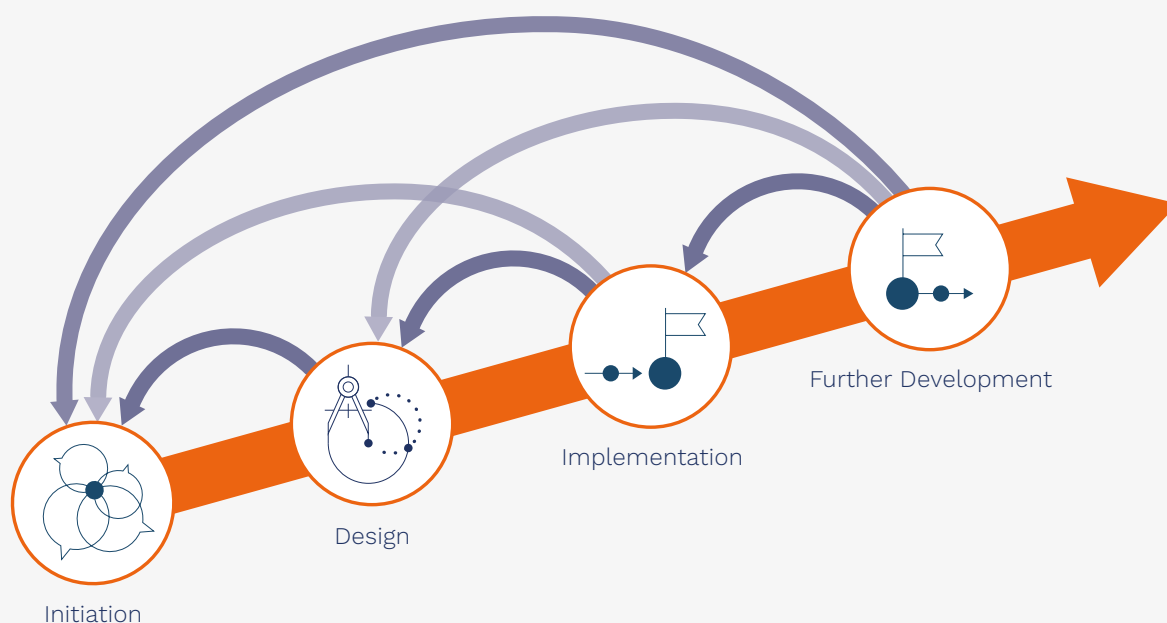




From initiation to further development – the typical phases of multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)

The establishment and implementation of MSPs follow typical phases that are described more or less consistently in the literature: initiation, design, implementation and further development. These phases can often overlap, and individual MSPs may take some steps at an earlier or later stage. Phases may also be repeated iteratively where necessary depending on the circumstances within an MSP or its context.

4 Phases of an MSP Process



Phase 1: Initiation

The aim of the first phase of a prospective multi-stakeholder partnership (MSP) is to develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of the problem and context, identify the relevant stakeholders and rights holders, and involve the key stakeholders and rights holders at an early stage (see [First steps in MSPs](#), 2024; [Results of MSPs](#), 2024, p. 14 et seq; [Online training on MSPs](#), 2024). Ideally, a ‘core group’ should be formed with a manageable number of committed stakeholders who develop a shared vision of the targeted change and drive forward the project together. This includes the systematic in-

volvement of competent decision-makers as well as stakeholders and target groups in the partner countries. In addition to formulating a precise description of the challenges and clarifying whether the problem in question can be addressed effectively within an MSP, the initiators have to familiarise themselves with the background and context of the problem and with the relevant stakeholders. This also involves gaining an understanding of the views and interests of stakeholders and identifying how they might benefit from cooperation. A context analysis should be carried out to clarify which approach-

es and initiatives already exist, thus ensuring that the planned MSP is aligned with ongoing activities to best effect. The first phase is not about establishing formal structures; instead the focus is on outlining the planned project and developing it further through

dialogue with stakeholders. Allowing sufficient time at this stage to develop a shared understanding and build trust provides a strong foundation for the subsequent success of the MSP.

Phase 2: Design

Phase 2 is concerned with designing a common road map and establishing agreements. This may also involve joint development of a theory of change. The partners agree on common goals and strategies as well as monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) mechanisms and related indicators of success ([Impacts of MSPs](#), 2022; [Self-assessment tool](#), 2023). Internal governance structures and decision-making processes also have to be developed ([Institutionalisation of MSPs](#), 2018). The roles of the individual stakeholders and the resources that each will bring to the partnership should be clarified here, too. In addition, activities for financing the MSP may be needed ([Financing MSPs](#), 2023) to ensure that the necessary resources are provided on a sustainable

basis. Ideally, all of this should be recorded in writing, for example in the form of a memorandum of understanding.

Holding a public event to present the newly established MSP can create a good opportunity to involve senior management from participating organisations, bring more partners on board and build public support.

The second phase lays the foundations for the specific cooperation between the partners and for the MSP's management, decision-making and communication processes. It thus creates the conditions necessary for effective implementation in Phase 3.

Phase 3: Implementation

In Phase 3, the MSP enters the implementation stage, in which the goals are implemented flexibly based on the jointly developed strategies. The agreed monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) mechanisms are also put into practice here. For the MSP to succeed, it is important to create space for reflection and learning processes in order to allow for any adjustments to strategies and roles. If it becomes apparent during implementation that conditions have changed, key partners are missing or strategies are not effective, the stakeholders can revisit the previously described planning processes in Phases 1 and 2 at any time. The structures and processes

created in Phase 2 must be established for effective implementation. However, these can also be flexibly adapted where required. In many cases, partners' capacities for implementation need to be developed as well (see [Results of MSPs](#), 2024, p. 16 et seq). More robust communications and stakeholder management are also needed to ensure that general interest in the topic is maintained and that partners remain committed. Initial implementation successes should be emphatically celebrated and communicated to further boost engagement. Increased staffing needs must be taken into account in all of this, especially for the purposes of a well-staffed secretariat.

Phase 4: Further development

Phase 4 is about securing the long-term success of the multi-stakeholder partnership and identifying potential for further expansion (scaling up). First of all, it is important to maintain enthusiasm for the change process through the results achieved, transparent governance, and internal and external communication. The monitoring, evaluation and learning

(MEL) mechanisms should also be used to reflect on whether the partnership can be developed further and what direction it might take (see [Four elements of exit strategies for MSPs](#), 2024). Perhaps the MSP could achieve a broader impact by (further) increasing the international reach of the process. The successful strategies of the MSP could potentially

be used to address another problem or economic sector, thus increasing its impact in this way. For long-term success, it is important that the partners agree on what is needed to maintain the MSP. At the same time, they should enable the transfer of responsibility so that new partners can come on board and, most importantly, local stakeholders and their capacities are strengthened.

However, maintaining an MSP is not an end in itself. Once an MSP has achieved its goals as far as possible (at the given time), it should be wound up. The lessons learned should be documented in an easily understandable way and shared among the various stakeholder groups so that others can benefit from them.

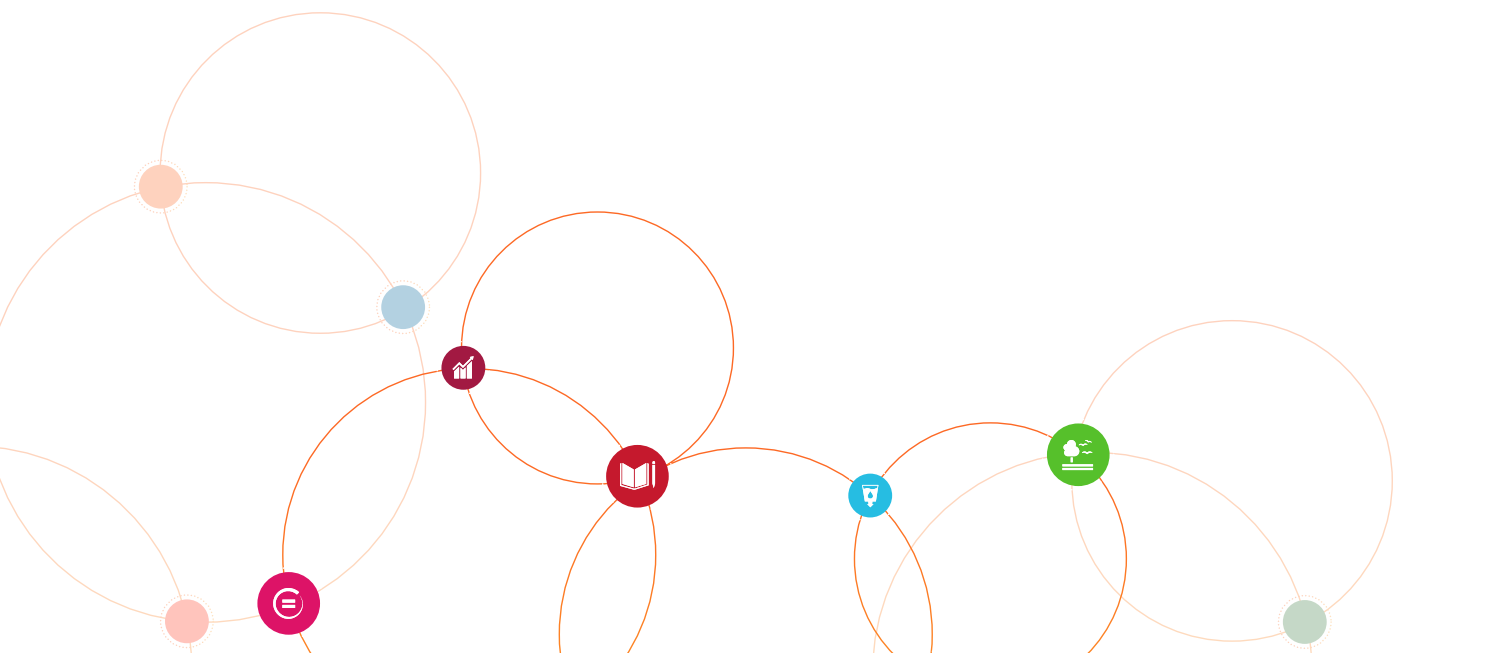
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