

# Decide on structure

## Why is this important for MSPs?

Once stakeholders have established that an MSP is needed as a general principle (or that an existing MSP needs to be renovated), they will have to agree on the type of structure that is most appropriate. MSPs may vary from a very structured design with **formal organisational agreements**, to those with **more fluid, ad hoc arrangements**. As with many things, **form follows function**: the MSP structure will be influenced by the goals of the stakeholders (see Establish scope and mandate), as well as by the different types of groups involved (see Stakeholder mapping) and the political and governance context (see Accounting for context).

By its very nature, an MSP is different from most organisations, working across different organisations, and often requires **different administrative procedures and structures** to those with which most sector-bound governments and other networks are familiar. **For example, deciding where to place the MSP structure within governance bureaucracies is a challenge for MSPs** because of their multi-sectoral nature: Placement in over-arching bodies such as planning ministries or Presidents' offices provides maximum convening power, but is nutrition an important enough issue that it won't get lost in these high-level bureaucracies? Placement in a line ministry such as health or agriculture might provide clearer day-to-day oversight, but will the ministry be able to convene the different stakeholders effectively? Placement of the MSP as an independent body might provide more flexibility to work with multiple stakeholders, ride out political change and react swiftly to challenges, but will it have the legitimacy and sustainable funding of an MSP linked to government?

Research has identified **eight common factors** that determine an

## MSP structure:

- **Size** – from a handful of participants to hundreds.
  - National-level MSPs are likely to engage a larger number of stakeholders than decentralised MSPs
  - An MSP with only a few active members may be able to work through regular face-to-face meetings and emails, whereas a larger group may need more facilitation by an MSP leader and smaller sub-groups for working on particular issues.
- **Leadership** – from top-down to distributed.
  - In some cases it will be clear that one person or organisation should lead an MSP; in others there might be good political or practical reasons for rotating leadership among different groups over time.
- **Governance** – from formal to informal.
  - In some contexts, a written constitution and organigram would serve to define leadership and membership roles and contribute to clarity and accountability in the MSP. In other contexts a more informal setup might offer more flexibility and agility to adapt to change and access key stakeholders.
  - For formally-constituted MSPs, deciding where to position the MSP in sectoral ministries, overarching bodies such as planning ministries, or as independent bodies is key.
- **Purpose** – from short-term outcomes to systemic change.
  - Some MSPs start by focusing on a single issue within nutrition in order to build collaboration between stakeholders and achieve a tangible goal in the short term. Over time, most MSPs work towards coordination in the nutrition sector as a whole, with a goal of longer-term or systemic change.
- **Alignment** – from maximum to minimal alignment between

stakeholders.

- It is likely that some stakeholders on an MSP will have very similar sectoral goals, but that others will be focused on very different aspects of nutrition. It is important to understand the variety of goals and interests in order to decide how stakeholders will work together.
- **Sector** – from a single sector to multiple sectors.
  - By its very nature, an MSP will be multisectoral – but how many sectors are involved, and do they speak similar disciplinary languages, or do they work in very different ways? Understanding how to communicate among different sectors is vital to a successful MSP.
- **Orientation** – from action-oriented to learning-oriented.
  - Some stakeholders will join the MSP because they have a particular action they want to achieve, which will be better achieved alongside other MSP members. Other stakeholders may be more focused on the information-sharing that happens among MSPs to help them in their own work.
- **Geography** – from place-based to global.
  - By its nature, an MSP will be nationally-focused. But within a country there will be a need to set up structures that address local needs through decentralisation, and structures that can link to global networks and support.

Identifying where your context sits on each of these issues will help decide the most effective structure to suit both the stakeholders involved and the MSP's vision. **It is up to the MSP steering group or membership to assess these issues** and decide what would fit best in a given context. The initial structure may need to be revisited over time, to check that it still fits the MSP's purpose.

Overall, **the structure needs to be flexible** enough to deal

with different activities and changing demands over time. Many countries are working towards decentralisation of nutrition services, so an MSP will need to be responsive to this by establishing sub-national level structures as well as national level (see Decentralisation) and clarifying how structures at different levels will work together.

## How does this work in practice?

Kyrgyzstan's MSP has established the administrative details of its structure on paper through the development of an **organogram**, showing technical and coordinating roles and the position of networks within the platform. In reality, however, the partnership has tended to be a looser arrangement between participating organisations. Stakeholders have now taken steps to improve coordination by '**marrying**' **formal and informal structures** within the MSP, including:

- Aligning existing formal entities such as the (previously inactive) **Food Security and Nutrition Council** (FSNC – housed within the Ministry of Health) with the more informal SUN networks by creating a coordinating technical secretariat within an existing structure (the FSNC);
- Consolidating multi-sectoral 'buy-in' by **rotating the MSP technical coordination role between sectors** (responsibility for coordinating the MSP has moved from Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Agriculture);
- Strengthening formal **governance** mechanisms such as the **Memorandum of Understanding** (MOU) between all SUN networks, by developing **Terms of Responsibility** (TORs) to clarify roles and accountability within the MSP.

Much of this has been achieved by those working within the country; however, the Kyrgyz MSP also sought and received **technical assistance via the SUN secretariat** in clarifying the MSP structure, and in aligning it with the country's multi-sectoral food and nutrition plan.