

## **“Developing Capacity”**

By Allan Kaplan. Community Development Resource Association. South Africa. 1999 (The following is an unauthorized summary prepared by Rob Fairley.)

### **A model of organizational capacity - the goal is to build an organization that:**

- Is an autonomous, self-aware entity that defines its own sources of inspiration, focus and direction
- Is able to learn from its experience
- Is able to respond with flexibility, innovation and adaptability to changing circumstances
- Has a strategic outlook that enables it to act decisively to impact and change its circumstances and social context
- Motivates, inspires and develops its members
- Concentrates on developing a robust capability
- Is sustainable - organized for the long haul, rather than for the capacity to perform a particular task at a specific time.

### **Building an organization with capacity**

Organizations with capacity emerge from development of the organizational features listed below. This development must include an examination of these features in terms of their meaning for the whole organization and in terms of their relationships to one another.

#### ***1. Context and Conceptual Framework***

The first requirement for an organization with capacity is the development of a conceptual framework that reflects the organization’s understanding of its world.

#### ***2. Organizational “attitude” [and identity]***

An organization needs to build its confidence to act in and on the world in a way that it believes can be effective.

It must have a clear sense of its own identity in terms of its own strengths, its intended impact in its relationships with others and with its context.

#### ***3. Vision***

Organizational vision yields an understanding of *what* the organization intends to do. Organizational vision is developed through interplay between internal and external constraints and possibilities. There is a reality out there that must be responded to, and there is an inner inspiration that must be harnessed and focused.

#### **4. Strategy**

Strategy is the *how* by which the organization intends to realize its vision.

Strategy involves developing a coherent methodology of practice upon which the organization is designed and built.

***RF: Strategy must involve a coming to terms with history and with power – ours and theirs.***

#### **5. Culture**

Organizational culture is formed by the norms and values that are practiced in an organization; the way of life in the organization; the way things are done in the organization.

An organization with capacity is self-critical and self-reflective. It takes the time to understand itself, to learn from its successes and failures, to evaluate honestly, to become aware of its strengths and weaknesses, to hone its methodology and sharpen its strategic edge - rather than spending all its time on constant activity in the field.

#### **6. Structure**

Once organizational aims, strategy and culture are clear, it becomes possible to structure the organization. 'Form follows function' - if one tries to do this the other way around the organization becomes incapacitated.

#### **7. Skills**

Unless organizational capacity has been developed sufficiently to harness training and the acquisition of new skills, training courses do not 'take', and skills do not adhere. An organization without a strategy, without a sense of responsibility for itself and without an adequate structure, cannot make use of training courses and skills acquisition.

The organization must take the time to develop its members and organizers; not simply to ensure that they are trained. It encourages them to develop inner resourcefulness, creativity and a self-critical appreciation of their organization's practice. It honours such creativity and self critique.

#### **8. Material resources**

To be capacitated, an organization needs material resources: finances, equipment, office space, and so on. Where resources are lacking, however, the effects can be countered through organizational 'attitude'. Careful utilization of scarce resources becomes capacitating.