

Deepen understanding and trust

Why is this issue important to MSPs?

Establishing a clear structure and process are vital to designing a successful MSP (see Decide on a structure and MSP process), but a large part of what makes an MSP work is the people involved and how they interact. **To work together well, MSP members need to trust each other:** to trust that fellow members will follow through on their commitments, will share relevant information, and will work together as a team; and to trust that the MSP process will speak to their own interests and will be well led. Aspects of stakeholder interactions that tend to build trust include competence, reliability, integrity and honesty, openness, and a caring attitude.

Building trust requires putting a particular emphasis on building and maintaining relationships between different stakeholders within the MSP. In some cases these professional or personal relationships will already exist, from long years of working together. In other cases however, respect and trust will need to be built specifically when bringing stakeholders together – sometimes, if there has been a lot of conflict among stakeholders over different interests, this process of building trust will need to go on for some time before a formal MSP process can be launched. The way that early stakeholder interactions are handled is vital for trust later on, so this step should not be rushed.

Key to building trust is making sure that stakeholders understand each other's' views, values, perspectives, and interests. They don't need to agree, and conflict is an

inevitable part of building an MSP, but people need to feel understood, listened to, and respected before they will start to trust each other. For this reason, the MSP design process should start with activities that help stakeholders to interact and get to know each other: what are their interests around the MSP and nutrition work; what are they already doing and how does this fit with what other stakeholders are doing; what do they think remains to be done...?

To be successful in communicating and working together, it is important that the MSP is a space to learn and reflect, to be able to say what you need to say without being judged even if others have different opinions. In building understanding and trust, **a successful MSP makes sure that multiple perspectives are something to value.** To build trust, the perspectives of the less powerful should be heard as much as those of the least (see Power in MSPs).

What does this mean in practice?

In **Zambia**, a significant period of building and deepening mutual understanding and trust was undertaken when designing and setting up a decentralised MSP in one district. Initial phases included identifying potential leaders of the MSP from different ministries and guiding them on a 'learning journey' through local communities to look for the causes of stunting in those communities from their different sectoral perspectives, and creating a 'problem tree' which incorporated each of these perspectives. This exposure provided an entry point into a deeper engagement with one another about how to address these realities. It also raised the issue of where power lay among the different members, which could then be discussed and addressed. When the MSP leadership came back together in their regular meetings, this experience provided a basis from which to continue conversations, to increase mutual understanding. Over time, as mutual understanding grew and roles were clarified and acted upon, trust emerged among the

leadership group, and a relatively open and trusting ethos was set for the MSP as a whole.