	OCAT (excluding section on Influencing the public sphere) + ACAT survey	Capacity assessment survey, integrating relevant ACAT sections /questions	
Projects with an exclusive advocacy focus			ACAT

PIN CP project staff can tailor this tool with support from PSI, CAD, and IFU advisors based on the type of CSAs targeted by the project (new, growing, mature, or a mix).

5 End of Project Phase

The End of Project Phase in a capacity strengthening project is a critical transition point that demands careful planning and execution. It involves assessing outcomes, transferring knowledge, ensuring sustainability and formally closing the project.

A project closure meeting should occur during the last quarter of the project implementation. The main purpose of the meeting is to make sure that all activities are finalized, the budget is spent, project documentation is archived, and lessons learned are discussed, documented, and disseminated. The staff invited to the meeting are the relevant members of a project team, support departments (MEAL, procurement, HR etc.) and CP management. It is important to ensure knowledge transfer and documentation at the project level and in terms of key capacity strengthening results. In this regard, some key considerations for project teams during the end of the project phase are included below:

Knowledge Capture: Identify tacit knowledge[11] within the project team and among stakeholders. Systematically document this knowledge, including lessons learnt, best practices, and challenges faced. Project managers should fill out the Project Learning Brief: this includes an overview of lessons learnt and best practices, and it should be shared with relevant regional colleagues, PSI Advisors and staff. A lessons learnt call is recommended to discuss the content of the Project Learning Brief with the colleagues mentioned above.

Internal Reflective Analysis: Encourage the project team and relevant partners to conduct a reflective analysis of the entire project lifecycle, including identifying areas where improvements can be made in future. Contact the PSI Civil Society Advisor for assistance with the design of this participatory workshop. An end-of-project learning workshop can take place with the participation of the project team and consortium partners. Whenever possible, invite PIN colleagues from other countries to listen in or, alternatively, offer a webinar for them to present lessons learnt after the workshop.

Knowledge Sharing: Utilize other channels, including social media, to share knowledge about the project achievements and learning. Organize a knowledge-sharing event or workshop to disseminate project findings, successes, and lessons learnt to a broader audience. Encourage discussions and networking among participants. The knowledge-sharing event can be combined with a closing ceremony or event to celebrate the project's achievements with key stakeholders, project participants and project team members.

Continuity: Make a list of CSAs with strong capacities in relevant areas/sectors that can be engaged in future projects (as mentors, trainers, experts). Keep a roster of recommended trainers and facilitators to assist future project teams in implementing capacity-strengthening projects. Use the generated evidence and lessons learned for the next phase and/or other CSA development projects per the CP Strategy.

Sustainability: Capacity strengthening is a long-term approach, with some donors considering it to take 3 to 5 years of continuous human and institutional support to develop a strong organization[36]. Whilst PIN's interventions in a project should not be considered in isolation, but rather as part of a broader network of support and opportunities that the CSA may have access to,

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[11] Tacit knowledge refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities an individual gains through experience that is often difficult to put into words or otherwise communicate. Tacit knowledge is sometimes known as "know-how" knowledge.

PIN Project Managers should nonetheless consider options for continuity of CSA support from other external stakeholders, post-project end. This could include ensuring that supported CSAs know where and how they can access funding opportunities and contacts of other support structures (e.g. other identified CSO capacity strengthening support projects, business incubators for social enterprises, relevant international networks that national networks may be able to align with). These elements should have been included in the capacity strengthening interventions themselves, but they could be revisited as part of project closure to ensure that the necessary information and resources have been cascaded.

As highlighted throughout this Guide, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to CSA capacity strengthening. This Guide seeks to provide guidance on a variety of approaches, tools, and methods that can be used in different contexts and for different types of CSAs.

Evolution of CSO project participants to co-implementing and strategic partners

It is important to consider transition options for those civil society organisations that are motivated and ready to evolve from project participants (recipients of sub-grants, capacity strengthening, etc.) to the position of project co-implementing or lead partners. This will feed into the Country Programme Partnership Strategy and build on long-term relationships, trust-building and investment efforts with local CSAs in the light of the localisation agenda. It is advisable that for this pool of CSAs, the CP continues working with the Partnership Advisor to develop a clear engagement strategy and further capacity strengthening investments.

For further information on any of the tools or resources in this Guide or to discuss design or implementation options in more detail, please contact PIN's Advisors from the Civil Society and Inclusive Governance Pillar team, who will be happy to assist.

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