Concepts and definitions

What are MSPs?

Broadly speaking, multi-sector and multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) are semi-structured processes that allow actors from different economic sectors and government departments to **come together for working around a shared set of concerns**. Therefore, these work best when solving a specific problem requires expertise and resources beyond that of a single sector, and is in the shared interests of stakeholders from multiple sectors. Nutrition is one such issue, requiring multiple sectors and stakeholders to come together.

The following definitions can be applied to MSPs:

> ***Collaboration**: when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues relating to that domain. (Wood & Gray, 1991)*
>
> ***MSP success:** Success in intersectoral initiatives has been defined as the ability of a partnership "to emerge, to maintain itself over time, and to realize activities related to its goal" (Harris et al., 2017).*

These definitions, in turn, help us to understand the components, process and outcomes expected within MSPs, as described below.

Why have an MSP?

Malnutrition in its various forms has a range of determinants, and these determinants are addressed by different sectors (such as the health or agriculture sectors) and by different

types of stakeholder (such as government, civil society and the private sector). Nutrition as a sector has suffered from a lack of coordination and collaboration among these different sectors and stakeholders, but the specific areas of need for collaboration will differ in different countries and sub-national contexts. While the broad reason for having an MSP is to foster this collaboration, those designing (or reviewing and revamping) an MSP should first understand the specific constraints in their context or the functioning of an existing MSP, before clarifying their reasons for renewing MSP design.

Who is involved?

Nutrition work spans multiple sectors, including agriculture and health as core sectors to nutrition, and involves multiple roles within each. Nutrition also spans multiple different types of stakeholders, including government, civil society, academia and the private sector. All of these sectors and stakeholders are involved in different ways in influencing nutrition outcomes within a country, therefore all need to be represented in the MSP (See Stakeholder mapping).

Work on changing nutrition outcomes is therefore likely to involve actors who approach nutrition from different perspectives have different strengths. They might have common, or different, interests. MSPs are likely to be stronger and more sustainable if they allow participating actors to retain their autonomy (and different worldviews) while fostering mutual understanding (see Deepen understanding and trust). Such MSPs are likely to thrive when the participating actors realise they are mutually interdependent, and therefore, come together to achieve outcomes which they might not be able to do alone.

How are MSPs designed?

A useful way to conceptualise different MSP designs is by thinking of them as a continuum based upon the strength of associations:

- An absence of MSPs is described as a sectoral style of working with little engagement.
- As sectors start coming closer, the level of engagements changes, going as far as exchanging information in a cooperative way, to conducting joint activities together in a coordinated way, to fostering deeper understanding of fellow stakeholders for more stainable collaboration.
- MSPs are not designed to promote full integration of resources and strategy among stakeholders, but to get to a level of cooperation, coordination or collaboration that is useful for the goals the MSP defines.

While multisector collaborations can take place in an ad-hoc manner through one-off meetings, the thought behind this toolkit is to promote the development of more sustained platforms for working together for nutrition. The specific nature of individual MSPs will depend upon the precise requirements of the local context, but the functioning of different MSPs is comparable at a broader level, allowing for the broad recommendations in this toolkit