Results of multi-stakeholder partnerships

Social, ecological and economic impacts at local level

Contents

List of abbreviations

AfIn	Alliance for Integrity
BCI	Better Cotton Initiative
PST	Partnership for Sustainable Textiles
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CCA	Clean Cooking Alliance
CoST	Construction Sector Transparency Initiative
CSDDD	Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive
ERI	Enabling Rural Innovation
EU	European Union
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
FiTI	Fisheries Transparency Initiative
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GAIN	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
Gavi	Gavi – the Vaccine Alliance
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GPSDD	Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data
GWP	Global Water Partnership
ICT	Information and communication technology
INA	Initiative for Sustainable Agricultural Supply Chains
ILC	International Land Coalition
KICTANet	Kenya ICT Action Network
KPI	Key performance indicator
LkSG	German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act
MSP	Multi-stakeholder partnership
MSC	Marine Stewardship Council
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RTRS	Round Table on Responsible Soy Association
RSPO	Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNGPs	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Introduction
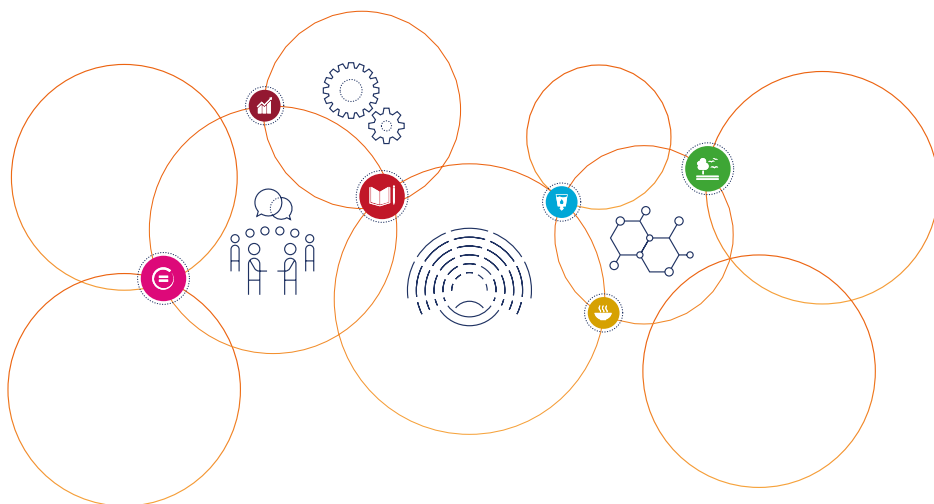
A multi-stakeholder partnership (MSP) is a form of cooperation in which stakeholders from the public sector, civil society, private sector and academia work together on an equal footing for the long term, to devise and implement solutions for the challenges of sustainable development.

Cooperation in an MSP offers a great deal of potential. MSPs can promote the inclusion of marginalised interests, develop measures aligned to local concerns and needs, broaden the knowledge base and bring together actors who have not previously cooperated.

The impacts of MSPs, especially on local populations, rights holders and marginalised groups in developing countries and emerging economies have not yet been investigated in depth. Nevertheless, existing research studies and activity reports from MSPs allow findings on impacts at local level to be summarised. These guidelines present examples of MSPs' impacts across the entire range of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and provide recommendations on how such impacts can be achieved.[1]

Who are the rights holders?

Rights holders are commonly defined as individuals who hold proprietary rights. Proprietary rights imply a legal protection for intellectual property, inventions, utility models, trademarks, etc.

In the sphere of international cooperation, the term is defined more broadly. It refers not only to material goods, but also to people's rights vis-à-vis others whose activities (could) interfere with living conditions and opportunities. Drawing on the definition used by Germanwatch[2] in connection with supply chains and due diligence, the following definition is used here;

> Rights holders are individuals or societal groups who have special claims against MSPs. In the case of an MSP, it means those groups of people whose rights are actually or potentially threatened by the activities of that MSP. This legal position distinguishes rights holders from other actors within or outside the MSP.

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[1] The research methods and their full results, methodological aspects and research desiderata have been summarised in a background paper, which also contains a bibliography with literature used for these guidelines.

[2] 'Rights holders are individuals or societal groups who have special claims against certain duty-bearers. In the case of corporate due diligence, it means those groups of people whose rights are actually or potentially threatened by corporate activities. This legal position distinguishes rights holders from other stakeholders in the supply chain of companies, especially suppliers.' (Bahn et al. 2022, p. 8)

In this context, the literature refers to local communities in general, as well as (small/subsistence) farmers, indigenous population groups, women, children and young people, workers in the informal sector and other often marginalised groups. In this paper, the focus is on the local level.

In each case, which stakeholders constitute rights holders depends largely on the topic and sector addressed by the MSP. In the case of MSPs active in the field of data for SDGs (e.g. Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, GPSDD), this could mean, for example, all citizens who obtain (easier) access to identity documents, registration, recognition and suchlike, due to the work of the MSP. In the case of agricultural MSPs, it tends to mean farmers, agricultural workers, farmers' cooperatives and (small) processing or trading companies that are or should be taken into account as stakeholders or rights holders at local level.

Some groups of rights holders are well organised – for example in trade unions, farmers' cooperatives or civil society organisations – and can participate effectively as members of MSPs and help shape their activities to prevent violations of their rights and to derive the greatest possible benefit from the work of MSPs. However, this does not apply to marginalised population groups, who are often poorly organised and have little capacity for active participation. Added to this are language and cultural barriers or the dominance of powerful individuals, which can stand in the way of equitable participation. Overall, the lack of visibility is a characteristic of marginalisation, meaning that the needs and contributions of these groups are often not taken into account.

In many parts of the world, local populations are shouldering a growing burden of conflict, inequality, poor governance, competition for resources, soil degradation, droughts and other conditions exacerbated by climate change – developments that threaten the livelihoods of vulnerable groups in particular. The transformation needed to achieve the SDGs, including through MSPs, must be pursued in such a way that all rights holders benefit and equal opportunities are created. In this context, it is important to prevent MSPs from becoming fig leaves for powerful interest groups such as governments and companies. This can turn into 'social washing' and lead to even more frustration among cooperation countries and rights holders. MSPs must proceed carefully in order to achieve cooperation on an equal footing.
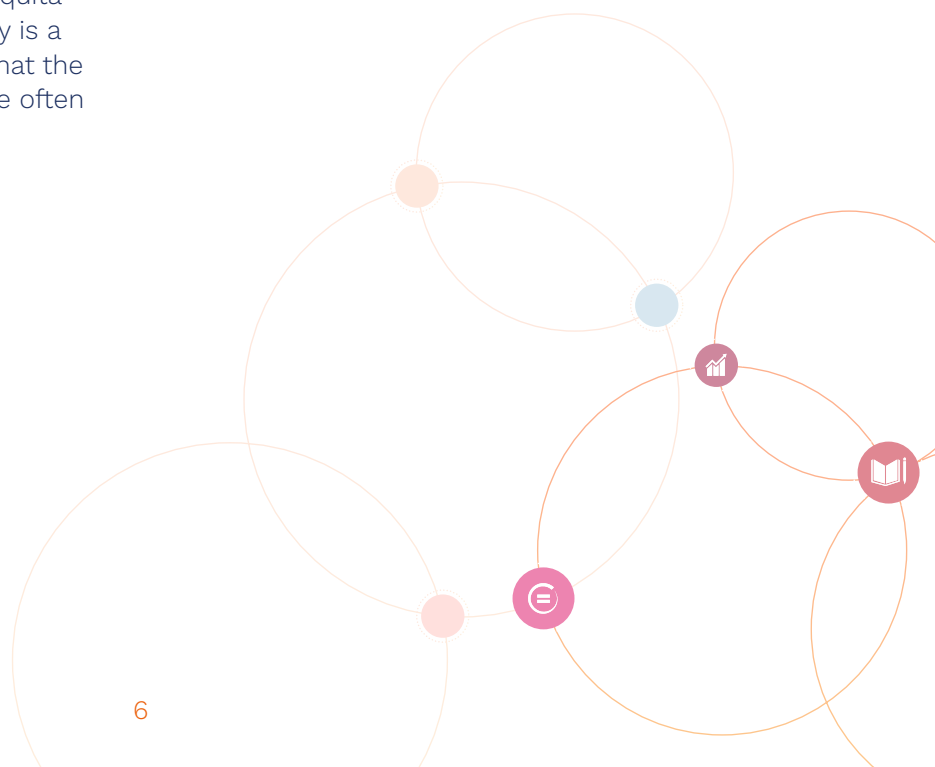
Intended impacts of MSPs at local level
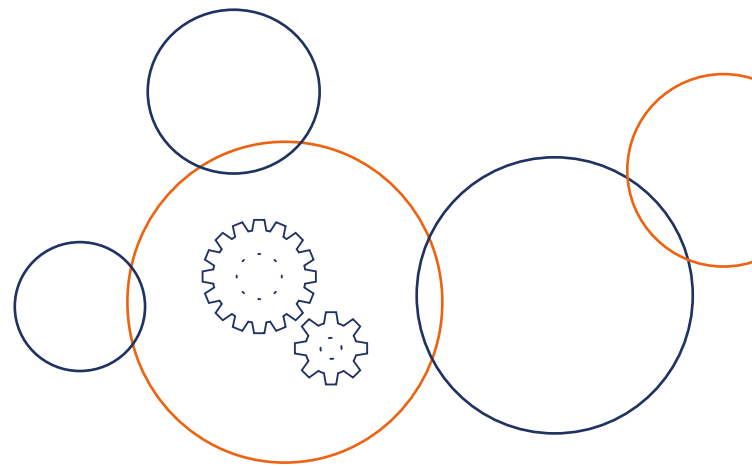
MSPs differ in their objectives, sectors, members, scope and other characteristics. It has proven useful to differentiate between different types of MSPs, such as standardisation, service and knowledge partnerships. With regard to the local-level impacts considered here, the results logics of these MSPs can be described as follows:

○ **Standardisation partnership:**

These focus on setting norms and standards (especially related to the environment and labour) that are to be met by local stakeholders, in particular farmers and other producers or workers in production facilities, in order to make products and production methods, packaging and transport (more) sustainable. This usually requires capacity development, the use of new resources, new workflows and/or new investments, as well as the monitoring and auditing of products and processes. One example is the certification of agricultural products.

○ **Service partnership:**

Service partnerships focus on implementing specific activities in the local or regional context where the impact is to be achieved. This can include, for example, the financing of projects or the organisation of training courses. One example is Gavi – the Vaccine Alliance, which provides vaccines and funds in developing countries to vaccinate people against preventable diseases.

○ **Knowledge partnership:**

Exchange of knowledge and its wider dissemination are intended to improve the sustainability of MSP stakeholders' activities. Various sources of knowledge from practitioners, civil society, businesses and government institutions are involved – including the knowledge and experience of rights holders. One example is the Sustainable Agricultural Supply Chains Initiative (INA), which addresses overarching topics that affect different commodities, such as the living wage, deforestation-free supply chains and digitalisation. As an open platform and field of experimentation, INA is also a learning platform for all the stakeholders involved.

In its evaluation criteria for bilateral development cooperation, which draw on the international cooperation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD DAC), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) distinguishes between intended and unintended impacts, positive and negative impacts, and impacts that might differ between different groups that are involved and affected (BMZ 2021). These impacts appear in the short, medium or long term and are related to the activities of the MSP directly or indirectly. In the 'impact chain', a distinction is made between different impact levels: Input → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Impacts (Partnerships2030 2020). However, the research literature on MSPs and their impacts and the MSP activity reports rarely differentiate between these levels, but instead make different distinctions. These guidelines are therefore based on the following understanding of impacts at local level.

In their objectives, intended impacts and indicators, many MSPs emphasise the impacts on local stakeholders and rights holders. According to the three pillars of sustainability (social, environmental, economic), **three categories of impact** can be distinguished that are directly or indirectly relevant for local stakeholders and rights holders:

With respect to **social impacts**, almost all the SDGs are directly relevant, from overcoming poverty, to health, access to water, energy, food, education, work and housing, infrastructure and liveable cities, to protection against environmental risks and climate change impacts, violence and war, discrimination and exclusion. It is also always important for the rights holders to have equitable participation in the preparation of decisions, in decision-making itself and in the implementation of decisions, as well as in learning and evaluation processes that prepare the adaptation of decisions over time.

Ecological impacts are also relevant for rights holders. This refers to the effects of MSPs on local ecological conditions, such as the preservation or restoration of ecosystems, habitats and various elements of the natural and built environment (air, water, soil, landscapes, urban environment, etc.).

The **economic impacts** of MSPs are closely linked to their social and environmental impacts. The effects on the local economy and economic development are of direct importance to rights holders and the realisation of their livelihoods. For local actors, the focus is on local economic conditions and entities, in particular micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, agricultural stakeholders and export and import companies. However, macroeconomic development at national level, international trade, financial conditions and geopolitical situations (wars, sanctions, etc.) are also extremely important.

Today, the governance field is often added to the three pillars of sustainability. Accordingly, there are MSPs that aim to improve **governance**, for example transparency initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) or the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI). In this case, there are impacts at local level that arise through the publication of information and making knowledge accessible to citizens and stakeholders.

Impacts of MSPs observed at local level
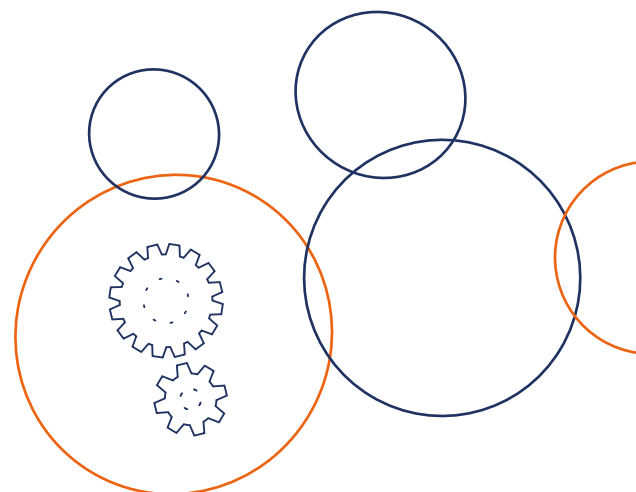
For these guidelines, relevant scientific publications (peer reviewed and so-called grey literature) and MSPs' activity reports were used, and impacts observed at local level were summarised. Some 40 publications were taken into account (see also footnote[1]). These report on a wide range of impacts related to the achievement of various SDGs. To illustrate the breadth and diversity of MSPs and their impacts, for each SDG one MSP is presented below as an example, together with its impacts.

SDG 1: The projects of the **Sustainable Development Programme for Narino's Coffee Growing Families** in Colombia enabled 1,960 smallholder coffee-growing families to improve their position in the coffee value chain by avoiding middlemen and concluding fixed purchase agreements, allowing them to make higher profits. They were able to preserve the local tradition of coffee cultivation and learned to produce higher-quality coffee. This also prevented the forced migration and displacement of coffee growers in Nariño. The participants also reported stronger cohesion and better cooperation in their communities (Payandeh & Pfisterer 2014).

SDG 2: In 2012, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) supported the innovative programme **Integrated Community-led School Nutrition** in Bangladesh, which offers hot, freshly made school meals to increase school attendance and enhance the nutrition of children aged 5 to 11. The programme used locally grown foods to strengthen the local value chain and agriculture. Local producers, salespeople, retailers and other stakeholders in the value chain took part in the programme, making it a true cross-sectoral partnership. The most important outcomes of this MSP include strengthening the local value chain, reducing hunger and malnutrition, reducing the number of school drop-outs and increasing school attendance (Kar 2014).

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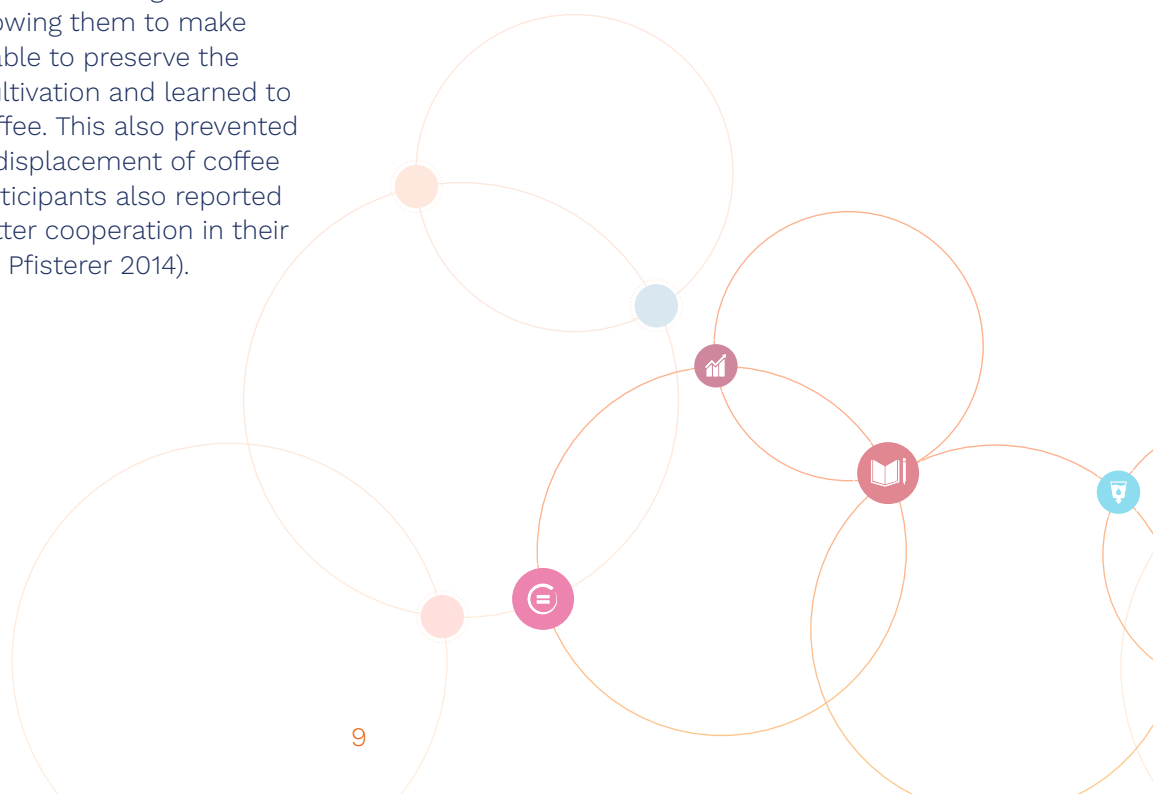
SDG 3: **The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria** (Global Fund) has made a decisive contribution to providing antiretroviral therapies for people infected with HIV, testing and treating people for tuberculosis and providing mosquito nets to protect people against malaria. Between 2005 and 2015, mortality from these diseases fell by 40 per cent thanks to the huge dissemination of these measures and their financing by the Global Fund. In 2021 alone, the Global Fund achieved the following results: 23.3 million people received antiretroviral therapy for HIV, 5.3 million people were treated for tuberculosis and 133 million mosquito nets were distributed.

Average life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 52.3 to 65.7 years between 2002 (the year the Global Fund was founded) and 2019. Progress in the fight against HIV, tuberculosis and malaria accounted for an increase in life expectancy of 6.9 years (OECD 2015; The Global Fund 2022).

SDG 4: Key outcomes of the **Enabling Rural Innovation (ERI) in Africa** partnerships included improving the capacity of farmer groups to negotiate, identify and access markets, and generate information through experimentation and participatory innovation development. Many participants considered capacity development to be one of the most interesting and rewarding components of ERI partnerships at the individual level. Common examples of the benefits of partnerships for individual employees of partner organisations include increased skills, knowledge, self-confidence, self-esteem and career opportunities (Sanginga et al. 2007).

SDG 5: **Family Planning 2030** (the successor to Family Planning 2020) coordinated activities with donor countries and in over 30 developing countries to facilitate women's access to contraceptive information and materials. The programme also initiated and supported the development of national family planning plans. More than half of the participating countries have developed national family planning plans and integrated them into their budgets. In 2013, bilateral funding by governments for family planning programmes increased by 20 per cent and an additional 8.4 million women and girls gained access to modern contraceptives (Suzman 2015).

SDG 6: The **Global Water Partnership** (GWP) reports that it supported water resources and climate resilience investments worth more than EUR 1.5 billion between 2010 and 2020. By 2025, GWP aims to support the advancement of water security in 60 countries and 20 transboundary basins with a combined population of over four billion people. Many individual impacts are reported in impact stories. These include the establishment of local and national multi-stakeholder processes for the management of drinking water, irrigation and wastewater; education and training for a wide range of relevant stakeholders; the preservation or restoration of local ecosystems and ecological resilience, and the creation of jobs in the formal and informal sector. Most importantly, the work of GWP, its national and local 'offshoots' and its partnership with donor institutions, local civil society organisations and communities has provided many millions of people with access to safe drinking water and hygienic sanitation. These impacts have been achieved in cities and rural areas – mostly in developing countries, but also in drought-prone regions around the world, such as Mediterranean islands (UN DESA Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform 2015; GWP 2023).

SDG 7: The **Clean Cooking Alliance** (CCA) works with a global network of partner organisations to build an inclusive industry that can make clean cooking accessible to all. The Alliance helps to increase consumer demand for clean cooking, mobilise investment and support policies that enable the clean cooking sector to thrive. Since its founding in 2010, CCA says it has provided access to clean cooking fuels and technologies to over 400 million people worldwide and saved nearly 4.6 million lives from the harmful effects of household air pollution. Through its extensive communication, advocacy and convening efforts, CCA has also reached more than 100 million people and raised awareness of the issue (CCA 2023). To fulfil its accountability and establish evaluations as evidence-based learning, the CCA has developed a comprehensive Monitoring & Evaluation Framework which includes CCA's Theory of Change (CCA 2020).

SDG 9: The **Kenya ICT Action Network** (KICTANet) is a multi-stakeholder think tank for policy formulation in the field of information and communication technology (ICT). Its work includes stakeholder engagement, capacity building, research and policy advocacy (KICTANet 2023). Since its inception in 2004, the MSP has acted as a catalyser in the participatory development of an ICT policy framework in Kenya. Even after the adoption of the policy framework, the MSP has had a major impact on the ICT sector, contributing to the adoption of the Kenya ICT Master Plan and the regulatory approval of M-Pesa and voice over internet protocol (VOIP) services in the country. It also participated in discussions leading to the drafting and adoption of the National Cyber Security Strategy (2014) and coordinated public participation in consultations, such as the 2014 African Union Convention on Cyber Security (UNESCO 2017).

SDG 8: **Bonsucro**, the largest MSP for promoting sustainability in the sugar cane value chain, records its impacts in areas such as occupational safety, decent work and an adequate living wage. According to its Outcome Report 2021, operators and workers reported a significant decline in accidents, with average reductions of 16 per cent in mills and 19 per cent in farms over five years of certification. The average maximum hours per week fell by 10 per cent in mills and by nine per cent in farms over five years of certification. To achieve Bonsucro certification, producers must pay at least the minimum wage established in local legislation. The data shows that today, the level of pay has risen above the national minimum wage in both certified farms and certified mills (Bonsucro 2022).

SDG 10: **The Partnership for Sustainable Textiles** (PST) advocates for a textile and clothing industry that is socially and environmentally responsible and corruption-free, one that respects the rights of all employees, protects the climate and the environment, and operates with integrity within the planet's limitations. The MSP addresses four focus topics in the sector, including grievance mechanisms and remedy. The 2022 Annual Report outlines various measures at country level. For example, the Partnership supported 16 suppliers in Pakistan in establishing internal grievance structures. In India, it supported 40 spinning mills in setting up internal complaints committees with which 2,078 complaints/incidents were resolved (PST 2023).

SDG 11: The work of the **Construction Sector Transparency Initiative** (CoST) aims to improve information disclosure and civil society participation in the construction sector. In some countries, cases were documented in which transparency about plans and (the award of) contracts led to infrastructure projects being changed or construction projects being cancelled – in particular due to excessive costs or a lack of safety, e.g. for public roads and bridges. Rights holders were thus protected from risks and public budgets were protected (Brockmyer & Fox 2015).

SDG 12: The **Food Waste Challenge** in the Netherlands addressed the problem of food waste, particularly in the hospitality industry. A multi-stakeholder partnership was established to help the Dutch hospitality industry prevent food waste by means of a 'Food Waste Challenge'. In the challenge's first edition, a large-scale field experiment with 172 participating restaurants, food waste decreased by 21 per cent. Interventions were used to bring about changes in the behaviour of guests and staff (De Visser-Amundson 2022).

SDG 13: The **SEED Initiative** is a global partnership for action on sustainable development and the inclusive green economy. SEED supports innovative small and growing, locally owned businesses in developing countries as they integrate social and ecological benefits into their business models.

SEED offers programmes of direct company support to promote the establishment and scaling up of climate-friendly enterprises (SEED 2023a). One of these programmes is the SEED Replicator Programme, which supports participants in workshops to identify opportunities to start a business, generate impact, incubate their own ideas and innovate business models. The workshops also aim to integrate and replicate existing best practices and adapt proven business models. To date, the SEED Replicator Programme has trained more than 2,130 entrepreneurs in over 84 workshops and developed over 214 replication plans (SEED 2023b).

SDG 14: The **Marine Stewardship Council** (MSC) standardisation partnership 'was founded in 1997 with the aim of steering global fisheries in a more sustainable direction and preventing overfishing through a certification programme with strict ecological requirements.' […] In the search for solutions, in 1997 the MSC programme was established on the basis of an initiative of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), an environmental organisation, and Unilever, a food company at the time. Its market-based approach is a lever for concrete, long-term improvements in global fisheries. […] Today, 25 years later, the MSC programme has achieved worldwide application and recognition. Over 5,000 companies worldwide have included sustainability in their fish and seafood sourcing policies. More than 500 large and small fisheries around the world have been motivated to scrutinise their practices, change them where necessary and become certified to the MSC environmental standard. To date, these fisheries have brought about over 2,000 concrete improvements for our oceans: less bycatch, more protected areas, stricter controls and innovative research.' (MSC 2022)

SDG 15: Interest groups surveyed gave a positive assessment of the role of the MSPs **Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil** (RSPO), **Round Table on Responsible Soy Association** (RTRS), **Better Cotton Initiative** (BCI), and **Forest Stewardship Council** (FSC) in promoting ecological sustainability in their respective raw materials sectors, and in defining standards of good practices. The work of the MSPs has contributed to the reduced use of agrochemicals and the conservation of habitats. The MSPs have helped formalise the documentation of agrochemical use, thereby promoting good management practices. In addition, BCI reported that the MSP promoted capacity development among the farmers and included otherwise marginalised smallholders in designing measures (Obereke & Stacewicz 2018; Riisgaard et al. 2019).

SDG 16: The **Alliance for Integrity** (AfIn) publishes success stories about its results in individual countries. These tend to be qualitative impressions. To date there are 14 success stories from different countries and regions that describe the problems companies have experienced with corruption and what has changed as a result of training with AfIn. One example is PARSEC, a medium-sized company that operates in the Brazilian civil engineering sector, has 40 direct employees and an annual turnover of around USD 3 million. Already in 2017, PARSEC implemented some control mechanisms to ensure transparent and clean business practices. With a goal to supply more large companies, PARSEC continued working on its compliance management system, as high integrity standards can encourage business success. An AfIn mentoring programme helped PARSEC to implement measures set out in its Code of Ethics. In order to further strengthen the implementation of the Code, employees are required to adhere consistently to high standards of integrity. A comprehensive risk analysis also supports the company's strategic planning (AfIn 2023).
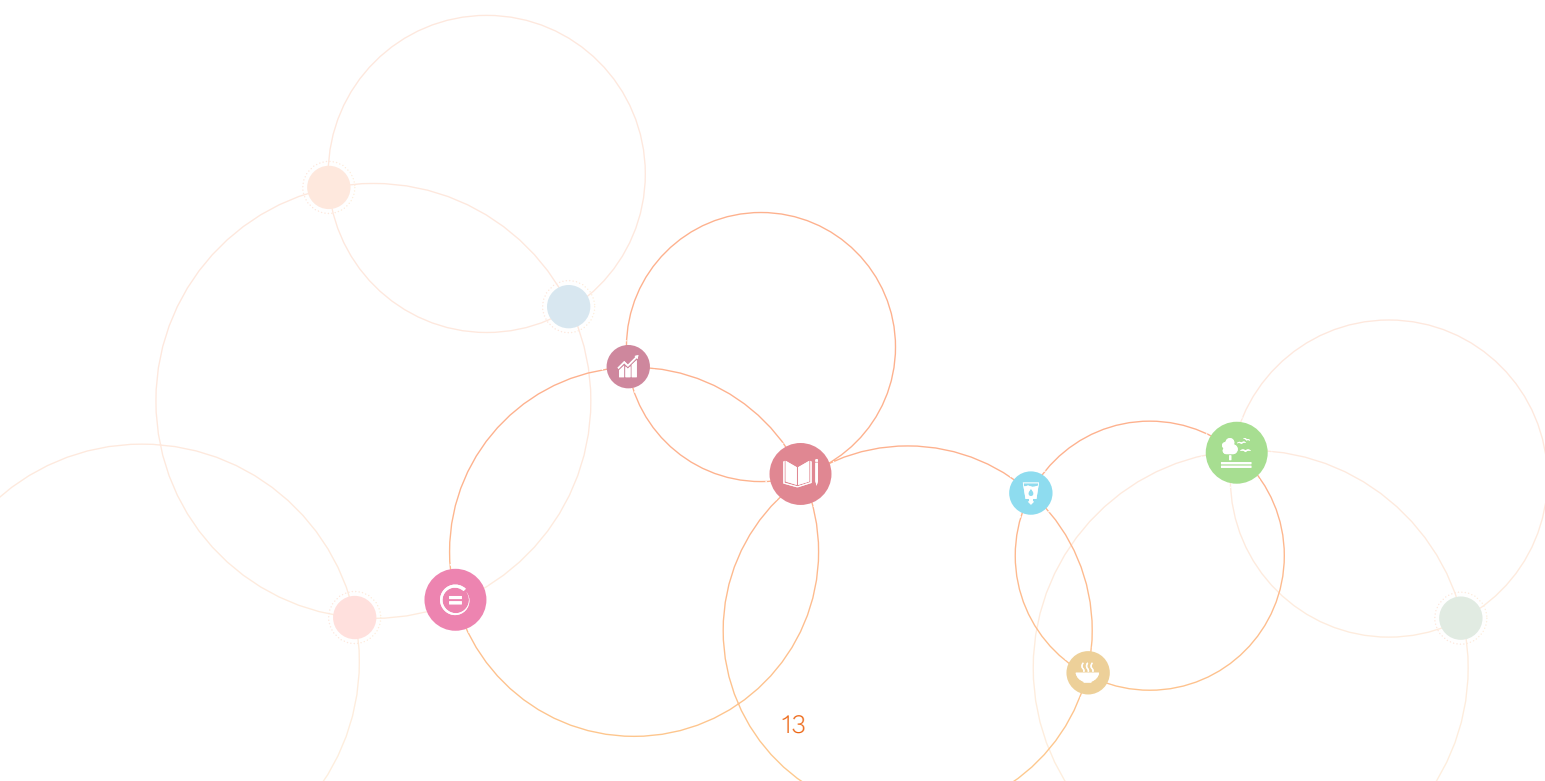
Recommendations for MSPs in practice
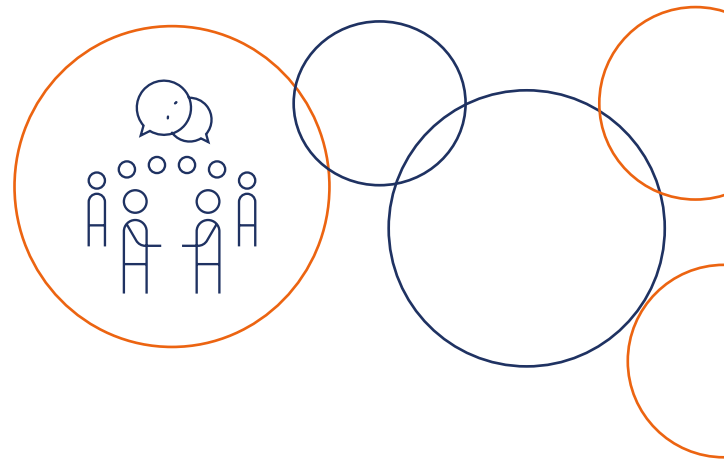
How should MSPs be designed and implemented in order to optimise the achievement of positive impacts, especially for rights holders and at local level? What should be considered in order to avoid negative impacts?

Overall, it can be said that the reported findings do not contradict the the widely used guidelines and practical guides for MSPs. However, the empirical studies did yield some more detailed recommendations, which are summarised below.

Involving all stakeholders

In the literature and in the reports by the MSPs, involving all relevant stakeholders is repeatedly cited as a key success factor. The focus is often on the possible exclusivity of global or national MSPs in particular, which are less accessible than local, ‚home-grown‘ initiatives. Marginalised groups in particular have less access to MSPs or are barely able to participate actively and play an active role in shaping activities on an equal footing. However, even at local level or in MSPs initiated by local civil society groups, not all the relevant stakeholders are represented (see, for example, Pittore & Debons 2023; Payandeh & Pfisterer 2014). In addition, MSPs are often initiated by a small group of stakeholders who usually also set the conditions for further membership in the partnership. Certain stakeholders or groups of stakeholders may indeed

be favoured – in part because the aim is to start ‚pragmatically‘ with those who are willing and have the capacity, and who are already known. In MSPs at all levels, it can happen that partners who do not agree with the objectives of the MSP or whose interests cannot be realised in the MSP either do not participate at all or at least do not participate actively or constructively enough.

If MSPs do not involve all the relevant stakeholders, or if individual stakeholders do not participate or participate only reluctantly, this may limit the capacity of the MSP to take action as well as its potential impacts and success. Without the participation of all stakeholders, not all potential contributions (expertise, experience, networks, etc.) are available. Moreover, inclusiveness […] ‚is important to ensure the legitimacy, accountability, justice, fairness and equity necessary for sustainable development.‘ (Herens et al. 2022, p. 2)

Successfully involving all relevant stakeholders can strengthen transparency and the fulfilment of accountability obligations, factors which also strengthen the legitimacy of an MSP. In this respect, inclusiveness is not only directly relevant for the stakeholders and rights holders, but also indirectly for strengthening the MSP concerned, which in turn boosts its likelihood of success.

The following measures can help achieve or at least improve inclusiveness:

○ MSPs should develop an explicit **theory of change** or impact narrative together with all their stakeholders as equals, and should formulate clear goals and ways to achieve them. This helps to identify everyone's interests and promotes knowledge sharing. This should include all forms of knowledge: scientific, practical, local realities and traditions.

○ MSPs always work in a context. That includes a **historical context**, which can only be understood with the help of the local stakeholders. Working together to address the history also helps the collective development of an appropriate theory of change.

○ **Participatory stakeholder mapping**, which is not carried out solely by the initiators of an MSP, but collectively, equitably and iteratively with all the stakeholders, and further developed at regular intervals, is a key instrument. It increases the chances of including stakeholders and rights holders who are not known or accessible to the MSP initiators, who often operate at a national or global level. Where rights holders are not equally represented in local networks or organisations, and/ or are not represented by them, particular efforts must be made to include their opinions. They can be approached and invited directly, for example, or given support for networking and preparations. Furthermore, an MSP should remain open to adding new members in all its phases.

○ Many authors refer to **co-design or co-creation** of MSPs, and the collective development of knowledge as success factors. One example is the involvement of all partners (especially the producers in a value chain, for example) in joint visioning processes and participatory innovation development, which can then lead to joint action plans. Even working on more straightforward tasks can serve to strengthen trust and cohesion (e.g. jointly planning and conducting events).

○ **Cooperation with existing systems, platforms and networks** is necessary if local knowledge is to be incorporated, also in the MSP's decisions. This not only saves resources and is efficient, but also helps to build trust, as the stakeholders are usually already known to the rights holders.

○ The **use of suitable tools, methods and formats** can specifically support the equitable participation of marginalised groups: these include participatory methods (e.g. interactive workshop formats, participatory feedback), visualisation tools (e.g. joint development of the process architecture of an MSP), mediation methods and competent moderation. If and how it is possible to work virtually must be decided collectively on a case-by-case basis. It is often worth experimenting with virtual boards, online meetings or quick feedback methods before making this decision.

○ Regular, **targeted learning processes** to reflect on the inclusion of all stakeholders in an MSP can promote the further development of strategies and methods. Such learning processes also help to understand inclusion as a process, not as a status that is achieved once (or not achieved at all). Partnerships2030 has developed a self-assessment tool for MSPs that can also be used for this purpose. It is likewise possible to understand and organise the process of inclusion in an MSP as a shared learning journey and/or to use pilot projects specifically to learn the best inclusion strategies and processes.

○ It is important to identify the added value that individual stakeholders (can) derive from their participation in an MSP – preferably together with them – and, if necessary, to develop appropriate **incentives** to encourage them to participate actively. This does not just mean local rights holders or marginalised groups. It is sometimes the powerful actors who do not get involved because the MSP's work seems to run counter to their interests and/or they shy away from dealing directly with local rights holders. Here, too, it is advisable to approach them directly and emphasise the importance of their participation, and to identify incentives and interests.

○ Local actors and rights holders often require **funding** or equivalent resources to enable their equal participation. As a minimum, consideration should be given to travel and catering costs, as well as childcare and compensation for time spent. Despite this, participation in MSPs is usually voluntary, and this needs to be explicitly recognised and appreciated.

○ The joint development and effective implementation of **grievance mechanisms** in MSPs is an important tool for rights holders who disagree with an MSP's activities.

All of these processes and measures take time. This also needs to be clearly communicated and financed. This depends on the flexibility of donors and the commitment in favour of grassroots initiatives and rights holders.

Capacity development for all stakeholders

Many reports and studies emphasise the importance of capacity development for the successful development and implementation of MSPs, especially with regard to marginalised groups and local rights holders. The following recommendations can be made.

On the one hand, a collaborative **capacity analysis** can be included in a stakeholder mapping exercise, in order to determine if and how participation in the MSP is even possible and how to facilitate it if necessary. This should be carried out when an MSP is initiated and repeated at regular intervals, as the tasks change during the various phases of the MSP and new partner organisations may be added.

On the other hand, **system-wide capacity** development is crucial and should be approached and moderated in a participatory and inclusive manner. Capacity development is needed at multiple levels:

○ **Individuals** need technical and communication skills, self-organisation skills, access to information, knowledge about their own rights, and the development of negotiating skills. Rights holders are often isolated, are not organised and have few resources, competencies or skills for advocating for their rights. It is often reported that successful capacity development can initiate a process of personal growth that leads to more self-confidence, communication and initiative, both within and outside the MSP – in the community, in dealing with retailers and in cooperatives (e.g. Payandeh & Pfisterer 2014, van Oppeln 2018). In this way, MSPs themselves can become useful media that open up opportunities for participants to build their capacities. Joint training for all participants can also help MSP partners get to know each other and build trust among them.
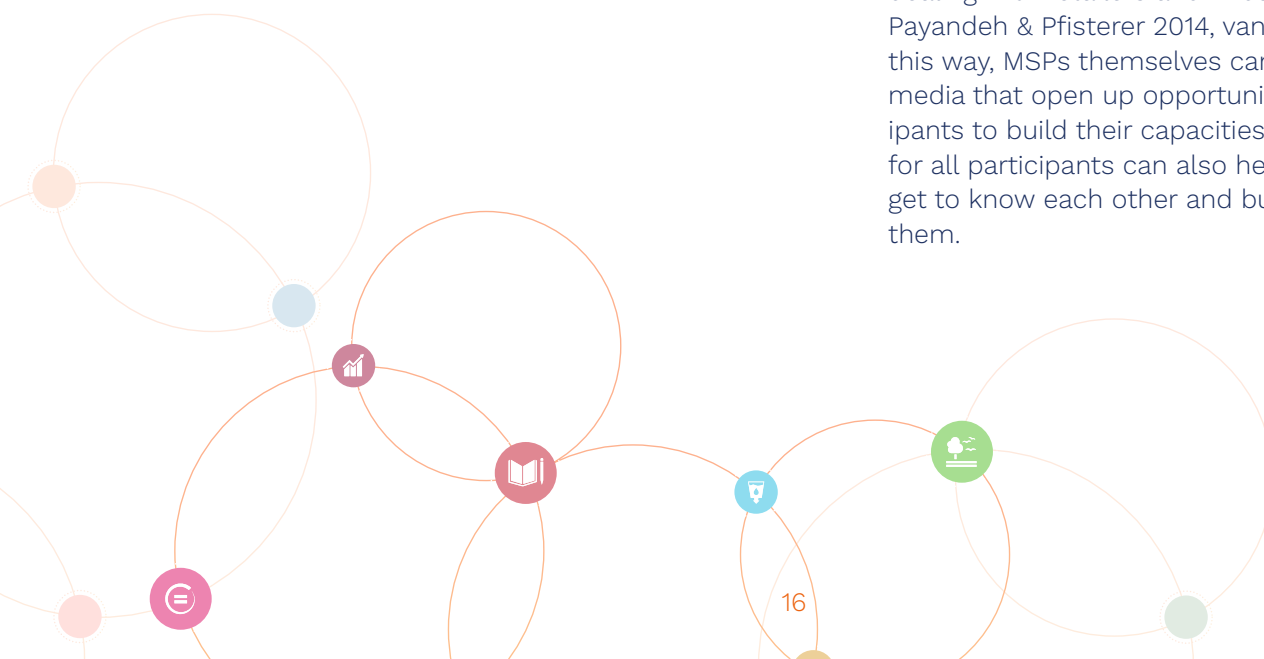
○ Other actors also need capacity development, especially those coming from different organisations and acting as **boundary crossers** in the MSP. Often, they first need to practice effective communication and build trust with representatives of other stakeholder groups. If different representatives of partner organisations attend the MSP meetings, this will support the capacity development more broadly than if the same person always attends.

○ **Finally, organisations and institutions** must learn to integrate all types of knowledge and insights and strengthen their roles as bridges to MSPs and other partner organisations. In many cases, for example, job descriptions and key performance indicators (KPIs) need to be revised to enable individuals and teams to work in MSPs on a permanent basis. Organisations must also learn how to conclude the new contractual agreements required for MSPs – often a task for legal departments or external expert advisors.

Many MSPs start their work without systematically considering the need for capacity development and fail to integrate it into their initial financial planning. When the need for training then becomes obvious, there is no budget for it. This is another reason why it is important to gauge the necessary capacities and the need to develop them right from the start.

The role of local or national MSPs initiated by civil society

There are repeated indications that local networks or MSPs established and managed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are better accepted by and more accessible to certain stakeholders than global, regional or even national MSPs. These local networks can therefore potentially play important roles and should be considered as possible partner organisations of global MSPs. While they cannot replace global MSPs with their access to trade chains, international legislation and consumers around the world, they can make key contributions to transforming a system. This is particularly relevant in the context of global supply chains.

Sometimes researchers can also fulfil a similar function, for example when local people are more willing to talk to them than to government representatives, whom they perceive as less neutral and independent.

One example of this is the Food Change Lab in Fort Portal, Uganda. A local NGO initiated a local MSP on nutrition (safety and quality) that brought together a larger number of different actors than a national MSP devoted to the same topic: they include young people, farmers and people in the informal sector. Also working with street vendors, the local MSP effected changes that the national MSP would not have been able to achieve – from infrastructure like streetlights to improved food supply and better standards of street food hygiene (Pittore & Debons 2023).

Another example is the International Land Coalition (ILC) and land reform in South Africa. The ILC promoted a civil society-initiated multi-stakeholder platform that supported the participation of NGOs and community groups in the national land reform process, and in doing so contributed to inclusion and legitimacy, as well as to the success of the land reform process (Jansen & Kalas 2020).
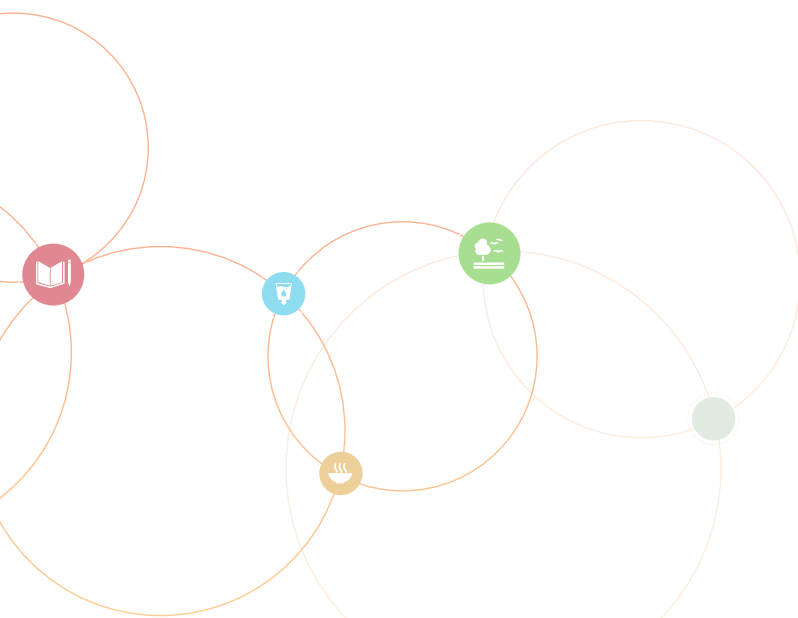
Multilevel approaches by MSPs

Global MSPs sometimes lack national integration, for example in national development plans. As a result, in individual partner countries globally agreed goals and strategies may be perceived as inappropriate and as being 'imposed' upon them. It is often very difficult for global MSPs to adapt their activities flexibly to the local conditions in different countries. Multi-level systems in the work of MSPs may be an appropriate way to combine their activities at global, regional, national and sub-national levels. This approach could help ensure MSPs' strategies are adapted to national plans and contexts and to the needs of local actors. They also offer a solution worth considering in the context of the challenges of involving local rights holders. This kind of cooperation can take different forms. For example, global, regional or national MSPs can cooperate with local MSPs initiated by civil society, or with research projects that enable the active involvement of local populations and marginalised groups (e.g. GAIN). Or global or regional MSPs can initiate partnerships at national level as part of their work. In such country-level partnerships, all relevant groups work together (also in local languages) and jointly identify problems and solutions. They are also accountable to each other and, where appropriate, to the global MSP (e.g. GWP).

In any case, it is important for MSPs to have the necessary room for manoeuvre at national level so that their work and processes are suited to local conditions and stakeholders. This makes a decisive contribution to the commitment of partners and the effectiveness of MSPs. The connection with global MSPs can also provide additional motivation for local actors, while global partnerships benefit from the learning experiences and perspectives of local initiatives.

Communication and coordination with other processes, projects and MSPs

In many cases, MSPs coexist with an array of other plans, processes and projects, as well as other MSPs working on the same topic in the same country and/or globally or regionally. As generally in politics and in international cooperation, good coordination of different processes is essential for coherence and for sustainable and efficient success. This also applies to MSPs. MSP's participatory structure and expertise in the cooperation of diverse stakeholders make them the obvious partner for supporting the communication and coordination of various ongoing efforts. For example, they can invite people to roundtables and encourage dialogue on strategies and success factors related to the specific SDGs on which they are working.

MSPs and the fulfilment of due diligence in supply chains
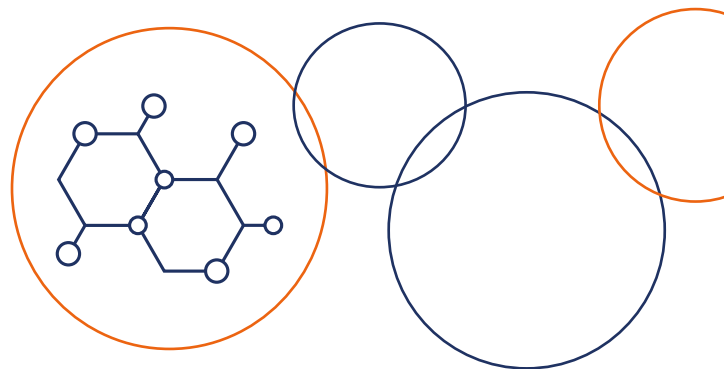
In the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), the participation of rights holders is considered a central component of the human rights due diligence process. This also applies to the German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act (LkSG) and the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), which is currently in preparation.

The German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act was adopted in 2021 and came into force at the beginning of 2023. It will be implemented in two stages: from 2023, large companies with at least 3,000 employees will be obliged to monitor compliance with human rights, labour and environmental standards along their supply chains. Foreign companies are also included if they have larger subsidiaries and workforces in Germany. From 2024, the law will apply to all companies with at least 1,000 employees, which means it will apply to some 4,800 companies in Germany at that point.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives and partnerships certainly played a role in the **evolution of the German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act**. In the textile sector, for example, it was evident that civil society campaigns (e.g. Detox by Greenpeace) prompted leading companies to take action. In some cases, this sowed the seeds for multi-stakeholder partnerships such as the Partnership for Sustainable Textiles. It can be assumed that the progress made in such MSPs encouraged legislators to initiate the LkSG, as it attested to the fact that even complex global supply chains can be made more transparent and more sustainable. Ultimately, this means that standards that were developed and tested in voluntary initiatives and MSPs have become generally applicable and enshrined in law.
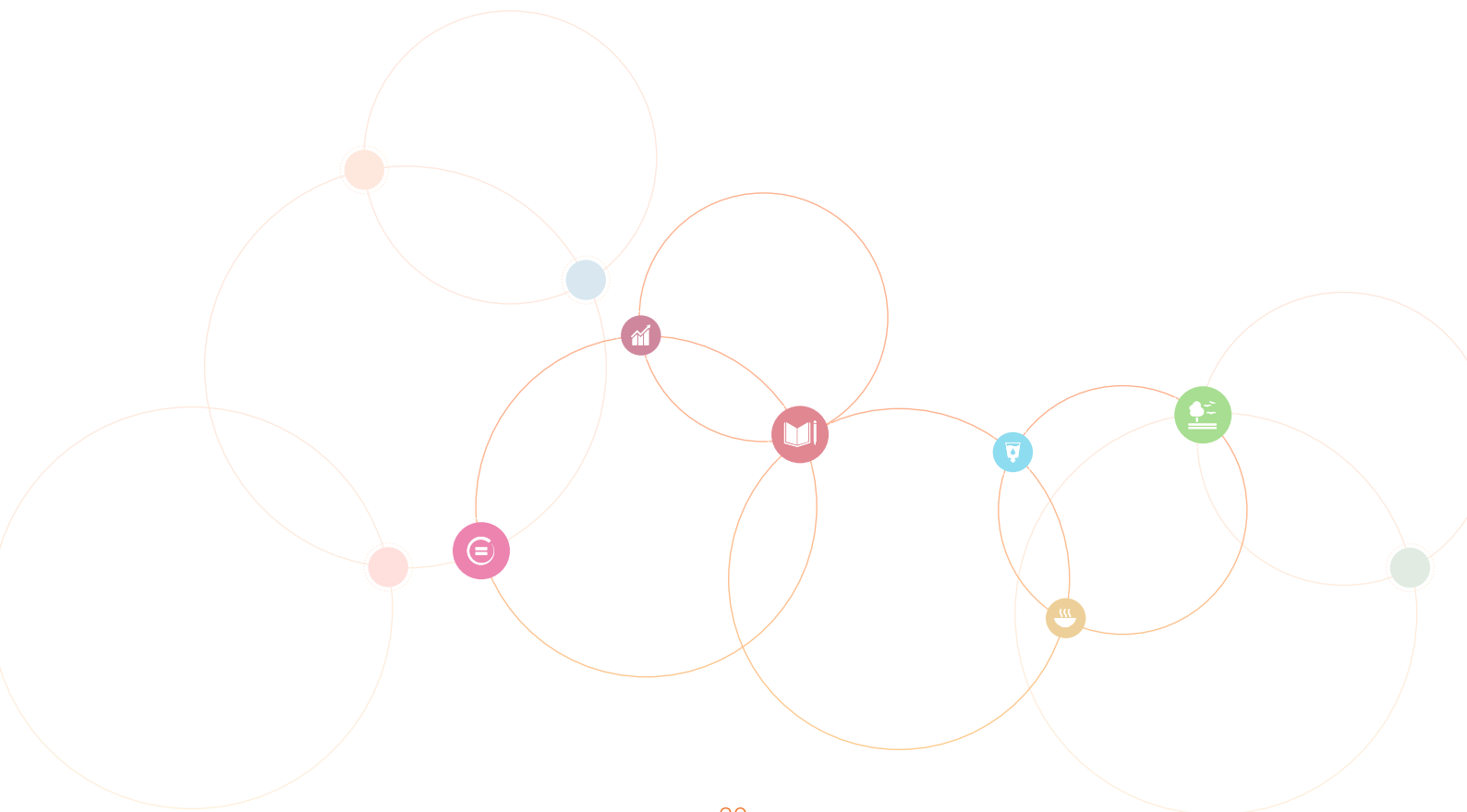
The purpose of the CSDDD is to foster sustainable and responsible corporate behaviour and to mainstream human rights and environmental considerations in companies' operations and corporate governance. The CSDDD should ensure that businesses address the adverse impacts of their actions, including in their value chains inside and outside Europe. Like the German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act, the CSDDD marks a trend towards the regulation of corporate due diligence that complements voluntary sustainability standards (Wahidi 2022).

The UNGPs, the LkSG and the CSDDD dictate that companies enter into dialogue with rights holders, directly, as part of their due diligence. Non-governmental organisations in the Global North cannot act as representatives of rights holders. As MSPs imply and promote the participation of rights holders and are designed to bring a wide variety of stakeholders into dialogue and cooperation, they can support the **implementation of the LkSG and the CSDDD**. This may also require support at local level in cooperation countries, as it is often very difficult for the informal sector and local rights holders to meet the requirements for documentation. These may need to be made more flexible in order to accommodate the limited resources of local groups.

Legislation and voluntary activities, including in the context of MSPs, continue to be useful in terms of a **‚smart mix'**. The specific form that involvement should take depends, among other things, on existing capacities, the sectors and countries concerned and possible partner organisations. Some MSPs are already supporting their member companies in this respect (see, for example, the Sector Dialogue Automotive Industry).

In the coming years, many MSPs will gain experience in this area, and the **lessons learned** should be carefully documented so that they are available to others (e.g. EU member states). The impacts at local level should be monitored particularly carefully: what role(s) can MSPs play in supporting the implementation of due diligence? How can this be done as effectively and efficiently as possible? And how can unwanted impacts be avoided? Drawing on these observations in practice, guidelines and manuals on MSPs might have to be revised or supplemented, and both desired and unwanted impacts discussed in connection with due diligence, particularly with regard to rights holders.

Authors and acknowledgements