



DEVELOPMENT
ALTERNATIVE



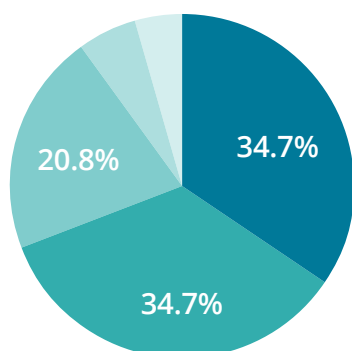
SHIFTING THE POWER:

Ziyad, young researcher
from Iraq

How to strengthen organisational capacity differently?

We investigated the root causes behind youth CSOs just surviving, not thriving, and we learned that **with tailored and needs-based support that recognises the diversity of organisational ambition**, youth CSOs will be able to truly play a leadership role in the sector and do the work they want to. This brief unpacks how to leverage internal, diverse learning spaces and maximise capacity strengthening opportunities.

How to support youth CSOs bridge capacity gaps in their organisation:



- Access to capacity building from external providers
- Funding for capacity building
- A platform to share learning with other organisations/networks/movements
- Knowing where I can access capacity building
- Dedicated time for capacity building

This graph shows that capacity issues are not a matter of lack of time or a lack of awareness of where to access capacity building. It's mostly an issue of funding (for the things they need/want to do) and seeking access to external expertise (the latter often perceived as something that lives outside individual organisations).

We found that...

“Capacity building” is widely understood as coming from external (international) spaces, largely framed by donor compliance requests and Western INGO standards of what a ‘good’ organisation looks like, without considering the diversity of learning spaces and moments to be leveraged within organisations. And while external perspectives are perceived as more valuable, youth CSOs want capacity support to be **designed around a detailed assessment of their needs**.

There are numerous, complex and simultaneous capacity needs for organisations, but no clear sense of prioritisation. It would be potentially irrelevant to identify what capacity needs organisations should target first, as these depend on each organisation’s work area.

While youth CSOs might not know which content areas to prioritise, they are **clear on a hierarchy of capacity needs**: organisational needs > role-specific individual needs > individual learning.

How can we do it differently?

Capacity strengthening support and funding for youth civil society **must be reprioritised and move away from “one size fits all”, donor-mandated capacity strengthening**. Instead, it should be a tailored and needs-based mix of ‘core skills’ for programme delivery (ie. fundraising, financial management, project management, and MEL) and specialised skills (ie. advocacy, communications, research), and support CSOs identify other capacity gaps to deliver better work.

There is an appetite for capacity support to be **transformative (and not compliance-focused and enable CSOs to have an equal voice** within the wider development sector.

Understandings of “capacity strengthening” in the CSO sector need to be widened to include internal loops of learning within organisations, and **stop perpetuating notions of capacity support as external opportunities**.

“ **EXPOSURE TO OTHER LEARNING AND EXCHANGE PROGRAMS WITH ESTABLISHED ORGANIZATIONS WILL HELP US GROW AND BE MORE EFFECTIVE.** ”
FROM A GRASSROOTS ORGANISATION IN ZIMBABWE.



This research series is coordinated by The Development Alternative, a group of organisations committed to testing and developing new ways of doing development that are truly led by young people and their communities. This project is funded with UK aid from the UK government.