



Success factors for efficient, effective and sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)

Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) have enormous potential to bring about social change and tackle complex global challenges – if they are successful. But how can MSPs ensure their long-term success?

This guide presents six key success factors for MSPs and provides a brief overview of what is needed for an effective and sustainable MSP.

Common strategy and planning

- **Development of clear goals:** Each stakeholder in an MSP has individual interests and goals that may differ from those of the other partners. The challenge lies in agreeing on viable common goals for an MSP that consider not only the mutual benefits of the partnership but also the added value for each stakeholder. The partners have to show commitment and take shared responsibility in order to jointly develop goals and a clear vision on an equal footing (*Collaboration on an equal footing in MSPs*, 2025). The agreement of strategies with clearly defined results chains and milestones creates a solid framework and gives partners, third parties and the general public clarity and assurance regarding the collaborative approach of the MSP. Only by clearly defining goals, a vision and strategies can the resources required for implementation be identified or developed.
- **Equal responsibility:** In MSPs, solutions are developed jointly in a co-creative process and decisions are negotiated and made by actors on an equal footing. In most cases, there are elected steering structures in which the various stakeholder groups are represented. Collaboration in MSPs involves pooling the expertise and resources of stakeholders, considering their different perspectives, finding a balance between their interests, sharing any risks and taking collective responsibility. In the initial phase in particular, a ‘core group’ of committed stakeholders is therefore required to jointly drive the development and implementation of an MSP.
- **High-level support:** The success of MSPs is also influenced by external actors that are not directly involved in the partnership. In a political context in particular, public support from influential individuals can contribute to the achievement of partnership goals. High-level support helps to maintain political momentum for an issue and to mobilise public and private resources. If ministries, large companies or similarly influential actors are not already part of an MSP, the partners should identify institutions for which their topic may be of relevance and explore how to involve them in order to increase the influence and effectiveness of the MSP. In addition to external support, high-level support from within partner organisations is also essential to the success of MSPs. Without this support, it can be difficult for the representatives of these organisations to invest sufficient time and resources in their involvement in the MSP or to justify cooperation with stakeholders with conflicting interests.

Cooperation management

- **Involvement of relevant stakeholders:**

Cooperating with actors from various areas of society in multi-stakeholder partnerships is not an end in itself; instead it serves as a means of incorporating all relevant expertise, skills and perspective in order to find effective solutions to complex challenges. The aim of MSPs is not necessarily to involve as many partners as possible, but more importantly to involve those stakeholders that can contribute to the development and implementation of solutions. It is therefore crucial to begin by identifying the resources and knowledge required to realise these goals and the groups directly affected by the issue. Once the relevant stakeholders come together, MSPs have enormous potential to bring about change. Conversely, the credibility of an MSP and its capacity to act can suffer without the involvement of key stakeholders (see [Results of MSPs](#), 2024, p. 14 et seq).

- **Respectful communication:** A key prerequisite for successful MSPs is establishing a basic level of trust between stakeholders, which can often take time. This can be facilitated by respectful interaction on an equal footing and also by the

achievement of initial partnership successes. While trust can be developed through respectful interaction on an equal footing, it is quickly lost if there is no constructive communication, reliability or transparency. Interaction at a personal level also has a significant impact on the success of MSPs. This is one reason why secretariats play an important role in MSPs: they facilitate communication, maintain contact with individual partners and can identify where trust has been lost and suggest ways to further develop the partnership.

- **Common ‘language’:** Even partnerships involving organisations that represent the same societal actors are often complicated. In MSPs, the situation is even more challenging as stakeholders not only have differing goals and problems but also different organisational frameworks, identities, rationales, terminology and so on. It is important to recognise and address these differences in ‘culture’ and ‘language’ in order to arrive at a shared understanding of the nature of the problem to be solved as well as a common vision. Joint development of a vision, goals and strategy can be very helpful in this respect (see [Impacts of MSPs](#), 2022).

Steering and resources

- **Neutral secretariat:** Multi-stakeholder partnerships are complex cooperation systems that call for a great deal of communication, coordination and process management. From the transition from Phase 2 (Design) to Phase 3 (Implementation) at the latest, MSPs should therefore have a well-resourced secretariat with at least one person who is solely responsible for coordination and process management. While the size and functions of secretariats may vary depending on the MSP, it is essential that they remain neutral as this is the only way to establish credibility both internally and externally. This requires clear rules on management of the secretariat within the MSP’s governance structure.

- **Inclusive and transparent decision-making and steering structures:** Multi-stakeholder partnerships are based on equal cooperation between all partners. In practice, this means establishing transparent governance structures and procedures that give all stakeholders equal access to decision-making processes. Effective, negotiation-based steering in MSPs requires respectful

dialogue on an equal footing that enables mutual learning as well as fair consideration and integration of differing interests. All partners must have access to all relevant information for decision-making. In many cases, capacities have to be developed so that stakeholders can contribute on an equal footing. Different stakeholder groups also work at different speeds; this too calls for understanding and requires a balance to be found. This approach to inclusive and transparent governance safeguards the legitimacy, trust and effectiveness of the partnership.

- **Sustainable resource mobilisation:** While multi-stakeholder partnerships offer enormous potential to address complex challenges, they usually involve significant and varying use of human and financial resources depending on their goals and scope. Many of the success factors listed here – such as steering structures, internal and external communication, management and monitoring – must be factored into costs. Regular checks should be carried out to ensure that the available budget can cover the MSP’s activities and ambi-

tions. Ideally, an MSP should not rely too heavily on a single source of financing in order to limit one-sided influence – even if such influence is only suspected or theoretically possible. In every case, any expectations or obligations associated with financial support must be made transparent from

the outset. In addition to the necessary funding, the time and human resources required from all participating stakeholders must be taken into account to ensure that all partners can fulfil their respective roles.

Process management

- **Results orientation:** A clear focus on implementation and measurable results contributes directly to the success of a partnership. Evidence of the direct relationship between resources invested and intended results is required to ensure long-term stakeholder commitment to a partnership.
- **Clear roles:** The ideal multi-stakeholder partnership involves all stakeholders necessary to achieve the desired outcome, with each partner making specific and relevant contributions. The partner contributions and responsibilities must be clearly defined. Each stakeholder should take on the role that best suits their abilities and capacities to ensure the best possible use of skills. The joint definition of roles and responsibilities is part of the steering structure and should be set out in a written agreement, such as a memorandum of understanding (MoU). The clearer and more binding the wording, the easier it is for all involved to hold each other accountable and demand accountability.
- **Transparency:** Continuous, cost-saving communication between the individual partners and between the partners and the secretariat contributes to the effectiveness of a partnership. Transparency is crucial, and the communication channels and platforms used must be equally accessible to all or must be made accessible. Only then can all stakeholders make well-informed decisions and interact as equal partners.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)

- **Process and results monitoring:** Through process and results monitoring, MSPs can quickly identify new circumstances and challenges and adapt their strategy and approach accordingly. At the same time, transparent and participatory MEL mechanisms play an important role in determining whether a partnership is working well and whether the established cooperation, communication and steering processes are being adhered to.

Regular self-assessments can also provide valuable information while contributing to cohesion and cooperation in MSPs ([Self-assessment tool](#), 2023).
- **Learning processes and capacity development:** The aim of MEL activities is to learn from successes and failures and improve future work through participatory learning processes. Monitoring and evaluation also support the development of necessary capacities in an MSP. In the face of changing conditions and challenges, it is essential to continuously identify any capacities that are lacking – at both the individual and the organisational level – and address them accordingly (see [Results of MSPs](#), 2024, p. 16 et seq). This improves the effectiveness of the partnership and reduces any problems arising from the uneven distribution of capacities.
- **External communication:** Reporting on lessons learned and results is important for participating stakeholders as well as funding providers, the expert community and the general public. The results are visible, leading to increased backing and support. Open and transparent handling of results is central to the legitimacy of MSPs.

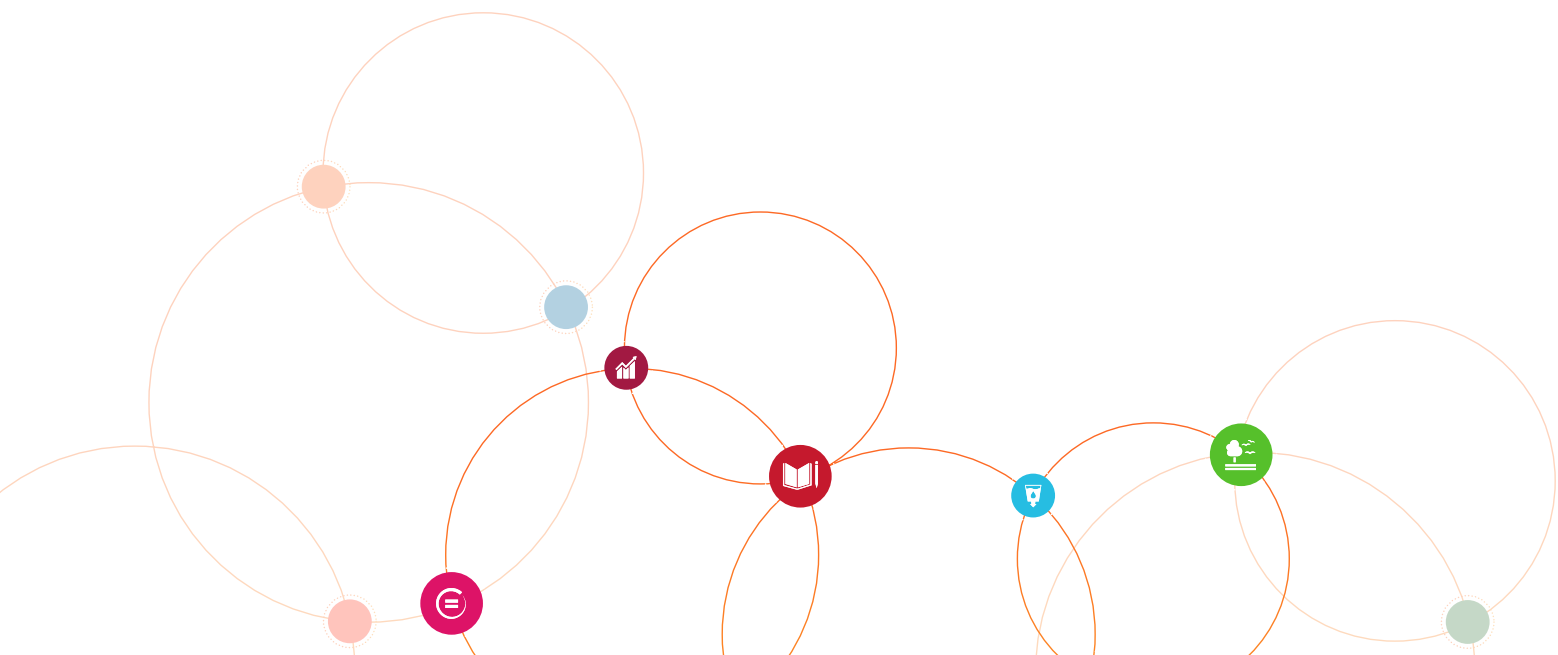
Communication should be tailored to the target group: funding providers prefer a formal report, while visually appealing stories with a personal touch are more appropriate for the general public.

Context

- **Context analysis:** The themes and goals of an MSP are always part of a larger context. A thorough context analysis and an evaluation of the activities of other stakeholders in the same field are key steps that should be taken in the initiation phase. Here, too, various stakeholders, such as a small 'core group' of committed partners, should work together to compile all relevant information and perspectives and develop a shared understanding of the context. This can prevent duplication, competition and fragmentation. Additionally, relevant local, national and global rules, frameworks and laws, such as an explicit contribution to the Sus-

tainable Development Goals, can be taken into consideration.

- **Dialogue and networking with other initiatives:** It is useful for all stakeholders in an MSP to engage in dialogue and to network with other relevant initiatives and, above all, other MSPs. This encourages mutual learning and increases the chances of achieving transformative impacts. Relevant events, for example, provide opportunities to get to know each other.



Published by:
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices: Bonn and Eschborn

Partnerships2030 – Platform for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Implementing the 2030 Agenda

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36
53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 228 44 60 3539

E info@partnerships2030.org
I www.partnerships2030.org

Responsible: Susanne Salz, Bonn

Authors: Dr. Minu Hemmati, Berlin and Mona-Lisa Limbach, Bonn

Design/layout:
DIAMOND media GmbH,
www.diamond-media-pr.de

On behalf of
German Federal Ministry for
Economic Cooperation and
Development (BMZ)
Division G 40
Principles Cooperation with
civil society, private organisations

Bonn, 2025

Note: As this is a translation of the original text, it may contain errors.

On behalf of



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development