

Build and maintain stakeholder support

Why is this important for MSPs?

Once the set of relevant stakeholders are identified (see Stakeholder mapping), those responsible for initiating the MSP need to **build stakeholder support for the MSP, and maintain their commitment**. Individual organisations will join an MSP with an expectation of securing some type of gain over and above that which they could achieve working alone or within a conventional contract. **Creating an understanding across all influential actors of why the issue is important** to them can promote a sustained focus on nutrition regardless of political or organizational change (see Roles of MSPs).

Stakeholder support can be built in the early stages by holding informal bilateral discussions with each key stakeholder. These discussions should inform people generally about initial plans for an MSP in ways that speak to their issues and interests. Involving one or two representatives from a stakeholder group can backfire if there is no feedback to the rest of the group, so eventually these bilateral meetings need to evolve into broader conversations. At the start stakeholders need to have some understanding of how broad or narrow the MSP agenda will be (see Establish scope and mandate). Stakeholders will want to know in general, but practical, terms what the MSP will mean for them. They will also be interested in how final decisions will be made, and by whom.

Champions are important, as stakeholders' views of those initiating, organising, and/or supporting the MSP can fundamentally influence long-term success (see Champions and high level leadership page). The people taking a lead must be

seen as legitimate and be respected for being open and fair, even if they are aligned with a particular stakeholder group. It can be very important to have respected leaders from all the different stakeholder groups showing their support for the initiative. As soon as one stakeholder group perceives the process as being hijacked by another group, legitimacy will collapse.

Along with champions, **having a steering group that represents different stakeholders will be important** (see Establish a steering body). The way in which different stakeholder groups view the initiative will be strongly influenced by who is involved with and who is leading this group, so great care is needed. In some cases, an independent facilitator or organisation may take on the mobilising role, in which case they must be seen as a legitimate and neutral player open to all groups.

After the MSP is formed, and stakeholders are aware of their roles and responsibilities, the MSP has to maintain the platform. **The MSP leadership or steering group should check regularly that participants are satisfied with their roles, sufficiently challenged, and have enough support to do their part.** Include the question “Are you still happy with the role you are playing in this team?” in your regular progress reviews. Remember, too, that distant stakeholders also need to be kept informed in order to maintain or (re)build commitment. Make sure that plans and results are communicated to stakeholders on the fringes.

There can often be ambiguity or conflict regarding the division of responsibility between the MSP overall and its individual members. **Conflict is an inevitable and normal part of any multi-stakeholder process but can be effectively managed.** Normal conflict is when parties or individuals have genuinely different interests and struggle over them, rather than negotiating between them. Conflict can also be necessary and desirable for change to occur. Thus understanding,

revealing, and dealing with conflict is an essential step in developing an effective MSP (see Power in MSPs). A clearly written constitution or contract (sometimes called a “terms of reference”) can help solve this. The document gives members an overview of how agreed-upon action will be taken and develops a sense of shared responsibility for the partnership’s achievements and failures. It also gives the partnership some structure and boundaries to work within, while allowing flexibility for change and growth (see Identify actions and responsibilities and Decide on structure). During MSP design and early setup, partners can also develop a specific work plan and agree on their performance management processes so staff members know what they are meant to accomplish and how they’re doing (see Develop detailed action plans and Define success criteria and indicators).

Stakeholder inclusion on an MSP should generally be broad and take in multiple ideas and interests, but note also that potential conflict of interest is an important issue to address: See SUN’s conflict of interest tools and statement here:

<https://scalingupnutrition.org/share-learn/multistakeholder-engagement/preventing-and-managing-conflicts-of-interest/>

How does this work in practice?

Even when stakeholders agree to be part of an MSP, they are often not clear about what they are expected to do and what the group hopes to accomplish. Discussions to help people orient themselves (“Where am I in this group?”) and open up (“What can I contribute?”) can set the scene for constructive dialogue. One of the key outcomes should be that everybody is clear what the issue is. In **Uganda**, the Nutrition Secretariat and the Local Government, in collaboration with USAID, FANTA and the Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (CDI), undertook a 2-year Initiative (2014–2016) to strengthen the capacity of Uganda’s district nutrition coordination

committees (DNCCs) to support nutrition governance and multi-sectoral nutrition interventions. The approach consisted of five components: consensus building, advocacy, capacity strengthening, monitoring and reporting, and experience sharing. The consensus building helped the MSP to define the issue and become a group. This was completed by providing forums for open discussion and orienting nutrition stakeholders on the roles and responsibilities of nutrition governance to ensure joint understanding and ownership of the process. A key activity that supports consensus-building is to orient nutrition coordination committees (NCCs) and their stakeholders on national level policies and frameworks, as well as NCC roles and responsibilities. This opens the dialogue about how to initiate multi-sectoral nutrition activities in local governments.