Enhancing Non-Governmental Organization capacity through organization development

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Abstract

Partnership with local NGOs has become an important feature in the development sector. The NGOs bring the advantage of being indigenous organization with close links to communities they serve. Organizational development as a management practice applies relevant knowledge areas, information, technologies and other measures to improve the processes of organizational change.

As NGOs have grown in scale they have recognized limits to their own effectiveness and begun to examine management and organizational issues in more depth. Organizations have recognized the need to have strong organizational framework if they are to continue to make any continuous impact in the development sector, attract aid funding and recognition.

NGOs continue to face multiple issues in credibility and competence and hence the need for OD interventions to assist them improve their internal structures .However there are challenges in strengthening the NGO sector in many African countries because despite NGOs having knowledge on good OD practices in reality they face significant challenges in translating OD principles into good practice.

Keywords: organization development, Non Govermental Organizations, capacity building, environmental CSOs

1. Introduction

Organizations that desire to better serve society and be more suitable for their role may need to continuously question the relevance and position of their programs' efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Organizations must be able to question the reason for any 'problems' occurring, evaluate their programs and self evaluate the organization itself. This is in fact one of the sectors greatest weak points, and one reason despite the clear desire for service to and transform communities, NGOs find it so difficult to change.

According to Woodman (2011:80)[10] organizations that fail to learn from errors become vulnerable to predictable 'surprises.' Organizations need to embrace change to become effective and satisfy donors, governments on project results. Change is required at organizational level because stakeholders demands have increased and technologies are rapidly evolving. Organizations therefore need to develop new strategies that build organizational structures and processes and change is required of individuals who make up the organizations through learning new skills because of job changes or elimination.

2. Perspectives in capacity and organizational development

Grant making organizations and international development agencies recognize the need for capacity development of NGOs. It rests on the principle that investing in organizations and individuals enables them develop capacities needed for them to thrive in undertaking development interventions at local level.

The expectations of NGO involvement have become more demanding and they now suffer from the consequences of under-investment in basic organizational functions and practices. NGOs sometimes lack the capacity to adapt and take on new functions due to weak internal systems and structures.

Organization development as a component of capacity building therefore involves considering the whole organization and taking the systems view of any interventions. One is required to avoid subjecting NGOs to interventions that may undo or undermine other capacity building efforts. Very few organizations receive capacity development support to strengthen their internal organization components.

An effective organization capacity approach should comprise of the following:

- Designed to improve the functioning of the organization.
- Interventions target the entire organization and system
- Involvement of organization staff who are in charge of their own learning

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[10] Woodman Richard, Pasmore William, Shani Abraham (2011) Research in Organization Change and Development. Bingley, UK: Emerald e-book collection, Ipswich; MA retrieved 2/2/2014

- Facilitate sustainable and progressive organizational change
- It is multidiscplinary and uses a variety of tools and mechanisms

According to Flower (2010:206)[11] for NGOs participation to grow in service delivery they need to be effective. Capacity building is therefore an intervention that supports to improve organization effectiveness in relation to mission and context and therefore should go beyond training.

Capacity building at whatever level needs to consider both the institutional and organizational context. It should be driven by a clear focus on the desired outcome which is "what are we trying to achieve?"

There are 3 key focus areas when doing capacity development within organizations technical, organizational development and institutional. A lot of donor support to NGOs focuses on the technical and institutional aspect but little or no focus is paid to the organization aspect which has meant over the years the NGOs are becoming weaker and have no sustainable structure and systems.

2.1 The organizational development concept

Organisation Development (OD) has burst into the NGO landscape as part of a renewed interest in capacity-building of NGOs. It originated in the USA as a discipline in the 1960s but its roots can be traced back as far as the 1930s.

The purpose of OD is to increase the effectiveness of an organization in terms of its mission, goals and objectives. It provides an opportunity for individuals to influence the way they relate at work, within the organization and the environment. Richard Woodman (2011:14)[12] argues that for an organization to be effective, leaders are required to re-align an organizational design, culture and people with continuous changes in the competitive environment.

It is interesting that the very organisations that were born to make changes within communities are actually highly sensitive to any kind of alteration in their surroundings and that they are themselves completely unprepared to undertake any kind of change as an essential part of their daily existence.

Organization sustainability is an ongoing process and a sustainable organization needs to be strong instituitionally, financially and morally. Unfortunately not even an exceptional strength in one can overcome weakness in others. So for any change to be effective it has to balance the three aspects to ensure the organizations is sustainable.

3.0 Organizational development interventions among environmental NGOs/CSOs.

The management of institutions is crucial and literature shows many institutions have low continuity and sustainability capacity. The findings in this section are based on analysis of organizational assessment exercise conducted for ten local NGOs in Kenya. The NGOs are supported with grants, technical assistance and OD interventions to improve their capacities to provide services within their communities.

The organizations are taken through an engaging process using an assessment tool and individual members of the organizations score elements in the tool and later discussions are held to get consensus and identify the reasons for the low or high scores in a particular section. Later the scores are analyzed and the teams discuss the way forward by select priority those areas to work on with support of the facilitator or another donor.

3.1 Common organizational development issues faced by NGOs

The following were the gaps identified among the organizations accessed (see table attached on page 14)

- **External relations**

    Eight out of 10 organizations had weak linkages with other stakeholders. Some key gaps lacked a strategy to guide them in interacting with other stakeholders within their target community, minimal engagement with the government departments in their districts, and minimal engage met with the media.

- **Finance management**

    Eight out of 10 of the organizations had weak internal controls. Gaps identified were lack of qualified finance staff, transactions were not recorded as per the requirement, ledgers for accounts not used, budgets done inconsistently and were donor driven, some of the organizations were not accounting for the funds as required due to inadequate or lack of finance policies and systems.

- **Monitoring , Evaluation and Reporting**

    Eight out of 10 of the organizations had gaps in this area, many were unable to report consistently due to weak data collection mechanism at the community level. Monitoring was done in an adhoc manner and reports only done as a donor requirement, staff lacked capacity in reporting and monitoring

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[11] Flower Alan, Acquaye-Baddo, Ubels N (2010) Capacity Development in Practice. London. Earthscan

[12] Woodman Richard, Pasmore William, Shani Abraham (2011) Research in Organization Change and Development. Bingley, UK: Emerald e-book collection, Ipswich; MA retrieved 2/2/2014

techniques and organizations lacked consistent M/E tools for monitoring work. In some of the organizations the M/E department was non-existent. The learning culture in the organizations was seen to lack as staff cited they did not have any reflections sessions to help them look at progress, challenges and use the experiences to improve the program, sharing of promising practices with other organizations was minimal.

- **Governance**

  Six out 10 of the organization had weak governance structure key reasons listed was the lack of a properly constituted board, incomplete documentation of board meetings, the board members did not meet regularly or even understand what their role was and this caused conflict between the board and staff. There was minimal involvement by the board members in resource mobilization and vision planning for the organization.

  Another challenge noted was a board member being a staff within the same organization and because some were founder members they interfered with the implementation of programs.

- **Program(Advocacy)**

  Six out of the 10 of the organizations were new to the area of advocacy and had no staff who could adequately engage in policy issues, some of the organizations lacked the influence required to address the issues they were championing in their communities.

- **Human resource management(HRM)**

  Six out of ten organizations had gaps in HR .In this area organizations had none or two staff in the organization, while others the staff lacked experience and skills for their positions, staff were not clear on what their roles were or what the was expected of them .Some listed issues of staff being dismissed without notice for either not following a directive that they felt was unethical or were subjected to harassment. Since some of the organizations were small the HR function was handled by the finance department staff who lacked relevant HR skills..

- **Resource mobilization**

  Five out of ten organizations had the following gaps: had one funding source and this meant resources were not enough and this affected staff recruitment and retention and the infrastructure that the organization had. Many organizations were not proactive in sourcing for funds and would wait until funds cease for them to look for another donor. Some of the boards were not actively involved in resource mobilization efforts.

- **Management**

  Five out of ten organizations had issues in management. They lacked a clear organogram which created conflict between management and staff, high staff turnover; the organization had no clear focus (vision) on what they engage in.

3.2 Organization development priorities identified by organizations

Once the gaps were identified the organizations discussed and selected priority interventions to improve their competence and action plans were developed to be monitored on quarterly basis through a committee established for each organization assessed. In summary the following were the interventions proposed.

Key area	Proposed intervention
External relations	Develop and implement a communication /external engagement strategy
Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation	Develop a monitoring and reporting framework and train staff in monitoring and reporting
Finance	Develop guidelines on organizational budgeting process Hire competent finance staff Develop finance manuals and policies Conduct periodic audits after every 2 years Build staff capacity on finance policies and procedures
Program(Advocacy)	Develop advocacy plan ,build staff capacity in advocacy techniques and policy engagement process and develop advocacy tools
Governance	Establish and induct board members Develop and implement a comprehensive board manual
Human Resource	Develop, complete ,improve HR policies/manuals Develop guidelines for the appraisal purposes, rewards and motivation schemes
Management	Develop an organizational strategic plan Develop organizational structure and policy documents to guide management Develop managerial supervisory skills
Resource mobilization	Develop resource mobilization strategy and staff capacity in resource mobilization

Table 2 *Priorities identified for OD support*

3.3 **Challenges that exist in providing OD support to Non Govermental Organizations**

There are several challenges experienced while engaging with organizations that in my view and experience caused delays in providing OD support and uptake of the OD interventions within various organizations I worked with.

3.3.1   Assessment fatigue

Many organizations participated in several assessments yet no support has been provided to help them address the needs identified. This built a negative attitude on assessments done as the organizations felt they made no sense. I realized as a facilitator for assessments, some of the organizations had done up to 3 assessments by different stakeholders and no support provided to address the gaps identified.

3.3.2   Fear of losing funding due to outcome of assessment

Organizations were seen to be reluctant to undergo an assessment for fear that they would be denied funding. This would result in some NGOs postponing the exercise for up-to 6 months to a year, while others during the assessment would not be open to discuss as they feared they would be fired once the exercise was done. Yet the information collected was to assist in providing OD support to the organization.

3.3.3   Lack of ownership by organization

OD interventions that are pursued in a half-hearted, or faulty manner are less likely to bring about meaningful change compared to those that have the full support of the people involved. While people in NGOs have often been committed activists, they have been reluctant to focus on management of the organization. The reason being that NGOs are characterized by a 'culture of action' in which leaders and staff are reluctant to devote significant amounts of time to improve organizational issues, because such a focus will interfere with the task of 'getting out there and doing something'.

3.3.4   Focus of development and organization strategy

Many organizations strategies tended to focus more on providing services to the 'poor communities' or 'vulnerable groups' through providing support on a short term periods. Many lacked strategies that target on building the organization's sustainability in terms of its internal structures.

3.3.5   Uncommitted leadership and governance structures

The relations between board members and staff cause tensions. Board members were perceived to be unwilling to carry out their responsibilities of providing governance within the organizations.

The difficulty of managing NGOs with operations in several countries was also a barrier. Organizations with a

headquarter office in another country had to get approval to undertake any organizational changes, this caused delays in providing support as approvals took long to be communicated.

3.3.6   Size of organization and staffing

When the organization is small and has few staff it becomes difficult to do much support and one can only focus on incremental OD support that is not too complex and expensive for the organization. Staff turnover also affected the support to be given to an organization.

Key management staff retention is low and sometimes it is difficult to consistently address OD interventions within the organization. For example where an NGO lacks a director or manager for over a year this slowed implementation of OD interventions identified.

3.3.7   Minimal or no Funding to support OD interventions

Some OD interventions require funds for them to be implemented; for example developing a strategic plan. Yet few donors provide funds for this and it becomes difficult for the organizations to make the required changes. Overreliance on donor funds can stunt or undermine the NGO's ability to tap or explore its own alternative resources to support OD interventions.

3.3.8   Project mentality focus

Project mentality often encouraged by the practices of donors who focus on activities of the organization at project or department level. Project funding in most instances is inflexible and produces uncertainties which may lead to delays in implementation. This mentality makes members of the organization not to see the whole picture and how the lack of proper internal structures or lack of capacity can impact on their performance.

3.3.9   Delay in review and approval of policies and documents

Many at times it was difficult to measure or assess the extent of use of the policies and tools developed. It took very long (six months to one year) for the Board and management to review and approve the policies to developed. Without a policy being reviewed, approved and instuitionalized it becomes difficult for management and staff to enforce it.

3.3.10   Inaccesibility among NGOs working in conflict zones:

It was a challenges for OD officers to work effectively with the organizations in conflict zones. Many times conducting the assessments or providing support had to be postphoned due to conflict and tension in the surrounding environment.

3.3.11   Monitoring and evaluation of OD interventions

The lack of an adequate system for monitoring and evaluating the impact of OD interventions is a challenge. With the exception of the information sometimes requested by its financers, the control, monitoring and evaluation of OD interventions has never been a priority in many organizations.

Assessing the impact of OD interventions is challenging as the interplay of internal, external factors and changing environment complicates the task of attribution. Finally the culture of many NGOs and their leadership or management styles do not embrace the need for Monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.

One of the things noted is that donors will concentrate on building the technical capacity of the staff and forget that the staff work in the organizations where operations need to be improved for the whole organization to improve performance.

The challenges listed can be addressed when the organizations being given support own the OD process and understand the link between performance and internal organization gaps. Many organizations perceive that capacity development interventions on the lower end of the hierarchy (skills development) are more crucial yet this will not change the fundamental patterns in the organization.

3.4 Factors that hinder or support effective adoption of OD interventions within NGOs

There are distinctive characteristics of NGOs that might encourage or slow changes from happening. The following observations are more typical of NGOs and may explain their high or low adaptation to change.

3.4.1   Low flexibility in the organizational structure

An organization's value clearly shapes its structure and as such is usually less flexible than a business, greatly slowing any process of change.

3.4.2   Emotional connection to the organization

The presence of people with a high emotional connection to the organization or project they are working on is a common feature of many NGOs. People with an emotional connection may have difficulty in seeing where former ways of thinking or planning are no longer effective and need to be changed. Organizations that do not renew their personnel, particularly in areas requiring leadership run the risk of becoming stagnated by the excessive protection of the project and overlooking an ever-changing environment. These organizations are

unable to detect the need for change.

3.4.3   Culture of participation

The culture of participation is without a doubt a feature of many organizations in the sector. There are numerous NGOs that consider participation as an important value to protect. It is not unusual to find significant crises related to the process of professionalizing management or organizational growth that are linked to defending a participatory culture, or further still to the tradition of assembly. The culture of participation is strongly related to the way these organizations were created

3.4.4   Culture of consensus

Given the characteristics of NGOs, achieving the full consensus of all members is incredibly complex and yet there are many organizations where this culture is deeply rooted. Conflict is perceived as an attack on the very pillars of the organization and as such is ignored or its existence not accepted.

3.4.5   Founder syndrome

Another challenge that affects organization is resistance from the founders, or more specifically a failure to see the possible need to change, even in organizations where leaders want to progress, a high level of emotional attachment can delay change when the same individuals show opposition. A failure to understand the reasons for the change, or seeing the change as a threat to the very core of an organization can generate very strong reactions of resistance.

3.4.6   Diversity of stakeholders

The diversity of stakeholders –founders, governors, members, donors, workers, volunteers, beneficiaries etc with their numerous roles and levels of dedication is a key feature of NGOs, but more importantly it is their will to participate in the key decisions made within the organization (often reflected in the lack of objectives) and that is often accompanied by a characteristic emotional attachment to the project. The number of stakeholders involved becomes a source of conflict and clearly makes reaching consensus in any process of change difficult.

3.4.7   Leadership styles

The cost of making change can be incredibly high as the leaders see their position in the organization and relationship with the teams totally transformed. Leading a process of change requires a firm attitude that is often lacking and this slows the process. The leadership style within an organization is seen to affect internal transformation as decisions must be made to instigate a change in the organization.

3.4.8   The unclear distribution of roles between management and governing bodies

The confusion of roles between the governing bodies and management is a common defect of many NGOs. In small, less professionally structured organizations governing bodies tend to be very involved in the daily operations of the organization, exercising strategic leadership and an important part of the operational management.

When the organization is in its initial stages it may be common (and quite often necessary) and clearly contributes to its dynamics. However this is not true in the long-term.The management team should be running the daily operations of the organization under the supervision of the board.

3.4.9   Financial dependence and scarce resources

Organizations have limited resources compared to the volume of activity undertaken. They may detect new needs of one of its markets, but then are required to convince the donors who will assist them in addressing the need and adapting the work of the organization. However donors can often delay change and financial dependence on certain donors may mean that an NGO is less daring or innovative.

3.4.10   Politically active culture

This means the organization focus is on action rather than reflection. This notion is based on the idea that NGOs were created to provide a solution to an outstanding need that they consider urgent hence time, effort and resources available are dedicated to what is seen as the basic mission of the organization. In smaller organizations the politically active culture is usually quite apparent. An organization that has limited resources may not detect any need to change, or if it is identified, may suffer from the lack of will or ability to make any reflection on its management.

4.0 Possible Good practice when supporting Organization Development in local NGOs.

The following are some learning based from experience working with NGOs/CSOs that can promote effective engagement when providing OD support.

4.1.1 Understanding the entire organisation

An organizational change program needs to recognize that the integrated nature of an organisation and how a change in one element will have an impact on other parts**.** Change has a holistic dimension (socio cultural, political, personal and technical).One has to realize that organizational change is not just a technical exercise. There is need to factor in people and their feelings, values, beliefs and secondly the cultural and political realities of any organisation. If change is looked at as a technical exercise only and one ignores the rest, it is unlikely to

produce a lasting outcome.

4.1.2 Creating a sense of urgency on the need to change

The determining factor of success for an OD intervention is that the NGO itself own the change process. To go through change they must see the importance of the change and have a vision of what the organisation could look like, once the change is finally implemented.

4.1.3 Leadership support and commitment

The level of commitment to a change program is closely linked with the nature of leadership support. Unless leadership is committed to supporting change efforts, they are doomed to fail. Leadership must be the key driving force behind the change.

4.1.4 Commitment and involvement of key stakeholders

The commitment of the key staff and board to the change process, particularly those who will be responsible for implementing the change is important. One realizes that the change cuts across different levels and everyone has to participate.

4.1.5 Identify change agents (Champions)

Having a task force or group carrying forward the change process internally needs to have a mandate from those already involved and the authority from the board or management team to make decisions. If they do not have the political power to facilitate change, they will soon become marginalised and frustrated.

4.1.6 Develop and build on the existing and potential strengths

When conducting the diagnosis one realizes that the organization has some strength this should be used as a positive force for change. This ensures the organization is not overwhelmed by many changes at once and organizations have within them strengths that can be harnessed in a positive way.

4.1.7 Engage skilled consultants

It is important for OD practioneers intending to work with organizations to have a clear understanding about the unique issues that the organizations experience. It is important for them to understand how organizations evolve, the culture, perceptions and some barriers to be encountered at different stages.

4.1.8. Use an appropriate mix of approaches and tools

Interventions in OD require one to adopt a variety of tools and processes that are considered relevant and appropriate to the context, size, culture and age of the organisation. It requires one to understand the stage of development that the organization is at and be able to diagnose the unique needs it faces at this particular point in time.

4.1.9 Develop and trigger change with care

Organizations are at different phases of growth and capacity and it is important to understand the history and complexity of the organization. This will help minimize frustration caused when change takes long especially for donors.

Donors can trigger an organizational change process on the agenda and if they do initiate the change process, it can have deep implications on how organizational change is carried out .This will determine whether ownership is with the client as donors control key resources and hence the process runs the risk of being perceived as donor imposed change. A second concern is the intervention becomes a one-off exercise to deal with a crisis and not a process that is in-built and part of organizational life.

4.1.10 Develop local OD providers

Effective OD work often involves long-term mentorship and coaching. Donors and funders understanding of the changing context must think strategically about supporting the development of local OD capacity. This can include building capacity of existing NGOs that provide OD consultancy services by developing individual OD consultants and /or creating a capacity-building centre of excellence or unit.

4.1.11 Donor commitment to see process through

Implementation of OD interventions often involves long-term support, which can be costly in terms of time and money. If the donor decides to support an OD process, it should be committed to see it through and not stop halfway leaving the 'partner' stranded.

4.1.12 Co-ordinate with other agencies and within departments

Donors supporting OD need to ensure that there is co-operation amongst them. An OD process can easily be undermined by another donor who does not share the same understanding of capacity-building or their role in the process, different donor policies and approaches may well confuse the process.

Secondly, there is need for consistency and co-operation within the donor offering OD support. For example, a unit within the donor organisation is supportive of a long term process, while another unit focused on short-term demands; this scenario sends conflicting messages to the partner receiving support. This often manifests itself in conflicting approaches between program and finance departments.

5.0 Conclusion

For an organization to maximize performance, it requires the capacity to structure and restructure itself to adapt to changing internal and external conditions. Organization Development (OD) therefore is as an important component that creates a whole system change in terms of organization design and culture change that is aligned with the organization's strategy.

The prevailing notion is that OD comprises of a group of consultants processing assessments for the purposes of funding an agency. There is a great need for the leadership and management of organizations to understand the role OD plays in an organization and align it to its strategy so as to achieve its full potential. The lack of an OD intervention process that is aligned to an organization spending means it is not given priority.

Leadership and management buy-in is a big contributing force in the adoption of organizational development interventions. Leadership and management support at all levels ensures realistic assessment of problems and opportunities, establishment of priorities, and the mobilization of internal and external resources to address the priorities identified

In the future it will become increasingly important for HRM managers to take lead in organizational change activities. Human Resource (HR) and OD have certain elements in common hence through utilizing a systems approach, HR and OD practitioners can work together to support an organization's pursuit for sustainable long term performance.

Failure to create continuously adaptive organizations leads to decline or death of organizations. OD assessments undertaken within organizations are a powerful learning experience if done by an organization for itself or done with a facilitating consultant in a highly interactive environment. In my view, organizational development interventions should be seen as key learning opportunities that could contribute to an organization's growth and survival.

What factors make a partnership or an alliance succeed or fail? The action research methodology employed in OD serves to identify if an effective planned change process will address the partnership/alliance objectives by determining what phase of the alliance will require what intervention or changes for it to meet its objectives. OD process also an important element to be considered to support partnership growth and survival.

The following remain a concern for OD practitioners as they continue to engage with local NGOs in the development and environmental sector.

- Building sustainable high-performing organisation where leadership takes an active role in change management.
- Appropriately building proactive and empowered environmental organizations using OD interventions.
- Promotion of organizational climate that harnesses human potential and creativity at work to encourage and build on continuous learning within an organisation.
- The challenge of assessing and measuring of change as a result of OD intervention. Many of the measurements have focused on the quantitative indicators and gaps exist in measuring qualitative indicators in OD due to aspects of attribution.

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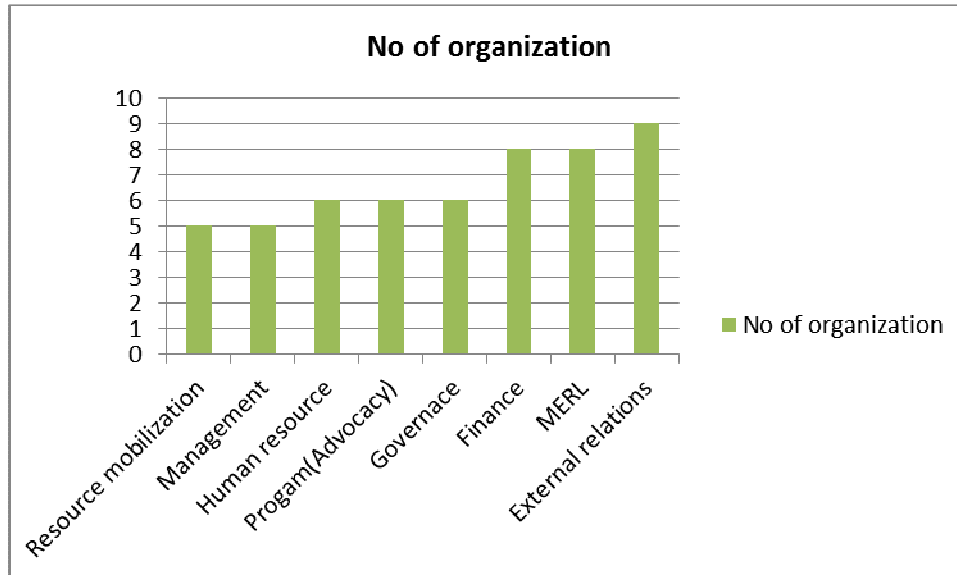
Table 1 Number of the organizations with gaps in the assessed areas

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