

Cover page

Title

Understanding the process of community capacity building: a case study of two programs in Yunnan province, China.

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Abstract (150-300 words)

In recent decades, development discourse has increasingly acknowledged the importance of participation and ownership of development programs at the local level. As the discourse has advanced, terms such as community-driven development and community capacity building have become widely used and have attracted significant funding. Yet, despite the prominent place community capacity building has come to occupy in both discourse and practice, relatively little attention has been given to the process of capacity building at the level of the community, particularly as it is understood by key protagonists. In this paper, the authors present a descriptive case study of two community building programs in Yunnan, China, examining how capacity is understood by the key protagonists at the level of individuals, institutions and communities, and which particular capacities are identified as built at each level. The authors show that while there are expected differences in the perceptions of the capacity building process and outcomes at different levels, there are also clear overlaps, and that capacities develop simultaneously at different levels, in an interactive and mutually-reinforcing manner. The results suggest that the interconnection across levels may be very important to study further. This study helps fill a gap in the community capacity building literature and contributes insights that could improve the effectiveness of community building projects. In addition, it provides insight into the specific case of capacity building in China, where literature has tended to focus on institutional capacity and relationships between civil society organizations and the government rather than process and outcomes at the community level.

Keywords:

China; Yunnan; community capacity-building; process; development

Authors contributions

This information will be provided after initial submission

Acknowledgments

This information will be provided after initial submission

Abbreviations

CBO Community-based organization

CCB	Community capacity building
EduP	Educational program
EnvP	Environmental program
FG	Focus group
GI	Group interview
I#	Individual interview # (e.g. I#1, #2, #3)
ID	Informal discussion # (e.g. ID#1, #2, #3)
INGO	International non-governmental organization
R#	Report # (e.g. R#1, #2, #3)
YC	Yunnan city
YV#	Yunnan village # (e.g. YV#1, #2, #3, #4, #5)

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The last 20 years have seen a considerable shift in international development policy from government centered and international donor-led programs and strategies of agricultural and industrial growth to more participatory and community driven projects (Craig, 2007, p. 339). During the period between 1999 and 2011, the World Bank alone allocated around \$85 billion to community-based and community-driven development programs and projects (Mansuri & Rao, 2013b, p. 15). These changes in international development policy have been accompanied by an increasing interest in ‘community capacity-building’ (CCB) as a fundamental element of more sustainable and people oriented development efforts (De Vita, Fleming, & Twombly, 2001; Eade, 1997).

Behind this change is the premise that development does not lie solely in the recognition of rights, the availability of resources or the provision of services, but more in the development of concrete ‘capabilities’ and ‘positive freedoms’ that allow individuals to engage in economic transactions and participate in political activities that may lead to improvements in human wellbeing (Sen, 1999, 2010). Following this proposition, the development community postulates that improvements in the governance and organizational capacities of institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would eventually enrich the connection and effectiveness of development projects with their ‘intended beneficiaries’ (Mansuri & Rao, 2013a; Putnam, 1993; Straussman, 2007;

Wilhelm & Kushnarova, 2004). Furthermore, it is assumed that by supporting and enhancing local people's capacity to self-organize and determine their own priorities and values, CCB projects may lead to their increased ownership of the process of change, and also make the process more sustainable and relevant to their realities (Eade, 2007).

As development policy has shifted, however, scholars and practitioners have highlighted structural contradictions of the current development system with CCB. For instance, Aragón and Giles Macedo (2010) have pointed out that NGOs and development practitioners often fail to align their mission statements and the way they think about development with their practices because they act based on 'assumed conditions for change' which may not be endogenous or contextually relevant to the realities of the communities they work with (Aragón & Giles Macedo, 2010, p. 87). Likewise, James (2010) has argued that the "distressing dissonance between espoused principles and actions" of some CCB efforts owes much to the strong audit-oriented direction of projects in terms of funding requirements, deadlines, and the need for efficient and measurable results (James, 2010, p. 14). Because the content or aims of projects often respond to donors' agendas and pre-established outcomes, the 'beneficiary' communities end up without little or no ownership of the process of capacity development (Diamond, 2004, p. 180). Other authors have criticized the fact that NGOs or donor-agencies often fail to take contextual factors and local understandings of the process into consideration and thus reinforce, rather than challenge, existent power relationships (Eade, 2007). Similarly, Simpson et al. argue that the lack of prior and careful examination of local perspectives and priorities during CCB projects, however well-intentioned, may be detrimental to pre-existent social networks and endogenous capacities already developed within the communities where those projects are implemented (Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003).

In the context of China, most scholarly work on capacity building has been focused on the institutional and organizational capacities of Chinese non-profit organizations and governmental bodies implementing development projects rather than in the development of capacities in the

communities themselves (Huang, Deng, Wang, & Edwards, 2014; C. Li & Guo, 2015)¹. A rare exception is Hok Bun Ku's recent work (B. H.-B. Ku, 2011) stemming from a 7-year rural social work project with a group of rural women in the province of Yunnan. In his study, Ku examines in detail the process and outcomes of a single-case economic project, the making and selling of traditional hand-made arts and crafts, through the use of oral testimonies and other enhanced participatory research practices (B. H.-B. Ku, 2011, pp. 363-366).

Nevertheless, the bulk of Chinese works on capacity building have specifically dealt with aspects of governance, public administration, and financial capacities and strategies of both NGOs and state institutions (Kim, Jones, & Yue, 2006; L. C. Li, 2009; Z. Li & Wang, 2002; Ma, 2009; Wu & Meng, 2008), the opportunities and challenges for NGOs collaboration (Guo & Acar, 2005), and the rise of corporate social responsibility and the development of Chinese NGOs in terms of changes in legislation, NGOs functions and work legitimacy, and their relationship vis-à-vis government institutions and agencies (Chan, 2014; J. Chen, 1997; X. Chen & Li, 2014; Jing, 2010; Marteens, 2006). At the same time, a substantial body of literature has focused on the increasing demands for the creation of capacity building courses and professional training programs in the fields of health, education, social work and environmental protection deriving from the socio-economic and environmental problems caused by the economic reforms, rapid urbanization and migration processes of the last 30 years (Deng, 2014; Jiang & Guo, 2006; H. B. Ku, Yeung, & Sung-Chan, 2005; H. B. Ku, Yuan-Tsang, & Liu, 2009; V. C. Li et al., 2001; Liu & Xu, 2012; Shang, 2002).

1.3 Research question and purpose

The discussion above highlights the emphasis on institutional and organizational capacity-building and the politics and contradictions of the development system in international and Chinese development discourse, the corresponding lack of research on the process and contextualization of CCB efforts (Mansuri & Rao, 2013b), and the fact that there is still much confusion on what is actually understood by 'community capacity-building' (Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010; Morgan, 2006).

Existing research on what capacities are built has generally taken an econometric approach, and little research has been done on how the actors involved understand these outcomes and their relationship to the process of capacity-building. These open questions show a fundamental need for more deep, qualitative research studies that focus on the process of community capacity-building, and how it is understood by the actors.

This paper contributes to these gaps in the literature by examining *how capacity is built within the community* in terms of two interrelated sub-questions:

1. How is the process of community capacity-building understood by its direct actors?
2. What capacities do direct actors identify as being built?

Examining the process of CCB in this way is important for at least two reasons. First, it provides a ground for developing local understandings of capacity that are both contextually relevant and can be owned, transmitted and sustained by members of the community. Second, it is useful for future research and collaborative efforts to make CCB projects more meaningful and effective to the realities and priorities of those communities.

To answer these questions, the authors examine two CCB programs in the province of Yunnan, China. The programs are relevant to current academic discourse both because they enrich the Chinese CCB literature and because the fact that interactions between the different actors involved are very visible in China is useful for understanding the processes of capacity-building in other contexts, where the interplay between different stakeholders is not as visible but equally relevant. Finally, the present paper is a contribution to the scarce availability of English literature on case studies of CCB efforts in the region.

1.4 Outline of the paper

In section 2 of the paper, the authors review the development literature outlining current approaches and understandings of ‘capacity’, ‘capacity-building’ and ‘community capacity-building’. Section 3 introduces the case study and describes the methodological approach and data analysis used in the paper. The research findings are presented in detail in section 4, and later discussed in section 5 in connection to the main literatures introduced in section 2. We conclude the paper by summarizing the contribution of the research and pointing towards opportunities for future research and collaboration.

2. Conceptualizing Community Capacity Building

Drawing from an extensive review of the literature on CCB, Verity (2007) describes ‘community’ as often referring to “[h]eterogeneous groups of individuals who share something and combine to act collectively” based on ‘geography-space,’ ‘networks and organizations,’ ‘aspirations, needs and interests,’ and ‘bonds and ties’ (Verity, 2007, pp. 6, original italics).

Concepts of capacity, and the associated process of building capacity, are understood differently depending on discipline, and the terms are often used without articulating their meaning, or relating them to practice (Morgan, 2006, p. 2). The different usages and the lack of internationally-accepted definitions have led to unchallenged interpretations and practices of capacity-building by different agencies and stakeholders, often producing problems of operationalization and implementation strategies that affect the coherence of development projects and the relationships between stakeholders (James, 2010, pp. 16-17).

In the past 25 years, however, there has been a growing ‘conceptual congruence’ among scholars, official agencies reports, international NGOs and development practitioners. Capacity-building is now recognized as a complex, endogenous, and contextual human process based on values, emotions and beliefs, that involves constant shifts in power and identity, as well as flexible,

multidirectional and evolving relationships, and where the main actors involved take responsibility for the process of change (Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010, pp. 3-4; James, 2010, p. 14). As Chaskin (2001) points out, while definitions of capacity-building have differed largely between disciplines, they all seem to agree on factors such as the existence of resources, the presence of networks of relationships and collaborative action, and elements of leadership and support for mechanisms or processes of participation within collective action and problem solving (Chaskin, 2001, pp. 292-293). Furthermore, capacity-building is often examined with reference to certain 'dimensions', 'domains,' or 'sites for action' such as community (with an emphasis on processes of power, history, leadership, and participation), institutional or organizational (in terms of influence, policies, resources, responsiveness), linking or relational (with regards to networks and patterns of interaction and collaboration between formal and informal systems), and instrumental domains such as 'skills and abilities', 'knowledge' and 'resource transfer' (Verity, 2007, p. 6).

Building from these constructs, the authors examine the process of capacity-building within the community through three interconnected levels: individual, institutional and community. By individual level is meant all processes of capacity-building in terms of knowledge, skills and also personal attributes, such as confidence, commitment, and leadership. Institutional level refers to aspects of productive and organizational capacities and systems, the availability and mobilization of resources, and the development and sustainment of collaborative partnerships between social organizations, official institutions and other stakeholders. Community level refers to social spaces and platforms for collective action, dialogue and problem solving, sharing practices and consensus decision-making.

Analysis through these three dimensions is useful: first, it offers an opportunity to better understand how the process of CCB is perceived and articulated by the different actors involved at each level. Second, it allows the clear identification of the actual capacities resulting from such projects, and at what levels. Finally, it provides a framework which allows interconnections between the different actors and indeed capacities to be made visible. Such links and their detailed

interactions can then be described, allowing deeper analysis to be planned in future studies if appropriate.

3. Research methods and analysis

3.1 Research questions and methodological approach

In this paper, the authors present a descriptive case study (Yin, 2014) examining the process of CCB by focusing on the efforts of two Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) working in close collaboration with an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO), to develop and sustain capacity in rural communities in Yunnan province, southwest China. The unit of analysis of the research is the collection (group) of people and institutions involved in the process of community capacity-building, and not the specific projects developed and implemented by the CBOs.

The review of literature outlined above shows a research gap with regard to the understanding of the process and contextual factors of CCB. Developing a clear, contextualized understanding of the process may help improve the efficiency of future development efforts by aligning projects to the realities and priorities of the contexts where they are implemented, and also make them more sustainable by increasing the participation and ownership of those directly affected by the process.

Specifically, this paper seeks to address two research gaps:

- *How is the process of community capacity-building understood by its direct actors?*
- *What capacities do direct actors identify as being built?*

Case study methodology was chosen as the most appropriate research methodology for three main reasons: first, it allows to adapt the design and data collection procedures to answer the research questions (Meyer, 2001); second, it provides the space for a systematic, holistic, in-depth and multi-perspectival analysis of the phenomenon being studied (Tellis, 1997); and third, it facilitates the exploration of the phenomena within its own context and in a timely manner (Baxter

& Jack, 2008). Furthermore, within the context of our research, a case study approach is both relevant and necessary, as our question needs to acknowledge the context-specific nature of the process of community capacity-building.

3.2 Criteria for selection and background of case studies

The chosen case studies fulfilled both logistical and epistemological criteria. Logistically, they needed to be currently operating, and have been operating sufficiently long to show a clear degree of success. In addition, case studies needed to have been appropriately recorded and documented to allow the authors an in-depth in vivo and also retrospective consideration of the processes and the interactions of the main actors during its different phases. Finally, due to geographical mobility and time-scale constraints, it was decided that case studies needed to be located within proximate locations.

Epistemologically, the case study CBOs and the INGO were chosen on two main grounds. First, their development programs are designed and implemented on an active participatory basis: the INGO and the CBOs collaborate. While guided and assisted by INGO, the CBOs remain independent and are the drivers of the capacity-building process. Secondly, none of the capacity-building projects are tied to specific deadlines or object driven; the design and implementation of the projects are adapted to the timescales and priorities of the participant communities.

For confidentiality, the two case study CBOs are referred to as 'CBO-A' and 'CBO-B', and their collaborating International NGO as 'INGO'. Also, pseudonyms are used for the project and location names. Below, the background and description of INGO and CBOs-A and -B are briefly introduced.

INGO

INGO was established in 1990. Initially it carried out various social enterprise works in cooperation with a variety of government bodies and community groups. Since 2001, it began working in collaboration with many CBOs across China through the implementation of an umbrella program of institutional capacity building (ICBP) comprising two main types of projects: an environmental

service program (EnvP) and an education program (EduP). The INGO would first find individuals who are interested in bringing one of these two programs to their own communities. These individuals were subsequently invited to take an intensive training course that enabled them to understand the program as well as the general concepts of CBO work. Those who were interested and deemed by INGO to be suitably prepared, came into a collaboration agreement with INGO. During the whole process, the CBOs work independently while INGO provides them with initial funds and guidance in the form of regular consultation visits by INGO staff, and periodic larger gatherings with other CBOs for horizontal learning. At the time of this writing, INGO is working with 33 established CBOs from 13 provinces in China.

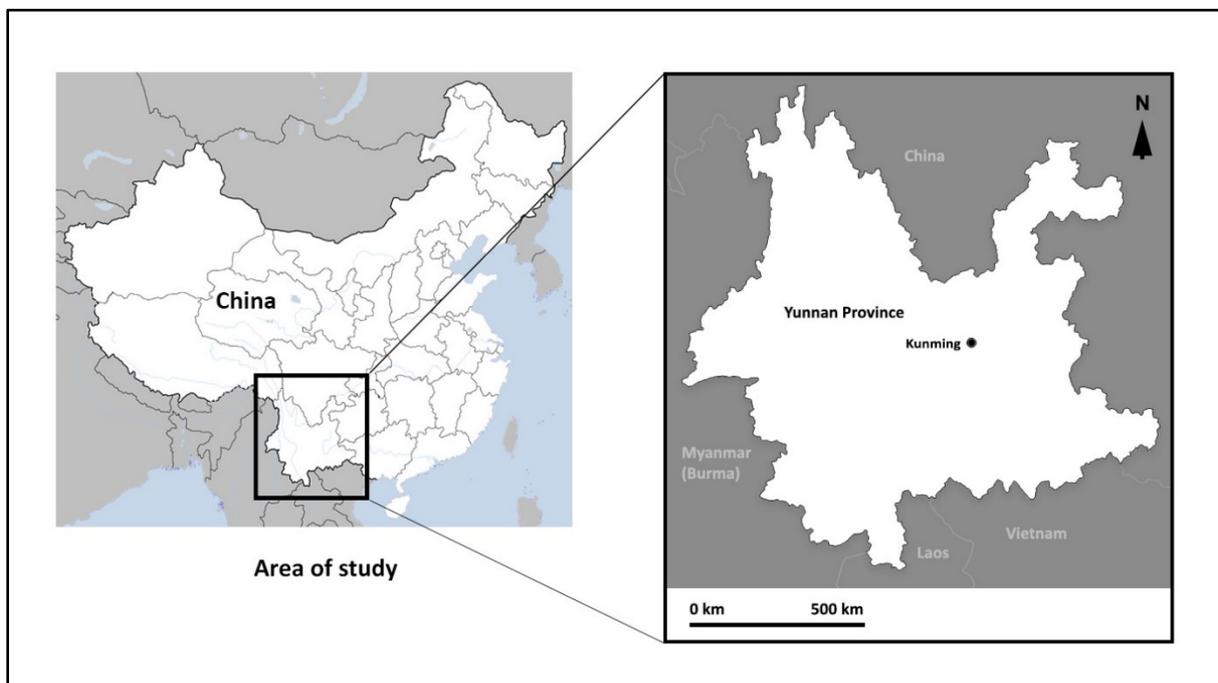
CBO-A

CBO-A was founded in 2005 and registered as a private non-corporate organization with the Chinese Civil Affairs Bureau in 2008. Since its inception, CBO-A has been working and implementing an education program (EduP) aimed at youth between the ages of 12 and 15, and is currently working with 1,500 youth. Its main purpose is to inspire and encourage participating children to contribute to the social and economic development of their community. The program operates both inside and outside school contexts, and is developed according to the specific needs and circumstances of the communities involved. It consists specifically in following a sequence of workbooks with stories through which participants are motivated to understand a series of moral concepts and put them in practice. It creates conditions where youth start to analyze and contribute to their own communities, and through that process they gain organizational, collaboration and consultation skills and capacities.

CBO-B

CBO-B was founded in 2008 and registered as a private non-corporate organization in 2011. CBO-B works implementing an environmental service program (EnvP). The program's aim is to encourage rural women to participate and promote a balanced development of their communities, both morally and materially. The EnvP consists of two main phases, the length of which are flexible and

dependent on the circumstances of women participating in the program. The first phase consists of a training course where participants, together with the program facilitators, explore their own understanding of concepts such as cooperation, unity, empowerment and collective consultation. This phase of the course also allows participants to explore how they can put those concepts into practice, gain a deeper understanding of the role of the farmer in the development of society, and to provide fundamental knowledge about eco-agriculture. After concluding the training, participants are encouraged to discuss the needs of their village and develop concrete bespoke action plans to meet those needs.



Map 1. Case study area

3.3 Data Collection

The authors worked in close collaboration with the case CBOs and INGO to design the research questions, carry out the data collection and the subsequent analysis, and report the findings. To ensure the validity of the case study, an iterative process of triangulation was carried out through the combination of multiple data sources, conceptual frameworks and consultation amongst the lead researchers (Johansson, 2003).

Data for this paper was ultimately collected from three types of sources (see Table 1 below for a detailed breakdown). First, we conducted a series of one-to-one semi-structured interviews with key-informants from INGO between October 2015 and February 2016 via Skype. Individual interviews had an approximate duration of one hour, were conducted in English, were audio-recorded and verbatim transcribed for analysis with the consent of the interviewees.

Second, field work was carried out during a visit to Yunnan in early February 2016 and consisted of a series of focus groups, semi-structured group interviews and informal group discussions with key-informants and project participants. These included five focus groups with key informants and participants in each project, two semi-structured group interviews with the CBO-A and CBO-B coordinators, and three informal discussions with informants and participants from CBO-A and B projects including: two parents, a school principal and two government officials. These were in Chinese and lasted 1-2 hours. Systematic debrief meetings *in-situ* were carried out with participants to compare and consolidate notes which later were translated into English and typed for analysis.

Third, we analyzed internal reports about each of the CBOs. These were relevant given their level of detail about the projects in terms of dates, actors and timelines. The reports were written up in Chinese between December 2014 and January 2015 and translated into English by INGO staff in March 2015, and included: one report from CBO-A and two reports from CBO-B.

Table 1. Data sources

Individual interviews	Group Interviews	Focus Groups	Informal Discussions	CBO Reports
<p><i>October 22, 2015</i> I#1 with INGO Chief Representative.</p> <p><i>October 26, 2015</i> I#2 with INGO President.</p> <p><i>February 23, 2016</i> I#3 with INGO Senior Operating officer.</p>	<p><i>February 3, 2016</i> GI#1 with 8 participants: CBO-B coordinator, 2 CBO-B facilitators, 5 INGO collaborators.</p> <p><i>February 3, 2016</i> GI#2 with 3 participants: CBO-A coordinator, 2 INGO collaborators.</p>	<p><i>February 1-3, 2016</i> FG#1 with 18 participants EduP program students from Yunnan village 01: 13 students, (ages 6-9 and 11-13), CBO-A coordinator, 2 CBO-A facilitators, INGO President, 1 external collaborator.</p> <p>FG#2 with CBO-A's staff. 20 participants, including: 3 CBO-A facilitators, 5 CBO-A volunteers, CBO-A Coordinator, INGO President, INGO Senior Operating Officer, 2 INGO collaborators, 1 external collaborator.</p> <p>FG#3 with CBO-A Community Forum Event attendants, YC. Over 40 participants, including: 10-12 parents (mostly mothers, 1 father), 10-12 students, CBO-A and CBO-B coordinators, 8 CBO-A and CBO-B facilitators, INGO President, INGO Senior Operating Officer, 2 INGO collaborators, 1 external collaborator, and 3 other male participants: one local freelance reporter, one local government officer, and one teacher from a technical school.</p> <p>FG#4 with Yunnan village 04 residents. 10 participants: 2 rural women participating in the EnvP program, CBO-B coordinator, 2 CBO-B facilitators, INGO President, INGO Senior Operating Officer, 2 INGO collaborators, 1 external collaborator.</p> <p>FG#5 with Yunnan village 05 residents. 21 participants: 14 villagers participating in the EnvP program, including one male observer), INGO President, INGO Senior Operating Officer, 2 INGO collaborators, CBO-B coordinator, 2 CBO-B facilitators, 1 external collaborator.</p>	<p><i>February 1, 2016</i> ID#1 with two parents and a village leader during visit to Yunnan village 02. 2 parents, INGO Senior Operating Officer, 1 INGO collaborator.</p> <p>ID#2 with Yunnan School Principle, Yunnan village 03. 8 participants: Principle and his wife, INGO President, INGO Senior Operating Officer, 3 INGO collaborators, and CBO-A coordinator.</p> <p>ID#3 with two local education officials, YC. 8 participants: 2 officials from the education department, INGO Senior Operating Officer, 3 INGO collaborators, and CBO-A coordinator.</p>	<p><i>Dec 2014-Jan 2015 (translated in March 2015)</i> R#1 CBO-A case study report on the EduP program</p> <p><i>Dec 2014-Jan 2015 (translated in March 2015)</i> R#2 CBO-B case study report on of EnvP program</p> <p><i>Dec 2014-Jan 2015 (translated in March 2015)</i> R#3 CBO-B case study of the EnvP program</p>

3.4 Data Analysis

A rigorous thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used with a grounded approach to coding and thematizing through three cycles of analysis. These cycles were carried out in consultation with the collaborating INGO with the aim to answer the main question and sub-questions of the paper in an integrated way.

Cycle 1

A priori (predefined) codes were used to match data with the research questions and the dimensions of the capacity building process explored in this paper. *Open* (derived) codes were then developed from the data for each of the two sub-questions independently. Finally, a preliminary set of themes and subthemes were derived from the most frequent codes or a combination of most prevalent ones, and shared with INGO key-informants.

Cycle 2

Following the first round of conversations with INGO, the authors reviewed and then finalized the wording of the preliminary themes and the clustering of subthemes, checking with INGO to make sure their scope and content were representative of the process and to rule out any misconceptions, assumptions or missed connections.

Cycle 3

During the last stage of the analysis, final themes and subthemes were developed, identifying those relating to either (a) how capacity was understood by the actors involved (first sub-question) or (b) what capacities do direct actors identify as being built (second sub-question). Each set of themes was then separately examined to identify relationships and develop an integrated understanding of the process of CCB, and relate the process of CCB to the outcomes. In the case of question (a), the authors did a further step of analysis in terms of actors (i.e. data source) as presenting the themes in terms of levels alone (institutional, individual or community) did not give

sufficiently detailed understanding. Below, the authors present the findings for each of the sub-questions.

4. Findings

The findings of the thematic analysis are presented below in two sections, according to the research questions: how the process of CCB is understood by different actors, and what capacities do direct actors identify as being built as a result of the two case study programs of CBO-A and CBO-B.

4.1 Understanding the community capacity-building process

The thematic analysis was developed in order to identify how the process of capacity building was understood at three interconnected levels: individual, institutional, and community. The final analysis of the themes led the authors to identify two models for understanding the process of CCB. At the institutional level, CCB was perceived in terms of purposes and expectations and described as a series of steps between the different actors involved. At the individual and community levels, it was referred to as conditions and opportunities for change (see Figures 1, 2 and 3 below)².

CCB at the institutional level

Five overall themes were identified to describe steps of CCB at the institutional level: (1) Initiating projects; (2) Knowledge exchange and networking; (3) Establishing an organization; (4) Developing and implementing projects; and (5) Reviewing and learning. However, depending on the institutional actor (INGO, CBOs and local government), certain aspects of CCB received more emphasis than others, and the length of time and chronological order of steps were described differently (see Figure 1). A sixth common theme across all three institutional bodies was that the CCB was a long-term process and that approaches and strategies could change depending on the circumstances of each community.

INGO

Within INGO, the CCB process was expected to encourage the establishment of CBOs and build their institutional capacity to contribute to sustainable development. It was seen as a process through which partnerships and collaborations are created and maintained.

Members of INGO referred to four main steps: *i) initiation of CCB efforts* (during which INGO engages with local institutions, officials and key stakeholders, and also invites interested participants to join their training program and subsequently form CBOs and become facilitators), *ii) integrated knowledge exchange and practice* (involving a series of training phases and courses with an emphasis on the understanding of CCB concepts and approaches, background information to specific INGO's ICCB EnvP and EduP programs, and related training, exploration and application), *iii) setting up collaboration agreements* (defining terms of mutual collaboration and vision of projects between INGO and prospective candidates to form their own CBO), and *iv) accompaniment and support of CBOs* (seed funding, organizational and technical support – e.g. registration of CBOs as non-profit organizations with the local authorities, periodic larger gatherings for consultation and relationships with local partners, horizontal learning and contextualized on ground support. This step also involved ongoing monitoring and evaluation of projects through regular contact and visits, and reports and communications drafted by INGO and CBOs members (R#1, CBO-A EduP; R#2, CBO-B EnvP; I#2, INGO President, female).

CBOs

Staff of both CBOs also referred to CCB as a process through which to develop projects and services within the community, in which individuals not only gain instrumental capacities to improve their living social and economic conditions, but also develop perception of and a sense of responsibility for the realities and priorities of their community and act together for its benefit.

CBOs also described the CCB in terms of five steps including first receiving their *i) knowledge exchange and practice* (including initial contacts and collaborations with both INGO and local partners) and then *ii) establishing their CBOs* in collaboration with INGO. From these two first stages, *iii)* the process could either lead to the CBOs' *registration*, (in order to operate legally and establishing a cooperative relationship with local government officials and thus gaining their trust and support), or *initiating contacts and starting work in the community* (including getting projects started, contacting people to open up spaces for action, through getting organized, recruiting, getting materials and planning), and then proceed to registration³. Next, CBOs start *iv) developing and carrying out projects* (referring to the strategies to develop projects successfully, including gaining people's interest, understanding, disposition and commitment to materialize projects, and using or making spaces to apply training and courses contents and participant's initiatives).

During and following the implementation of projects, two other associated processes were identified by CBO staff; first, following the initial stages of projects there was the important iterative element of *consultation, reflection and adaptation* emphasized by CBOs coordinators (described as exchange of ideas and experiences from participants, the communication and clarification of concepts and objectives of the programs implemented by the CBO, as well as changes in approach when things didn't work or needed to be improved). Second, and following from the initial stages of the projects, there was, or was expected to be, a process of *integration and expansion of projects* (including systematizing processes, engaging with different social organizations and stakeholders to gain more funding or develop collaborations, and also integrating services and encouraging participants to take more ownership of the process such as facilitation of projects or activities) (GI#1, CBO-A Coordinator; GI#2, CBO-B Coordinator).

Local government institutions

In general terms, within local government institutions and village committees CCB was perceived as the development and implementation of projects and services for which members of the community have increased levels of responsibility, and from which some sort of service or outcome in the form of improved living, social and economic conditions, is expected.

Here, the process of CCB was described in terms of three major aspects, starting with *i) registration* (as the first step and precondition which enables CBOs be able to operate legally as non-profit organizations, and open social spaces for action), followed by *ii) networking* (referred to by officials interviewed in terms of the importance of contacting with important people in the community to gain appropriate support and make things happen), and leading to the successful *iii) development and implementation of projects and services*. With regards to the carrying out of projects in the community, officials identified certain elements and processes as a result, or expected to result from projects such as a certain degree of *improvement of socio-economic conditions* in the community, the *upholding and strengthening of values and moral principles* such as harmony, consensus and the respect for the rule of law, and the *involvement, visibility and communication* with local authorities and relevant stakeholders in the community about the projects and their development (ID#3, Local Education official male, and Local Education official female; FG#3, Local Government official, male (group 5)). Officials viewed these aspects as steps or stages taking place both during and resulting from the process in terms of clearly communicating project objectives, strategies, and activities to all participants in order to gain trust of both local authorities and community members, and also avoid misunderstandings.

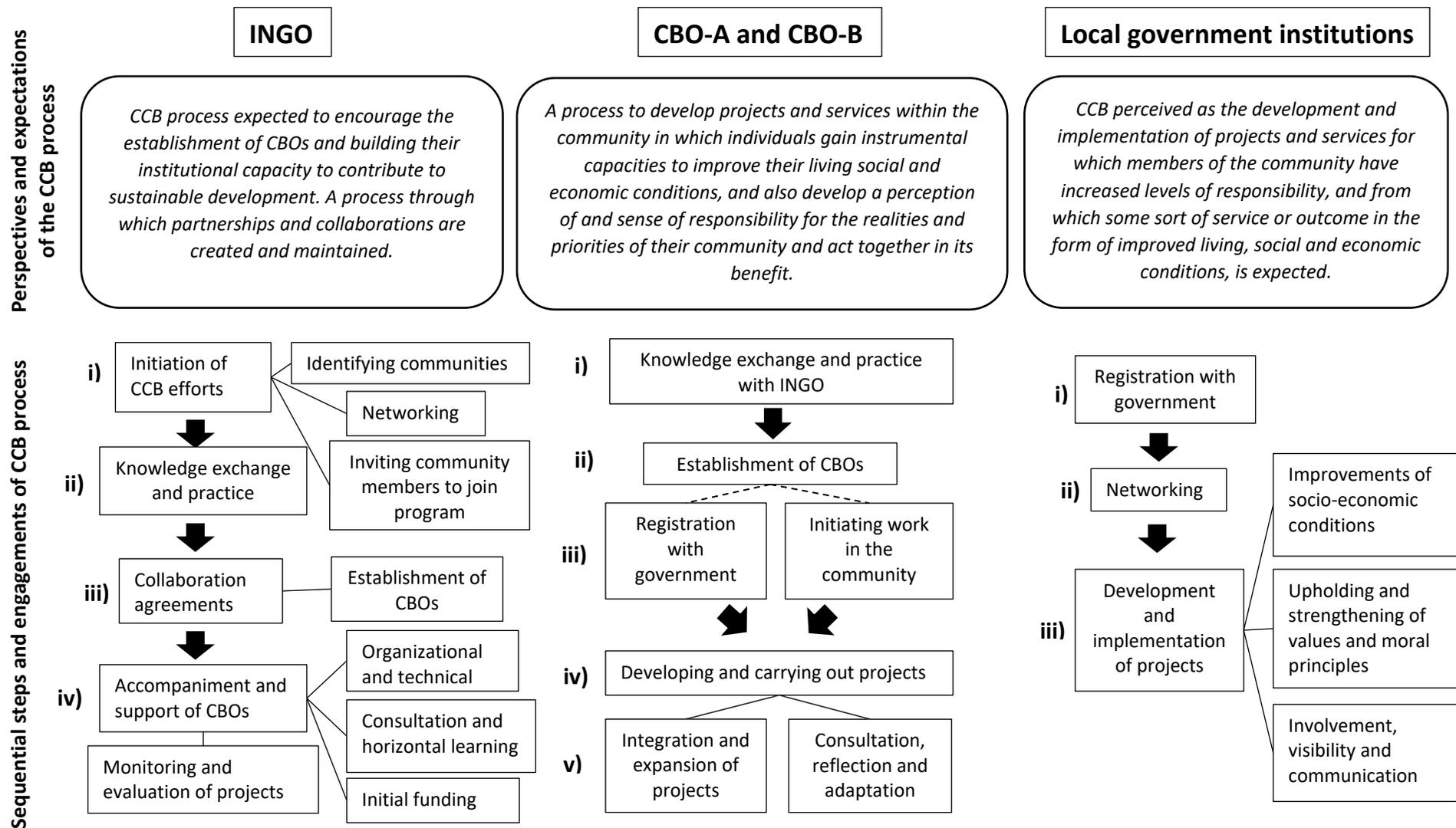


Figure 1. CCB process as perceived at the institutional level; in terms of purposes and expectations and described as steps from the perspective of INGO, CBO-A and CBO-B, and local government institutions and village committees.

CCB at the individual level

At the individual level, the process of CCB was described in terms of the availability and development of conditions leading to personal, social and economic change within the community (see Figure 2 below). These conditions and opportunities often manifested in the form of attitudes, qualities, skills, and relationships that did not necessarily succeed one another, nor were they always present among all the individuals involved in the process.

Community participants

These were broadly described as *instrumental capacities* (skills, technical knowledge, economic development and public infrastructure – having a house, a car, having access to green spaces, availability and conditions of public infrastructure. Participants also mentioned access to education and information, specifically in terms of children going to school and not working at an early age, and having access to local newspapers to be informed) and *personal qualities and attitudes* (including developing confidence, inspiring others and having an element of leadership, improved relationships within families, sharing and helping other members of the community, and also individual's understanding and ownership of both the purpose and direction of projects and activities). (ID#1, CBO-A EduP participant student's mother YV#2, and EduP participant student's father, YV#2; FG#1, CBO-A EduP participant students #1-5; FG#3, CBO-A EduP participant students' parents (groups 1-3); FG#4, CBO-B EnvP participant villagers, females #1 and #2; FG#5, CBO-B EnvP participant villagers).

CBO facilitators and volunteers, INGO members

For CBO facilitators and volunteers engaged with the case study projects, CCB meant more *organizational skills* (in terms of individuals being able to plan and execute projects, facilitate courses and activities, and being able to self-organize), *establishing strategic relationships* (engaging

with local authorities, social organizations and other stakeholders which could then lead to future collaborations, funding and consolidation and expansion of projects) and *developing a culture of collaboration* (through strengthened processes of sharing, consultation and dialogue) (GI#1 and #2, CBO-A and CBO-B Coordinators; ID#2, Yunnan Middle School Principle; FG#2, CBO-A Volunteers). Likewise, individuals involved in INGO, also referred to aspects of *organizational culture* and *culture of collaboration*, and added that *material and economic development opportunities* (such as the improvement of services or the development of small economic projects) were important, although not necessarily central, aspects of the process CCB (I#2, INGO President). Finally, there was also the common understanding that during the entire process, the development and strengthening of *personal qualities and attitudes* and *instrumental capacities* were important. Also, individuals involved in INGO and the CBOs agreed that a certain disposition to *learning and capacity to adapt* in terms of institutional memory, strategies to engage with different stakeholders and operational aspects of CCB projects were important conditions in the CCB process (GI#1 and #2, CBO-A and CBO-B Coordinators; I#3, INGO SOO, male).

Local government officials

Local government and education officials and village committee leaders viewed the process as an important opportunity for the improvement of *social and economic services* complementary to government welfare support (such as cultural activities, community service groups, small economic projects and ventures), and also the *improvement of personal qualities and attitudes* (through the promotion of moral principles and values such as respect for the law, harmony, unity, and the central role of family, and a general willingness to service the community) (ID#2, Yunnan Middle School Principle, male, YV#3; FG#3, local government official, male (group 5); I#3, INGO SOO, male).

CCB at the community level

CBOs facilitators and volunteers, INGO members, Local government officials

Reference to the CCB process at the community level (Figure 3) was made primarily by INGO, CBOs members and some local officials and was associated with opportunities to *build new patterns of collaboration or strengthen pre-existent ones* (including sharing practices and consultation decision-making, and improved dialogue and capacity to resolve problems within the family and also between officials, villagers, CBO facilitators and other involved stakeholders) and *the development of material and instrumental capacities* (in terms of the creation and opening up of spaces and platforms for action and collaboration – community centers, cultural activities, dancing groups, or even small economic or community service projects involving schools or local businesses) (I#1, INGO Chief Representative; I#2, INGO President; Group Interviews 1# and #2 with CBO- A and B Coordinators). Local officials referred particularly to the promotion of habits of politeness and cooperation amongst individuals and the respect of the law as essential conditions for improving living conditions in the community (FG#3, local government official, male (group 5); ID#3, Local Education Official, male, YC).

Community participants

Individual members of the community made some references to the development of prosperity within the community in terms of *improved relationships and dialogue* (better relations within families, between neighbors of different social and economic backgrounds, and also between villagers and local officials), increased *sharing and mutual help* (both in terms of resources and knowledge), the development of *inclusion, consultation and consensus* practices by members of the community (for instance, when carrying out activities, taking decisions or attempting to solve problems), and the development of policies that *create and open up green, public spaces for social and cultural activities* (FG#3, CBO-A facilitator, female (group 5), and EduP participant student's mother (group 1). Community participants also mentioned that individuals of a community must aim at a certain degree of economic development and well-being as a whole.

Both at the individual and community levels, from the initial stages of CCB projects to the accompaniment and support throughout the implementation of projects and activities, the opportunities and conditions for change were characterized by a repeated process of collaboration in terms of mutual learning and building of common understandings between the different stakeholders. This collaboration process (reflected in Figure 2 by a dotted line with double arrows connecting individuals from the community, CBOs and local authorities) was described as depending as much on the presence of people with certain vision, trust and *guānxi* (relationships) to make things happen, as on individual's confidence and persistence to initiate dialogue and their commitment to carry out projects. CBOs' facilitators and INGO's staff coincided in that efforts and strategies to understand the community's realities and often readapting project objectives when necessary, were important factors in this collaboration process of mutual learning.

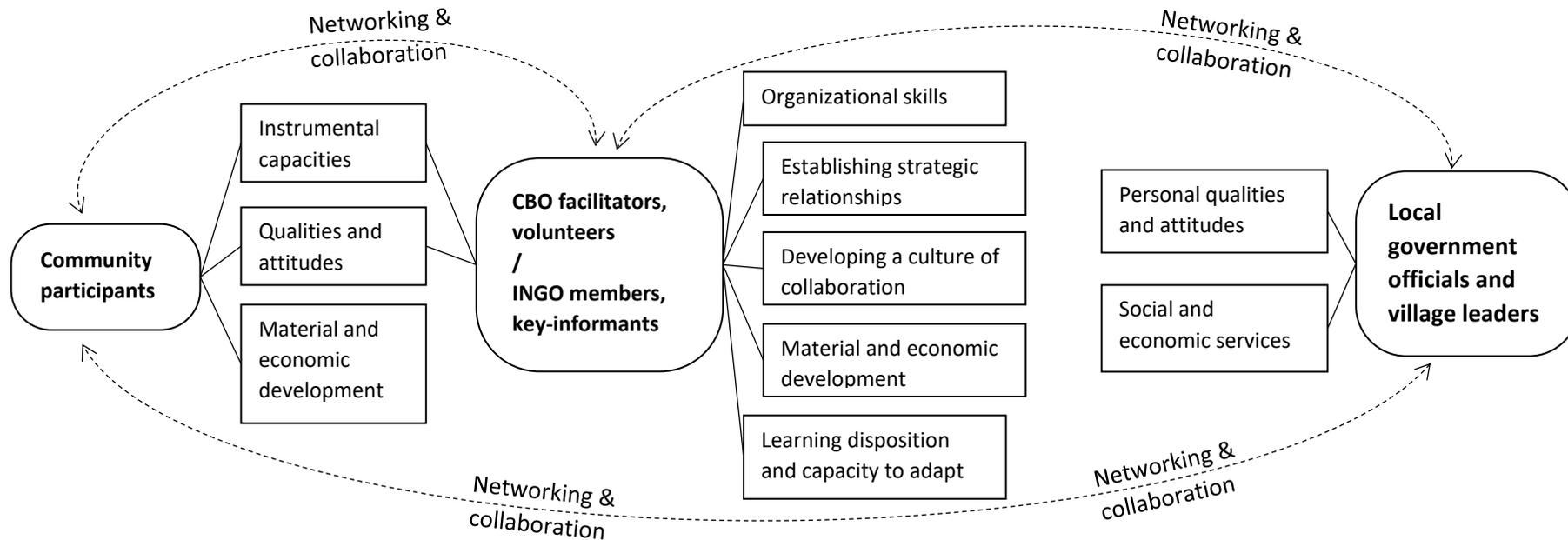


Figure 2. CCB process as perceived at the individual level; described in terms of (non-linear) conditions and opportunities for change according to community participants, CBOs facilitators and volunteers, INGO members, and local government officials.

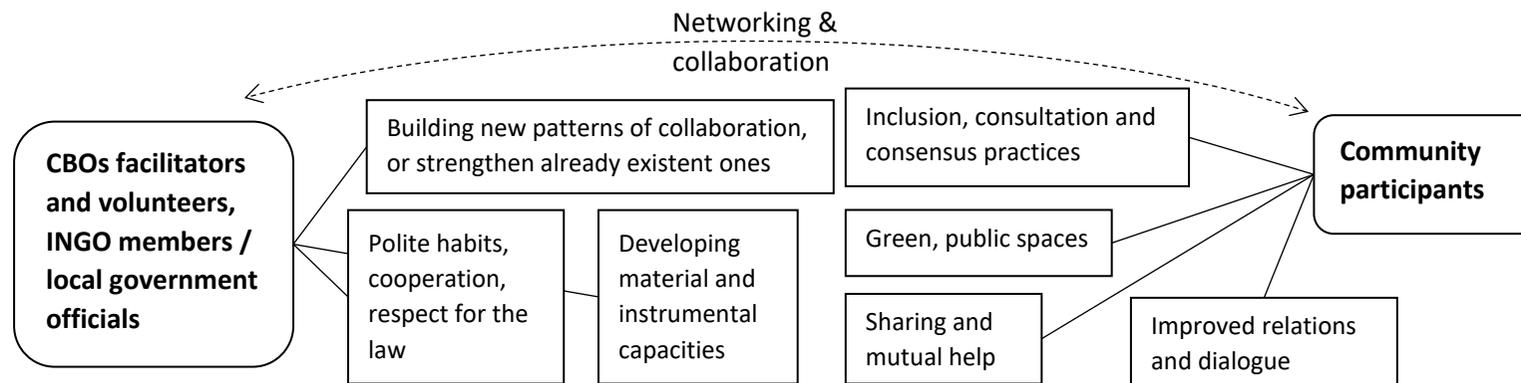


Figure 3. CCB process as perceived at the community level; referred to and described in terms of (non-linear) conditions and opportunities for change according to community participants, CBOs facilitators and volunteers, INGO members, and local government officials.

4.2 What capacities are built, and at what level?

Whether described in terms of purposes, expectations and series of steps at the institutional level, or perceived as conditions and opportunities for change at the individual and community levels, the evidence from the research shows that the process CCB was understood in terms of 5 broad themes: 'qualities and attitudes', 'organizational skills and abilities', 'developing and maintaining strategic relationships', 'building a culture of collaboration' and 'generating material and instrumental capabilities'. Within each, several sub-themes of capacities were observed as being built. These are outlined below, followed by a mapping of their occurrence at different levels (see Table 2).

4.2.1 What capacities are being built?

Qualities and attitudes

This theme relates to attitudes and approaches from individuals and institutions. This includes *confidence and resolve, the ability to learn and adapt, patience and persistence, a desire for individuals to understand the meaning and context of their work, and clarity of purpose.*

(1) *Confidence and resolve* was identified at the individual level among participants.

Examples include decisions relating to new agricultural production methods or approaches, as well as self-confidence within the wider community; *"[One] rural woman [...] expressed her willingness to try new crops and raise pigs. However, she was scared of taking risks. After taking the EnvP program, the woman not only started to cultivate a new crop (konjac) and was raising pigs, she was also sharing her knowledge and encouraging others to get involved."* (GI#1; CBO-B Coordinator, YC).

Another rural woman participating in the EnvP program became more confident to share her ideas with local officials who would look down at her due to her social status or be in disbelief that she was actually trying to implement the program; *"They wouldn't believe that she could do it. She said, 'they know all the things they know, but I know this program. I know environmental service project; I*

know what I am doing is good.’ And so she kind of mastered the courage and she went straight for them” (I#1; INGO CR, female).

(2) Learning disposition and capacity to adapt was observed at the individual and institutional level, including openness to restructuring programs and changing plans. For instance, in the first stages of implementing the EduP program in Yunnan Middle School, INGO’s staff and CBO’s facilitators changed their approach after learning from the school principle that instead of only collaborating with English teachers they should also be working with the *bānzhǔrèn* (homeroom teachers, class supervisors) (I#1; INGO CR, female). Adapting to the local context was also important for individuals to be effective in the development of the programs. For instance, the former director of CBO-A had *“started watching local soap operas, because when she would go and visit the homes that’s what people would talk about.”* (I#1; INGO CR, female).

(3) Patience and persistence were present at both individual and institutional levels. Many informants and participants noted that their projects needed a long time to develop and gain active support. As CBO-A Coordinator explained *“over the 10 years, it went from opposition or no support to some support to active support”* (FG#2; CBO-A Coordinator, YC). Patience was required by all participants, and in particular facilitators and leaders, throughout the implementation of programs.

(4) Clarity of purpose and understanding of the meanings and reasons for being involved in or developing a project or service was observed both at the individual and institutional levels. The former included participants’ awareness of the issues and challenges affecting their communities and their capacity to identify ways to address them. Examples from the data show increased consciousness on how to promote actions and include others; a group of rural women organizing a traditional dancing performance decided to put the money raised from the event in the community announcement board (I#1; INGO CR, female), Yunnan Middle School students carrying out community cleaning services realized it was better to do the cleaning at the time of the market, *“when more adults would see”* (FG#2; INGO SOO, male). Clarity of purpose at the CBOs’ service or

program level was linked to understanding the context for the work, their goals and a broader vision for what is to be achieved. CBO-A coordinator's description of the program's approach, for example, shows clear evidence of this: *"when grassroots organization interacts with grassroots, the motive is not just to interact with the grassroots and make some improvement. The voices of the people at the grassroots also go up and cause the government officials to pay attention and maybe look at the organization to see what they are doing and why it works"* (FG#2; CBO-A Coordinator, YC).

Organizing capacities

Within this theme, the evidence showed capacities being developed in terms of *planning and carrying out activities and projects, facilitation, and operational systems*.

(1) Planning and carrying out activities and projects relates to the capability to identify issues to address, set goals, and operationalize their execution through the scheduling of tasks, agreement of certain conditions and responsibilities, and mobilizing resources.

For example, a group of Yunnan Middle School students realized that trays were often not cleaned properly resulting in students not finishing their meals and food being thrown away. They tried to address this problem elaborating a plan that involved talking to different teachers and class supervisors, dividing in groups and visiting classrooms, agreeing on how best to communicate their message and making use of various materials and resources to convey their message, which included: preparing posters with images of clean trays, broadcasting radio messages in the school and writing and performing a theatre play about their whole experience (R#1, CBO-A EduP). As INGO Chief Representative reflects: *"they mobilized the whole school to do a better job of washing their trays"* (I#1; INGO CR, female).

(2) Facilitation capacities were observed extensively at the individual level, both in the members of the CBOs and program participants. It was present amongst villagers when they organized and carried out meetings and group discussions to share knowledge with new participants

in the programs, or organized events in the community; for example, one of the women in Yunnan village 05 organized an open group trip to a nearby village to meet other farmers and exchange experiences (FG#5; EnvP community facilitator, female, YV#5). CBOs facilitators' abilities to generate discussion and create opportunities for reflection and informed action was also reported as a critical factor (R#2, CBO-B EnvP).

(3) *Operational systems* refers to an organization's identity and its ability to articulate its vision and program to other agents. It includes developing specific administrative procedures and training strategies when carrying out projects, as well as the capacity to mobilize human and material resources. Both CBOs demonstrated this capacity in the gradual development of projects from simple activities to more complex services, their ability to adapt their working methods as more people got involved and their programs are implemented at different locations, as well as in their capacity to effectively work with new partners and government officers as they gained visibility. For example, CBO-A currently works in direct collaboration with three schools in YC involving about 1,500 participant students (R#1, CBO-A EduP), Since 2008, CBO-B has increased both its institutional capacities; in 2015 it counted with three formal employees, 11 project sites, and 655 participants receiving training (R#2, CBO-B EnvP).

Another important aspect of operationalization was the institutional memory of CBOs through the systematization of procedures and the passing on of methodologies and information to keep the organization working even when there were changes of personnel. An example of this capacity is the CBOs training of participants in the program to become community facilitators; at least 10 former participants in one school in YC had now become CBO-A's facilitators developing interpersonal, coordination and facilitation skills (ID#3; Local Education official, female, YC).

Developing and maintaining strategic relationships

A core capacity identified from the case studies is the CBOs' increasing ability to initiate and sustain collaborative relationships with institutions in the local area. Capacities have been identified

in terms of *networking, maintaining long-term partnerships, and building trusted relationships*.

These interactions are very important for gaining trust and legitimacy as well as materials and funding. Interactions were observed with local government (including village leaders, member of the local branch of the education bureau, and other government officers), local social organizations, (schools, local foundations), and also local businesses and banks.

(1) *Networking* was identified at the individual level with regards to coordinators of both CBOs developing connections with government, local social or philanthropic organizations, and businesses. This capacity was also extended to the institutional level as the coordinators' ability to seek out, identify and develop connections across a range of sectors to open up social spaces for action or increase the financial and material resources of the CBOs. A clear example in this context was CBO-B's partnership with the China Social Change Foundation which resulted in an additional funding of 90,000 RMB in 2014 to start a community development project in another village (R#3, CBO-B EnvP).

(2) *Maintaining long-term partnerships* is also an important aspect of this theme, both through individual and institutional cooperation. For example, CBO-A has developed a longstanding relationship with Yunnan Middle School in YC, and also cooperates with the Secretary of the Legal Committee of YC "*and together they developed the Building a Harmonious Community program where the Junior Youth participate*" (GI#2; CBO-A Coordinator, YC).

(3) Investing time in *building trusted relationships* was observed, for example, when CBO-B established contact with a local konjac noodles factory in YC. CBO-B members met with the manager, visited the factory and introduced him to the EnvP participant villagers who wanted to start a rotating seed fund project in YV#5. Establishing rapport with the factory's manager served both to get the konjac seeds necessary to start the project, and also collaborative attitude from the manager who showed concern following a drought in the area and decided to visit the village to make sure the *konjac* seeds could be planted and harvested (R#3, CBO-B EnvP).

Building a culture of collaboration

Patterns of collaboration were identified both at the individual, institutional and community levels in terms of *consultation, sharing, conflict resolution, and dialogue and the ability to relate to others*.

(1) Processes of *consultation* have been identified when participants from the community seek advice, support or input amongst themselves, or from other members of the community such as relatives or key people in order to initiate an activity or project; for instance, in Yunnan Middle School, students organized into groups to visit each class and get other students on board. The whole effort depended first on getting the permission and support from the *bānzhǔrèn* (R#1, CBO-A EduP).

Consultation also related to participants coming together to discuss and exchange ideas to make joint decisions, and through that process exploring different opportunities to act in benefit of the community. This has been present in both simple activities, like EduP participant students picking up rubbish from public areas and discussing how best disposing it (FG#2; INGO SOO, male, YC), and more complex ones like when the rural women in YV#5 initiated regular meetings to decide upon plans for a traditional dancing group and a rotating seed fund to enable community members to plant and sell *konjac* (R#2, CBO-B EnvP).

(2) *Sharing* processes were present in both CBO-A and CBO-B programs, but particularly amongst EnvP participants as villagers were supporting each other by sharing both knowledge and materials, such as tools or land; one of the rural women in YV#5 explained how, when the second group starting the EnvP program joined, the participants in the first cycle organized a meeting to share their knowledge and experiences on “*how best to grow the konjac and moyu seeds through intercropping*” (FG#5; EnvP participant villager (various), female, YV#5).

(3) *Capacity to resolve conflicts* relates to the ability to identify and understand a problem, create the space and opportunities necessary to address it, and reach solutions through consensual and inclusive interactions.

An example of this capacity at the institutional level was CBO-A's Coordinator dealing with the lack of commitment and support from some teachers in Yunnan Middle School at the beginning of the EduP program implementation. These teachers would come and participate in group meetings showing support for the program, but later in the classroom they would act otherwise. The CBO-A Coordinator began meeting with the teachers individually. This change allowed teachers to be more open while helping the CBO-A Coordinator to learn what their main concerns were, and develop strategies to address them (R#1, CBO-A EduP).

(4) *Dialogue and the ability to relate to others* was evident through reflections on changes in the way people interacted with each other after taking part in the program. These changes were taking place within families, between villagers and local officials, or in other contexts such as the classroom or dancing groups, for instance through more courteous or respectful language, or encouraging students to lead by example rather than giving orders (FG#2; CBO-A volunteer #4, female, YC; GI#1; CBO-B Coordinator, YC).

Similar changes were observed in amongst participants in the EnvP program implemented by CBO-B. A rural woman in YV#4 said that *"before joining the [EnvP] program we didn't have courage to accept new things, but now we are more flexible [...] to think about things, what to do and share knowledge with the rest of the villagers. There are better relationships among the villagers and within the families. We consult each other more, there is more consultation and cooperation to improve the economic development and situation of everyone"* (FG#4; EnvP participant villager, female #1, YV#4).

Generating material and instrumental capacities

Material and instrumental capacities were being developed at all three levels in terms of *skills and technical knowledge, services, economic development and spaces and platforms*.

(1) *Skills and technical knowledge* emerged of both improved communication skills and technical skills. For instance, various women in YV#5 expressed satisfaction at having increased their scientific and practical knowledge in terms of intercropping (FG#5; EnvP participant villagers (various), female, YV#5), others had successfully filled in and submitted application forms for funds to initiate projects (R#2, CBO-B EnvP). One of the teachers in Yunnan Middle School learned and adopted new teaching methods in class including group discussions and more proactive learning (R#1, CBO-A EduP).

(2) The *services* developed ranged from English classes and open libraries in the local schools participating in EduP to cleaning services in the community by groups of students, through the campaign to clean trays and save food in Yunnan Middle School, and the starting up of an economic project in YV#5. Another example was groups of students from Yunnan Middle School taking what they learn during the program and teaching it to younger children in their spare time (I#1; INGO CR, female).

(3) *Economic development* was described as the provision of clean, nice environments, public and green spaces, public infrastructure, material goods (houses, cars) and “*reducing the gap between the poor and rich*” (FG#3; EduP participant student’s mother (group 3), YC).

Evidence of this as a capacity developed in the case studies can be observed both in terms of income increase resulting from small economic projects, as well as villagers’ successful access to funds to start new projects within the community. The implementation of the ‘rotating seed fund plan’ in YV#5, for example, enabled rural women to expand the planting of *konjac* to a total 30 homes, comprising a total of 36 *mu* of planted area; “*The average income of each family grew to about 13,000 RMB – approximately 3 times more than they had previously made from planting*

crops” (R#2, CBO-B EnvP). Within that same village, two rural women were able to initiate small economic ventures and got funding for projects in the community (R#2, CBO-B EnvP).

(4) *Spaces and platforms* relates to the availability and access to social and physical structures that allow for the projects and activities to take place. Without these structures, processes such as consultation, interaction with stakeholders, sharing of knowledge or cultural activities would be impossible to carry out.

Concrete examples of social and physical spaces and platforms were found both at the institutional and community level. For instance, CBO-A and CBO-B share an office building in YC which serves as a multifunctional space for meetings, day-to-day activities, trainings, and also regular cultural events and community discussions. CBOs also make use of existing but often disused spaces within the communities such as community centers or school spaces. The creation and use of spaces was also identified as instrumental in terms of promoting or inspiring cultural changes or to help reduce social tensions. In YV#1, for example, the opening up of a small library in the local school allowed children from two conflicting minority groups to come together. The growing unity amongst the children also led their parents to start attending meetings together with the teachers and facilitators (FG#2; CBO-A Volunteer #4, female, YC).

Platforms were also mentioned by informants and participants. For instance, for the celebration of the International Women’s Day, the rural women in YV#5 organized a series of activities which included artistic representations themed on concepts of unity, cooperation, mutual love and support, as well as a public clean-up, a community meal and games (R#2, CBO-B EnvP).

4.2.2 Mapping the levels of capacities being built

Capacities were not always built at all three levels (see Table 2 below). For instance, capacities falling under *qualities and attitudes* were identified as being developed at both individual

and institutional levels with 'confidence and resolve' and 'patience and persistence' predominantly at the individual level, while 'learning disposition and capacity to adapt' was observed at the institutional level. 'Clarity of purpose and understanding' was observed at both individual and institutional levels. With regards to *organizing capacities*, 'facilitation' was present at the individual level, while the development of 'operational systems' was recorded at the institutional level. 'Planning and carrying out activities and projects' was present at both individual and institutional levels. *Developing and maintaining strategic relationships* was identified at both individual and institutional levels. Finally, capacities falling under the themes *building a culture of collaboration* and *generating material and instrumental capacities* were generally observed at all three levels (individual, institutional and community). The exceptions being: 'services' (not present at the individual level), and 'skills and technical knowledge' (not observed at the community level).

Table 2. Capacities built as a result of CBO-A and CBO-B's CCB projects and the levels at which these were identified, according to the evidence from the data.

Capacities built	Levels at which capacities were identified		
	Individual	Institutional	Community
Qualities and attitudes	✓	✓	✗
▪ Confidence and resolve	✓	✗	✗
▪ Learning disposition and capacity to adapt	✗	✓	✗
▪ Patience and persistence	✓	✓	✗
▪ Clarity of purpose and understanding	✓	✓	✗
Organizing capacities	✓	✓	✗
▪ Planning and carrying out activities and projects	✓	✓	✗
▪ Facilitation	✓	✗	✗
▪ Operational systems	✗	✓	✗
Developing and maintaining strategic relationships	✓	✓	✗
▪ Networking	✓	✓	✗
▪ Maintaining long-term partnerships	✗	✓	✗
▪ Building trusted relationships	✓	✓	✗
Building a culture of collaboration	✓	✓	✓
▪ Consultation	✓	✓	✓
▪ Sharing	✓	✓	✓
▪ Capacity to resolve conflicts	✓	✓	✓
▪ Dialogue and relating to others	✓	✗	✓
Generating material and instrumental capacities	✓	✓	✓
▪ Skills and technical knowledge	✓	✓	✗
▪ Services	✗	✓	✓
▪ Economic development	✓	✓	✓
▪ Spaces and platforms	✓	✓	✓

5. Discussion

The findings in this paper show that while there are differences reported at the individual, community and institutional levels with regard to both what the focus of CCB efforts are, and what capacity is relevant, there are also many interconnected understandings and descriptions.

For instance, while 'knowledge exchange and practice' and the development and setting up of 'collaboration agreements' were mentioned by both INGO and CBO-A and CBO-B as important steps in the process of CCB, local governmental authorities and village leaders did not reflect much on this, but rather on the formal legal establishment of the CBOs, and on clear communication, and improved socio-economic conditions. On the other hand, while individuals from the community such as student parents or rural women articulated specifically what they meant by 'personal qualities and attitudes' (such as confidence, relationships within families, or sharing and helping their community), local officials and village leaders also talked about them, but more generally (as respect for the law, respectful behavior, and the promotion of values such as harmony and unity).

The same pattern was also observed in terms of the capacities built, with some being clearly individual-level, like 'facilitation' or 'confidence and resolve', while others were capacities to systematize procedures and actions such as 'operational systems' and 'planning and carrying out of activities and projects'. At the community level, capacities were not discussed as such but there were initial manifestations pointing to changes at the level of culture, in terms of what people talked about, and interaction patterns that extended beyond the individual capacities; evidence of 'consultation', 'sharing', 'capacity to resolve conflicts', 'dialogue and relating to others', 'spaces and platforms', pointed towards some of these changes. These capacities at the level of community highlight the importance of the social space for discussion and reflection, and an atmosphere that allows these capacities to be carried from the project to the family and community setting.

There are few academic works that have explicitly set out to articulate such operational understanding of 'community capacity-building'. Chaskin (2001) and Morgan (2006) are two of the works often cited. Chaskin suggests: "Community capacity is the interaction of human capital,

organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organized effort” (Chaskin, 2001, p. 295). Morgan examines capacity-building from a systems perspective, referring to it as an “emergent combination of attributes that enables a human system to create developmental value” (Morgan 2006: 6) and that evolves “partly through the pushes and pulls of contextual factors including global economic trends, national governance, the legacy of regional history and many others” (Ibid, p. 19). For Morgan, those attributes and processes include: ‘foundational components or elements’ (financial resources, structure, information, culture, values); ‘competencies’ (energy, skills, behaviors, motivations, influence and individual abilities); ‘capabilities’ (both technical and logistical – policy analysis, financial management –, as well as generative – ability to earn legitimacy, creativity, trust, identity) (Ibid, pp. 7-8).

Chaskin’s and Morgan’s works are important efforts to understand the process of CCB in terms of its functional (Chaskin) and relational (Morgan) elements. However, both assume a uniform, almost abstracted understanding of capacity building by stakeholders, whether at different levels or even within one specific level. Their works depart from a purely institutional view or understanding of the process, and disregard the perspectives of other stakeholders. Second, they do not examine how the capacities that result from the CCB programs are articulated, nor at which levels of the process they are built. And finally, neither of their frameworks examines the extent to which capacities that are built at the different levels relate to one another.

The analysis of the case studies in this paper provides much rich information on the details of the processes and outcomes of the capacity building program. The findings suggest that there may be a spiral process of growth and cross-strengthening occurring, whereby individuals, institutions and the community grow a little in some ways and then further growth at each level continues. Examining such processes would require a finer, more granular analysis which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is clear that such a further detailed work would be useful, both

to extend approaches such as those of Chaskin and Morgan, and to provide practical operational guidance for the increasing number of community-led development programs.

Finally, while this work has largely focused on developing a broad understanding of the process as described by different actors in the programs examined, results clearly suggest that capacity building was recognized to be a nuanced and non-linear process, in which different levels of capacity were being built simultaneously. Interaction between different actors through reflection, mutual learning and collaboration was critical, as were the role of both social spaces, particular individuals, and macro and micro factors that helped shape the process. The detailed examination of these processes could offer a valuable contribution to understanding the conditions that facilitate capacity building at different levels, thus exploring the connections of the CCB elements to the outcomes, and understand the generalizations that can be made or not made to other programs and contexts.

6. Conclusions and open questions for further research

This paper shows that the stakeholders in two community-led development programs articulate capacities broadly categorized as ‘qualities and attitudes,’ ‘organizing capacities,’ ‘developing and maintaining strategic relationships,’ ‘building a culture of collaboration,’ and ‘generating material and instrumental capacities.’ While there are differences in both the focus of CCB efforts and the relevance of capacities at the individual, community and institutional levels, there are also interconnected understandings and descriptions, and the development of capacity at different levels appears to be iterative and reinforcing.

The findings contribute to the literature gap on what is understood by community capacity-building (Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010; Morgan, 2006), and the declared lack of studies on the process and contextualization of CCB efforts (Mansuri & Rao, 2013b). They point to the complex interrelationships amongst the actors involved in the process and its outcomes, and the need to measure aspects of CCB that are locally defined and contextually meaningful, rather than being

driven by external auditing. In this way, the research highlights the need and opportunity for an in-depth examination of the factors and critical conditions shaping the CCB process. Such an examination might facilitate the design of projects that satisfy the needs of donors and sponsors for accountability and efficiency while preserving the project elements that make CCB effectively participatory and contextually relevant.

7. Endnotes

1. The emphasis of Chinese research on institutional capacity building can be explained in part by the influential role of government agencies and institutions in the development and operational functions of NGOs (Chan, 2014; C. Li & Guo, 2015). Here, capacity development in China originally emerged in response to the 'dual challenge' of monitoring and regulating the rapid socioeconomic changes of the last decades, and the need to reform the state's centralized apparatus to embrace a market-driven economy (Collins & Chan, 2009).
2. While Figures 1, 2 and 3 help visualize the process of CCB as perceived and described by its main actors at the three examined levels, the authors admit that the process as it is represented here is overtly simplified and far from comprehensive. There are two major caveats that we would like to highlight: first, that the figures represent a three-dimensional process in a two-dimensional frame, and as such not all the connections and factors involved in the process of CCB can be justly represented. And second, that the diagrams do not comprehensively include the iterative process of mutual learning and collaboration taking place.
3. In reference to registration, it is important to note that both case study CBOs for this research began their community work before China's Charity Law was passed in March of 2016 (Congress, 2016). China has been reforming its laws governing civil society since the late 2000s, but prior to the passage of this most recent law, which requires all local NGOs and CBOs to register directly with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, registration generally required an NGO have an official supervisory organization. It was common for emerging CBOs to first operate as informal groups until such time as they could build up sufficient support to register formally, and many chose to register as businesses or to operate in a grey area, known to authorities but not officially registered. Hence the process of registration was highly dependent the specific conditions in the locality and the relationships with relevant government agencies. In the case of CBO-A and CBO-B, their work in the community had already been underway for some time before their official registration.

8. References

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