

Develop capacities for action

Why is this important for MSPs?

Those leading or catalysing the creation or renovation of an MSP should consider the types of capacity available among stakeholders in their initial context assessment, and factor in specific measures to build capacity of the MSP in areas where it is lacking.

Capacity describes the **human and organisational abilities and resources to create and sustain an MSP**. Capacity is often referred to as technical capacity, referring to the nutrition knowledge and skills that people hold. **Technical nutrition capacity** is important to have represented on an MSP, but equally important are two other types of capacity: **strategic capacity**, in the form of soft-power skills to operate across the range of sectors and stakeholders represented on the MSP, such as leadership skills, communication skills, and the ability to advocate for resources and convey evidence; and **operational capacity**, meaning adequate systems and personnel to carry out the MSP functions.

These different capacities may already exist among the MSP stakeholders and need to be harnessed, or capacity may need to be built. Resources exist for undertaking a **capacity gap assessment**, and this should be done as a first step in deciding where capacity needs to be built. There are **various options for building the strategic capacity** that is key to creating a functioning MSP. In Africa, the **African Nutrition Leadership Programme (ANLP)** enrolls participants for ten days of intensive leadership training to build individual strategic capacity. Many donors and development partners enable **attendance at dedicated leadership courses** on different continents. And some NGOs have brought in **facilitators to work with leadership teams** to build their strategic capacity.

How does this work in practice?

In Zambia the NGO Concern Worldwide worked with ministries in one district to create their first decentralized MSP. The MSP leadership team comprised of one key person from each of the three key ministries involved in the MSP, identified by the ministries themselves. As part of the MSP design and creation process, Concern contracted a regional facilitator to work with the leadership team, with six sessions over the course of three years.

These sessions included **'learning journeys'** into local communities, to help the leadership team understand the multi-causal determinants of malnutrition and so build technical capacity; **'leadership retreats'** where the team was guided to reflect on the kind of leadership needed to create change and to build communication and advocacy skills and so build strategic capacity; and **'active innovation'** in which the leadership team were guided in reflecting on existing systems and structures for working together, and defining new systems and processes to work within but extend existing systems according to the needs of the MSP, to build systemic capacity.

This focus on capacity building of the leadership team alongside operational systems has meant that the MSP has continued to function several years after the NGO moved on, despite several leadership changes within the MSP.