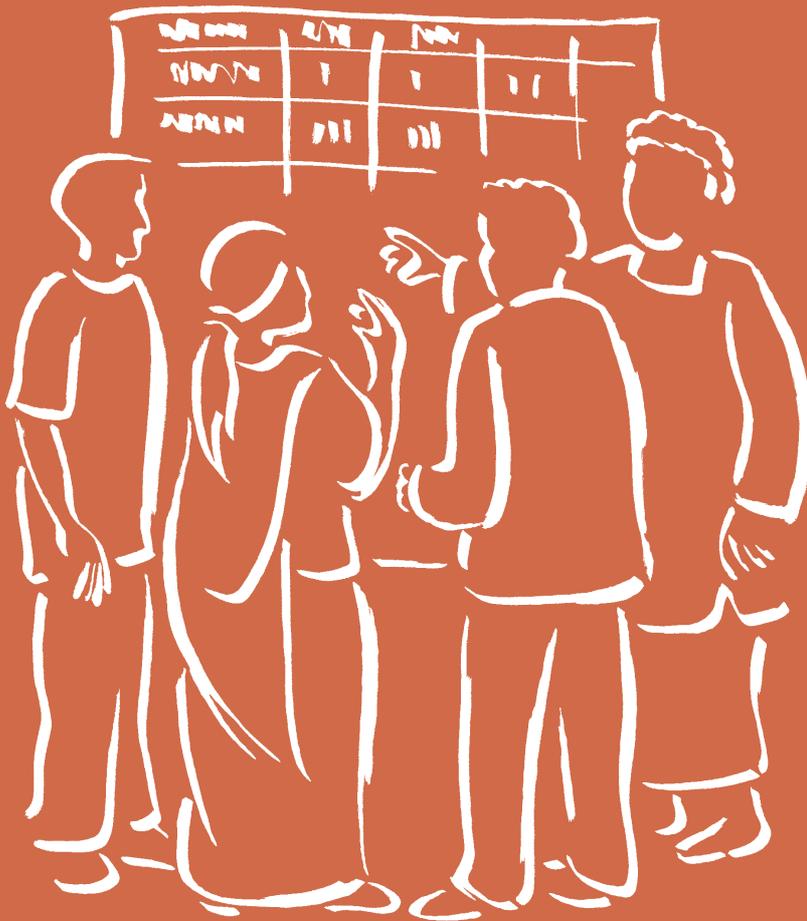


Capacity self-assessment





**Capacity
self-assessment**

by Bill Crooks

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If you wish to give feedback on CASA write to Tearfund or e-mail roots@tearfund.org. Knowing how Tearfund's resources are used by Partners and other organisations helps us to improve the quality of future resources.

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Introduction

What is CASA?

CASA stands for CApacity Self-Assessment. It is a tool for gaining an overall impression of an organisation, giving a picture of the stage of its development and providing insight into its current and potential impact.

Although CASA is modelled on other assessment tools, it aims to be specifically relevant to Christian development organisations. It is good to reflect, affirm what is good and seek God's guidance.

Quality assessment tools are used widely and found to be beneficial because they help organisations to improve their standard of service and their overall results. They enable management teams to focus on areas that should be given priority if organisations are to improve.

It is hoped that this tool will highlight positive aspects of organisations so that they can be encouraged and affirmed. This tool will also draw attention to those areas needing improvement. The assessment should prove useful as comparisons are made over time.

The CASA tool may not be relevant for every situation, so we encourage organisations to adapt and improve the tool according to their individual needs. If CASA is adapted, please acknowledge Tearfund as the source, and perhaps send us a sample copy. CASA is a checklist used in a participatory way. This checklist approach is not the only means of assessing an organisation. It might be appropriate to use other approaches to complement CASA in order to gain a wider perspective.

We suggest a number of options for using CASA (see page 11). Many of the options involve working through a number of stages, which we explain on pages 27–31. If you wish to work through these stages, we recommend that you use a good facilitator, employing one from outside the organisation if necessary.

The CASA tool is divided into three assessment modules. These can be selected according to the individual needs of the organisation or they can be used as a complete set.

The three modules cover three themes:

- INTERNAL ORGANISATION – who we are
- EXTERNAL LINKAGES – who we work with
- PROJECTS – what we do.

Each of the themes covers a range of key areas relating to that theme.

MODULE 1 **Internal organisation**

This module defines what the organisation wants to be, expressed through its purpose, vision, mission, values and identity. These are reflected in the strategies, management, systems and structures of the organisation.

- Key areas**
- Mission
 - Compassion
 - Non-discrimination
 - Governing body
 - Planning
 - Organisational structure
 - Financial reporting procedures
 - Human resource management
 - Christian distinctiveness
 - Strategy
 - Leadership
 - Staff participation
 - Financial management
 - Administrative systems
 - Human resources
 - Self-reflection and learning

MODULE 2 **External linkages**

This module focuses on how the organisation relates to others. When informal and formal relationships with other organisations are strengthened, the capacity of the organisation is built because it gains additional resources and support.

- Key areas**
- Relationships with other organisations
 - Advocacy
 - Relationship with the church
 - Capacity to obtain and mobilise resources

MODULE 3 **Projects**

This module is about what the organisation does, how well it performs and how much impact it is having on those it is serving. The projects can be varied: from providing services to mobilising communities and local organisations for social transformation. It is critically important that the projects are consistent with an organisation's overall purpose and vision.

- Key areas**
- Good practice
 - Targeting
 - Monitoring and evaluation
 - Sustainability
 - Beneficiary participation
 - Local culture
 - Achievement of objectives
 - Restoration of hope and relationships
 - Christian witness

Glossary

This glossary explains the meaning of difficult words according to the way that they are used in CASA.

adolescence	the period between childhood and adulthood
advocacy	helping poor people to address underlying causes of poverty, bring justice and support good development through influencing the policies and practices of the powerful
aerial	from the air
affirmation	the act of showing approval of something
appraise	to assess performance
audit	to examine financial records to check that they are correct
brainstorm	to state whatever immediately comes to mind about an issue
competent	suitable for the task
consistent	in agreement with
constitution	a written statement outlining the principles by which an organisation is governed
deficit	the amount of money spent which exceeds the budget
delegation	passing responsibility for something onto someone else
discrepancy	a difference between two things that should agree with each other
distinctiveness	having a unique characteristic
equity	fairness
hierarchy	where members of a group are categorised according to responsibility, ability or status
impact	long-term sustainable changes – positive or negative, expected or unexpected
inconsistencies	differences that conflict with each other

integral mission	reaching out to the local community to transform lives materially and spiritually
integrity	having high moral values or professional standards
intimidation	when someone is made to feel inadequate or fearful
key area	a sign of an organisation's health
mission statement	written document that outlines how an organisation will achieve its vision
morale	the level of confidence or optimism felt by a group of people
non-discrimination	the practice of treating different people equally
nurturing	helping someone to develop, eg: through training
objectives	the changes that a project will make directly (by way of outputs to fulfil the purpose) and which contribute towards the overall goal of the organisation
outcome	the result of project activities
output	what the activities of a project produce
plenary	the whole group
purpose	the expected change or impact as a result of a project
replicate	to copy
rigorous	very accurate and thorough
stakeholder	a person (eg: project beneficiary, member of the local community, government official) with an interest in, or concern for, a piece of work that an organisation undertakes
transparency	open communication by the leadership with the whole organisation

How does CASA work?

An organisation might decide it needs to do all of the CASA modules, or it might decide it needs to do only one or two. Some of the modules have many key areas, so the modules have been divided into sections. Each section has the same format of seven stages. Here we provide a brief overview so that you can reach an understanding of how the CASA tool works. We explain these stages in more detail on page 27.

- Stage 1 DISCUSSION STARTER** to help participants think in an interesting way about the aspect of the organisation they are about to assess.
- Stage 2 QUESTIONNAIRE**, which contains indicators that relate to the key areas for the module. The participants are given copies of the questionnaire and complete it on their own. They give each indicator a score according to the extent to which they feel the indicator applies to the organisation.
- Stage 3 SUMMARY SCORE SHEET** Indicators in the questionnaire are matched with the key areas. Each participant transfers their scores for each indicator to the relevant box on the handout. They then find their average score for each key area.
- Stage 4 PLENARY SCORING** The individual average scores are transferred to the plenary scoring table on a large sheet of paper.
- Stage 5 ANALYSIS** The participants review the patterns shown in the plenary scoring table to identify what the main strengths and weaknesses of the organisation are.
- Stage 6 RANKING PRIORITIES FOR CAPACITY BUILDING** Using the analysis, the three weakest areas in which capacity should be built are selected. The participants discuss how these areas will be addressed and what resources will be needed.
- Stage 7 ACTION PLANNING** The participants set a plan for how they will address the areas they have prioritised and establish who will take responsibility for the changes in a given time frame.

Preparing for **CASA**: why, who, when, how long?

It is vitally important to plan for CASA. The facilitator should look through the format of the CASA tool and adapt it to fit the context of the organisation. You should meet with the leadership, staff and board committee of the organisation before planning. This will provide an idea of the context in which CASA is to be carried out. You need to decide the most appropriate content (indicators) and process (see Options for using CASA, on page 11).

- Are the indicators appropriate? Are there additional indicators? Are there some that should not be used because they might cause friction within the organisation?
- Do you need to cover all the modules, or should you just focus on one or two?
- To what extent does the organisation need to be affirmed at the present time? If morale is low, what action can you take to make sure the process really affirms the organisation?
- What is the best way of using the tool – with the whole organisation or with specific groups?
- Is it necessary to alter the process we suggest? For example, you might want to use anonymous scoring to minimise friction.
- Could you bring in elements of other assessment tools?

It is vital that the content and process of the assessment fit the nature and character of the organisation. Those participating in the assessment should have time and support to read and understand the indicators. For a successful assessment, the indicators should be owned and seen as useful by the organisation.

A good organisational assessment is 80% facilitation and 20% tool. When an assessment is not successful it is usually because more emphasis is put on the tool than on the facilitation.

Good organisational assessment facilitation is all about staying in touch with the mood of the group. Work with their energy and know what to do at the right time so that the energy stays high. The energisers on page 19 might help with this.

Motivation for assessment

It is important to be very clear about what is driving the need for this organisational assessment. It can be for a range of reasons such as:

- key stage in the growth and development of the organisation
- need for clarifying the future direction and priorities of the organisation
- changes in leadership
- internal or external crisis which results in a need for major changes in the organisation
- expanding to respond to emerging needs or demands
- scaling down programmes.

Ownership of the assessment

It is important that the leadership, the staff and the board committee are aware of the need for the organisational assessment and are supportive of the process and the outcomes.

Options for using CASA

- All modules in phases over a set period of time.
- Selected modules.
- Selected key areas from one or different modules.
- Use the questionnaire for one-to-one interviews.
- Carry out the process in small groups, eg: the board committee, leadership and field staff.
- Do not use the questionnaire in its current format but select elements of the tool for guided discussion.
- Combine the key areas with other organisational assessment tools.

Setting aside time for doing the assessment

The CASA tool is divided into three modules. Each module can take between one and two days depending on the number of participants. It is not essential to do all the modules of the assessment at the same time. In fact, it is advisable to space them out so there is enough time to take action after each module. We suggest workshop formats for doing CASA on page 15.

It is important to find a time that is suitable for all staff participating, and when there is not too much pressure on the organisation. Timing also needs to take account of the seasons so that field staff can travel to and from the venue easily.

Who should attend?

Ideally all staff should be available to attend the modules. This enables everyone to own any changes that result from the assessment. Doing the assessment together helps the team-building process as insights are shared and greater understanding of the organisation is achieved.

However, it might not be appropriate to carry out the assessment with all members of staff at the same time. It might be more useful to carry out the assessment with specific groups at different times.

In some situations it is useful if independent observers, who know the organisation well, are present to give a more objective view. They may be people from another NGO, local government or members of the local Christian community.

Making the most of the assessment

An assessment process can be viewed as negative and threatening to the board committee, leadership and staff. To avoid this, it is important to plan for CASA so that it:

- begins by affirming what is good about the organisation
- builds on the positive energy and motivation of the organisation.

One way of achieving this is to use the principles of Appreciative Enquiry, which are explained further on page 26.

Bringing an organisation together for a day or two is a huge amount of time away from project and administrative work, so it is important to make the most of the time that has been set aside. Here are some tips for making the best use of the time.

- Make sure there is a good venue with lots of space for being together as one large group as well as working in small groups.
- Try to find a venue away from the office, so staff can focus on the assessment without distractions.
- Use the opportunity of the assessment to celebrate the good things that have happened in the organisation and to praise staff.
- The assessment is a time to reflect on where the organisation is going; this can be linked to some biblical reflections at the beginning or end of the day.
- Think through how the action plans will be used and managed after the assessment.
- Make sure it is a fun event that everyone will enjoy and want to do again.
- Try to include an appropriate team-building element which might include a good meal or an evening out doing something together.

How to use the results of an organisational assessment

The results of the organisational assessment can be used to encourage staff and others about the strengths and achievements of the organisation. Examples can be highlighted and talked about or written up on a poster or in a newsletter. They can be shared with the board committee and others connected with the organisation. Maybe the successes and strengths of the organisation can be celebrated by having a special meal together.



- Sharing the results with the staff is a good thing as it allows them to feel involved with the future plans for the organisation. It will enable them to take responsibility for the future, and it demonstrates the openness and transparency of the leadership.
- The results of the organisational assessment can be used to identify issues that need strengthening and working on. These can be ranked in order of priority according to the needs and the capacity of the staff in terms of time available to address them. The action planning sheets in each module can be used as a guide for doing this.
- The results can highlight training needs of staff. They might also lead to a proposal for funding being submitted to donors. Some donors may suggest training courses or identify an appropriate consultant or specialist to work with staff on building up their knowledge and skills.
- The organisational assessment can be carried out each year. The pattern of the results developing over a number of years enables the leadership to track progress and changes made. The annual results can be displayed for all staff to see, enabling discussions about the impact of future changes and what can be done to address them. We recommend that you keep copies of the plenary score sheets in a safe place so that you can compare them with scores in future years.

Questions for discussion

- How do you celebrate the successes and achievements of your organisation?
- What are some of the best ways to communicate the results of an organisational assessment to staff and others?
- Who in your organisation would be good at co-ordinating the action planning and making sure it happens?
- Can you think of other creative ways of using the results of an organisational assessment?

What are the risks of doing an organisational assessment?

CASA stimulates reflection and analysis of how an organisation is at a particular moment in time. The most important part of this type of approach is how the discussions are facilitated to make the most of findings.

Participatory assessments provide an opportunity for staff to share concerns and issues about the organisation. New insights are gained and it might be the first time that staff feel able to share their concerns. In our experience of using the tool, this is a good thing. Giving staff space to share their concerns helps to build a sense of togetherness in an organisation.

However, there are risks involved in this type of process. It is a good idea to use the skills and expertise of a competent facilitator who can not only use the tool in a way that is useful to the organisation, but can also manage some of the problems that might occur.

Some of these risks and dangers are listed below and might help you to identify a good facilitator to guide you through the tool. It might be that someone in your organisation is a good facilitator who is widely respected and understands how to work with groups. Otherwise you could think about using an external facilitator who is recognised for their competence and skills in this area.

RISKS AND DANGERS	ABILITIES OF A FACILITATOR
The assessment process raises expectations of staff members. They want to see all the changes happen in the shortest possible time.	Ability to help staff and stakeholders identify their priorities and manage expectations in line with the capacities of the organisation.
Staff and stakeholders are afraid of voicing their concerns in case they are viewed negatively by other members of staff and the leadership.	Ability to create an atmosphere of trust and openness to share for both staff and the leadership of the organisation.
The assessment uncovers tensions that have never been fully resolved.	Ability to creatively manage tension and conflict.
Some members of staff feel vulnerable as areas of their work become assessed and analysed.	Ability to create a supportive and affirming environment for staff members to reflect on their own practice and work.
Leadership are worried about how they are perceived by the staff and others.	Ability to create a supportive and affirming environment for the leadership to reflect on their own practice and work.

Suggested workshop formats

CASA can be carried out in one- or two-day sessions. The modules do not have to be done in order. They can be selected according to the priorities of the organisation at a particular time.

A summary of the CASA modules and the time needed according to size of organisation is outlined below.

This is a guide based on the experience of working with 15 partner organisations. It does not take into account issues such as translation.

	CONTENT	TIME REQUIRED FOR PARTICIPANT NUMBERS:		
		5-8	8-15	15-30
INTRODUCTION	What is an organisational assessment?	1 day	1 day	1 day
MODULE 1 Internal organisation	Mission and values	0.5-1 day	1-1.5 days	1.5-2 days
	Management 1	0.5-1 day	1-1.5 days	1.5-2 days
	Management 2	0.5-1 day	1-1.5 days	1.5-2 days
MODULE 2	External linkages	0.5-1 day	1-1.5 days	1.5-2 days
MODULE 3 Projects	Project planning and implementation	0.5-1 day	1-1.5 days	1.5-2 days
	Project outcomes	0.5-1 day	1-1.5 days	1.5-2 days

The chart below suggests how CASA can be done over a period of one year.

MODULE	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
What is an organisational assessment?	X											
Internal organisation	Mission and values		X									
	Management 1		X									
	Management 2		X									
External links					X							
Projects	Project plans and implementation							X				
	Project outcomes										X	

Key factors to consider

- Space between modules to give time to process the results and implement the action plans
- Timing of the modules to ensure maximum availability of staff and others
- Access to an external facilitator if required
- Enough time to prepare for the module.

Outline programme for a one day workshop for each module

STEPS	COMMENTS	APPROXIMATE TIME
Welcome and introductions	Explain the context and purpose of the assessment and the programme of the day	30 mins
STEP 1 Discussion starter	This may need to be adapted to the context or an alternative found	60 mins
BREAK		
STEP 2 Questionnaire	This includes time to introduce and take participants through the process	30 mins
STEP 3 Summary score sheet	This should be talked through once all participants have filled in the questionnaire	15 mins
BREAK GROUP ENERGISER		
STEP 4 Plenary feedback	If possible use stickers	45 mins
BREAK LUNCH		
STEP 5 Analysis	Work as a group to analyse the patterns and the causes of strengths and weaknesses	45 mins
BREAK GROUP ENERGISER		
STEP 6 Ranking priorities	We recommend a participatory ranking technique	45 mins
BREAK		
STEP 7 Action planning	This should include a discussion about how the results will be communicated to other stakeholders	45 mins
Evaluate the process	The aim is to learn how to improve the programme and the approach for next time	15 mins

Two day workshop

A two day workshop may be appropriate where there is a large number of participants. It may be useful to have different stakeholder groups go through each module independently from the other. The focus groups could share their findings at the end of the second day.

Outline programme for a two day workshop for each module**DAY 1**

STEPS	COMMENTS	APPROXIMATE TIME
Welcome and introductions Set up the different stakeholder focus groups	Explain the context and purpose of the assessment and the programme of the day	30 mins
STEP 1 Discussion starter	This may need to be adapted to the context or an alternative found	60 mins
BREAK		
STEP 2 Questionnaire	This includes time to introduce and take participants through the process	30 mins
STEP 3 Summary score sheet	This should be talked through once all participants have filled in the questionnaire	15 mins
BREAK GROUP ENERGISER		
STEP 4 Plenary feedback	If possible use stickers	45 mins
BREAK LUNCH		
STEP 5 Analysis	Work as a group to analyse the patterns and the causes of strengths and weaknesses	45 mins
BREAK GROUP ENERGISER		
STEP 6 Ranking priorities	We recommend a participatory ranking technique	45 mins
BREAK		
STEP 7 Plenary: Stakeholder groups share their ranked priorities		60 mins
Summing up the day		15 mins

DAY 2

STEPS	COMMENTS	APPROXIMATE TIME
STEP 8 Finalise priorities		60 mins
BREAK		
STEP 9 Set up working groups for developing action plans		60 mins
BREAK GROUP ENERGISER		
STEP 10 Presentation to plenary of the working group action plans	This is the opportunity to adjust the action plans	45 mins
Summing up the process		15 mins
Evaluate the process	The aim of this is to learn how to improve the programme and the approach for next time	15 mins

Icebreakers and energisers

Icebreakers and energisers are vital because they help to keep the group alert and allow participants to laugh and enjoy the process. Many of the activities listed below can be used as team building exercises and will help new members of an organisation to get to know their colleagues better. Please take time to read the instructions and feel free to adapt the activities to your own context.

'Getting to know you' exercises

- **BINGO** Draw a grid made up of around 15 boxes. Write different things in the boxes like 'Enjoys singing' or 'Always snores at night'. Give out copies to all the participants. The participants then go and find people that the boxes describe. They ask each person to sign the relevant box. The winner is the person who completes the grid first. The participants will learn many interesting facts about each other.
- **IDENTITY PARADE** Each participant writes down words or draws a picture that describe themselves. This is done silently. They pin the picture on themselves and walk around so that everyone can look at each other. Pictures are then shuffled and participants are asked to identify the person to whom the picture belongs.
- **CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS** Sit in a circle. One person starts by using an adjective starting with the same letter as their first name, followed by their first name (ie: Interesting Isaac, Smart Sarah). The next person in the circle repeats the first person's adjective and name and then adds their own. This continues around the circle with the last person having to repeat all other names in order and end with their own.
- **TWO TRUE, ONE FALSE** Everyone in the group has to say two true statements about themselves and one false statement. The rest of the group has to guess which one is false. You may be surprised. You can learn some interesting things about each other!

Trust-building exercises

- **WEB GAME** Take a ball of string and ask one person to hold one end and wrap it around their wrist. Then they throw the ball of string to someone else in the room and either say something positive about that person or something they have done to inspire them. The person who catches the ball of string then wraps it around their wrist and throws it to someone else, and so on until a whole web of string is tying people to each other.
- **BALLOON GAME** Everyone writes down one piece of information about themselves on a piece of paper and puts it inside a balloon. They blow up the balloon and throw it into the middle of the circle of participants. One by one, pop the balloons and guess who the pieces of information inside belong to.

Energisers

- **QUESTIONS ON THE BALLOON** Pass one balloon around the circle and ask each person to write a question on it. Then pass it around the circle and ask each person to answer three questions on the balloon.
- **HUMAN RANKING** Ask everyone to line up according to their month and day of birth. This can also be done with length of hair, height, weight and so on. If this is done in silence this can add a new dynamic to the group and provides an opportunity to explore how a group works together. You could ask someone to leave the room, decide on the type of ranking and get the person sent outside to come back in and try to guess what sort of ranking it is that the group is representing. This is a useful game for understanding the need for analysis and the importance of studying patterns and themes.
- **FAST LEMON** This game is for four players or more. First divide the group into two or more equal lines. Then give the leader of each line a full-length pencil and a lemon. As the teams line up in single file, mark a starting line and finish line on the floor (about six metres away at most). The object is to push the lemon with the pencil along the floor in a straight line. Each player must push it to the finish line and back to the next team mate in line. The team to finish first wins. The lemon always keeps rolling, despite a slight wobble, so it is difficult to keep it in a straight line. Be sure that any furniture is pushed back.
- **FRUIT BASKET** Ask players to sit in a circle and give each player alternately the name of a fruit such as an orange or a lemon. One person stands in the centre. The person who stands in the middle calls out one or both of the fruits. The people given the name of that fruit must change places as quickly as possible. The person in the middle tries to reach one of the seats. The one left standing then calls the name of either fruit or both fruits.
- **BANANA RACE** Give each player a banana with the instruction to peel and eat it while holding one hand behind their back. On a given signal they begin. The first to eat the whole banana wins.
- **PAPER BAG DRAMA** Split the participants into teams consisting of three to six members. Give each team a paper bag filled with assorted objects. These can be almost anything, eg: a stone, a screw, a bar of soap, a computer disk. The idea of the game is to present a drama using all of the objects provided. The objects may be used as they would in normal life, or they may be imaginatively employed. Give each group a topic to base their drama on. When all the dramas have been planned and rehearsed they are performed for the amusement of everyone.
- **ANIMAL MATCH** Everyone is given a card with an animal on it (make sure there are two of every animal). At the same time everyone makes their animal noise and tries to find their partner.
- **STRING GAME** Hide pieces of string of different lengths around the room. The participants then find as many pieces of string as they can. The winner is the one whose pieces of string form the longest line when tied together.