



Impact and Impact Assessment of and in Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs)

Tips from practice and research

In → multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs), partners from the public sector, civil society, the private sector and academia jointly tackle sustainable development challenges. In doing so, questions of impact and impact assessment arise: what does impact mean and how to assess it? This document provides answers as well as tips from practice and research.

A two-day peer-learning workshop with representatives of partnerships as well as political and scientific experts allowed for exchange and discussion around impact and impact assessment of and in multi-stakeholder partnerships. The workshop took place in Bonn, Germany in September 2018 and was organised by Platform for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Implementing the 2030 Agenda (→ <http://www.partnerships2030.org/>).

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1. Understanding impact of MSPs

Striving for approaches to tackle global challenges, stakeholders from at least three different sectors including government, business, civil society and academia come together in multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to work as equals in an organized and long-term engagement. MSPs are especially suited for approaching complex challenges that go beyond the reach of individual stakeholders.

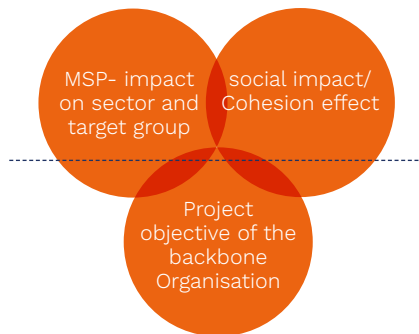
Differences in understanding and assessing impact exist between MSPs and projects of governmental and civil society organisations.

Figure 1: Impact of MSP



In comparison to the impact achieved via classical means like projects, the impact of multi-stakeholder partnerships has an additional component: Just like with classic projects, MSPs have an impact on the sector and target group. In addition, however, they also have an impact on the stakeholders within the MSP (as illustrated in figure 1). This impact on stakeholders within MSP is referred to as social impact.

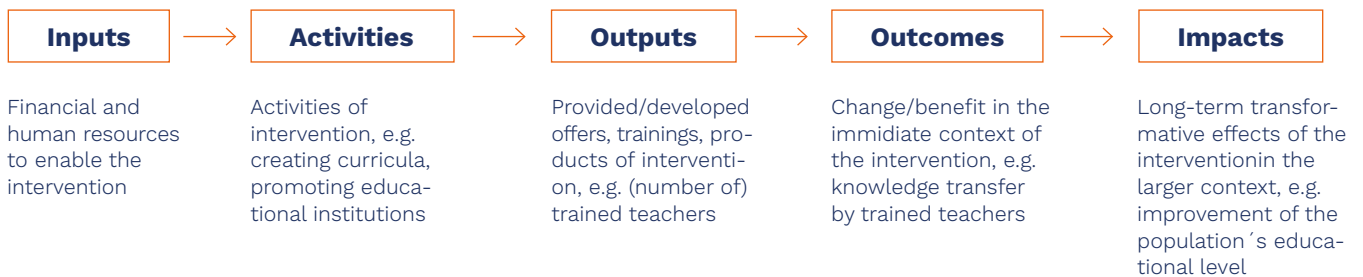
Figure 2: Impact and MAP – 3 perspectives



Further, it is helpful for MSP secretariats and backbone organisations to understand and consider their own impact separately from that of the MSP as a whole, as shown in Figure 2.

I Basics based on OECD / DAC criteria

Impacts can be planned or unplanned, positive or negative, intended or unintended. They appear in the short, medium or long term and are related to the activities of the MSP directly or indirectly. The so-called impact chain supports the consideration of impact of an MSP by breaking down the different impact levels. They are as following:



The five core criteria for effectiveness of OECD / DAC support the question of evidence of impact in relation to multi-stakeholder partnerships in the following form:

- Relevance** Is the MSP's objective relevant? Is an MSP the appropriate instrument to achieve the objective? Does the MSP create benefits compared to other approaches?
- Efficiency** Are the resources contributed by the partners, such as time, money, staff, in proportion to the results achieved or the benefits of the MSP?
- Effectiveness** Are there countable and measurable results of the MSP at the output level? Are there qualitative changes at the outcome level by making use of the generated results?
- Sustainability** Is the MSP likely to provide lasting benefits? How sustainable and self-supporting are the institutionalised structures and the structure of the MSP?
- Impact** Does the MSP achieve transformative change?

II Impact of MSP: social impact ¹

The fundamental ways of thinking and acting of stakeholders involved in MSPs can change through their interaction in an MSP. New patterns of interaction emerge from new internal dynamics based on cooperation, trust and joint action. These remain even beyond the cooperation within the MSP, leading to transformative changes of behavioural patterns of the stakeholders. MSP participants report on their experiences in their wider networks

and thus contribute to dissolving stereotypes. In addition, there is often an increased willingness of the stakeholders to cooperate again in other projects, to exchange information informally periodically about relevant matters or to act more inclusively and sustainably.

MSPs thus have effects that go beyond the change processes initiated by the MSP. These impacts are referred to as the social impact of MSPs.

III Impact of MSP: impact on sector and target group

In order to understand the impact of an MSP on the sector and the target group, the following questions should be considered:

- Outcomes** What is achieved for whom? When does the outcome occur?
- Mechanisms** What kind of factors and processes have made these outcomes possible?
How are the mechanisms that produce change interrelated?
- Additionality** What is the contribution of the MSP to the observed impact (keyword contribution)?
Has the MSP put forth the impact (keyword attribution)? Would the impact have been achieved even without the MSP? Has the MSP achieved more than individual actors would have achieved working on their own?

IV Impact of MSP: practical tips

How can MSPs navigate impact?
The following practical tips can help:

TIPS

- **Sketching the overall objective:**
What kind of outcome can be promised and realised?
For whom and where should the effects take place? The overall objective and impact of an MSP should be aligned with the type of MSP, its size and context. The different types of MSPs might help to pursue different kind of impacts (see box on the right).
- **Defining the overall objective:**
What do we want to achieve? What are our goals?
The overall objective (or „theory of change“) of the MSP should be discussed with all stakeholders from the beginning so that they develop a common understanding. It is important to bear in mind that there are different dimensions of objectives:
 - › the common goal of the MSP
(What do we want to achieve together?),
 - › the long-term developmental objective
(what do we as an MSP want to contribute to?)
 - › and the varying objectives of each MSP stakeholder.

Types of MSPs and kind of impacts

- Standardization partnership
→ Focus on setting standards and norms. The impact aims at transforming an entire sector.
- Service partnership →
Concrete implementation and realization of activities at the local or regional level, where the impact is to be delivered.
- Knowledge partnership →
Knowledge sharing aims to alter the actions of MSP stakeholders based on the information received.

In practice, MSPs are often a hybrid of types.

¹ As of now, there is no technical term – neither in science nor among practitioners – for the impact of and in MSPs on MSP actors and their patterns of action as described here. In this document, this effect is referred to as social impact

In general, it is recommended to execute a problem analysis as a baseline and to articulate clear, measurable goals and review mechanisms.

Since multi-stakeholder partnerships usually involve an intense initiating phase, their implementation and impact will only show later. Therefore, MSPs require longer time horizons than classical project work.

• Involvement of stakeholders:

who is involved?

The dialogue should be strategic: relevant and influential stakeholders can drive the process forward as a core group. However, too many stakeholders in the core group can slow down the process, as it is primarily about building trust within the group.

In order to gain further relevant stakeholders for the MSP, establishing business cases and demonstrating the benefit of involvement for different groups is helpful.

During the ongoing process, new stakeholders might join or drop out. Therefore, it is important to keep the impact model updated, especially when new stakeholders join.

• Working together as equals:

How do we want to cooperate?

Inclusive and participatory decision-making and implementation is essential when it comes to the sustainable impact of an MSP as it determines legitimacy and scope of the partnership. Stakeholder groups should therefore be able to engage in an equal way.

Institutionalised governance structures prepare the ground of the partnership and provide an agreement about the way in which stakeholders will work together. Among other things, it is important to ensure that governance structures ensure stakeholders work together as equals, so comments and suggestions are included from everyone.

Working in MSPs is at its core about the interaction of the engaged stakeholders. Building trust between the stakeholders is an integral factor for achieving impact. As for this, building a common identity and establishing a sense of „we“ can be helpful for the joint activities.

• Continuous Monitoring & Evaluation:

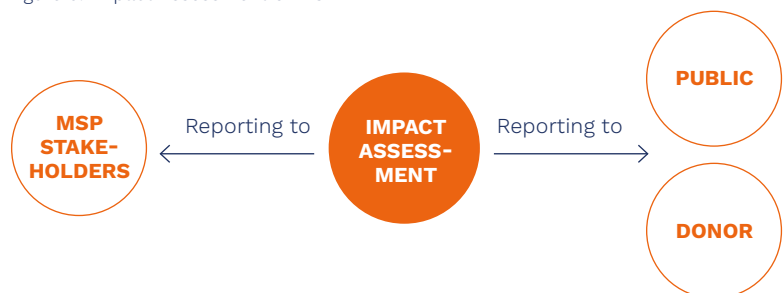
How do we achieve success? How do we ensure learning?

An important success factor for the impact potential of MSPs is sound process management. Joint learning, continuous development and improvements are the basis for the efficiency and effectiveness of an MSP. It is helpful to monitor short-term outcomes in order to ensure continuous learning, to make adjustments and to manage expectations. Measuring medium-term outcomes is important to evaluate changes that occur.

2. Impact Assessment

Impact assessment is relevant and essential in many ways - it provides accountability towards donors, target groups and active stakeholders of the MSP. Impact assessment is not simply about control, but rather about monitoring & evaluation (M&E) in order to document successes and ensure learning.

Figure 3: Impact Assessment of MSP



The goals of impact assessment are:

- Comprehension** How can the process be managed?
- Control** Are the tasks implemented by the responsible stakeholders?
- Learning** How do processes between stakeholders work and how does the MSP operate?
- Legitimacy** What kind of activities lead to which kind of results and who contributes?

I Impact Assessment for MSP: practical tips

TIPS

Following recommendations for impact assessment result from practice and research:

Who assesses? MSPs are responsible for their M&E process. External support and advice on M&E as well as training for the steering committee, the secretariat and / or other bodies can be helpful. In case of standards and certification, it is useful to involve independent third parties.

Why assess? Impact assessment requires capacities (time, money, effort). It should be emphasised that M&E legitimises and improves the impact of all MSP stakeholders. This requires the evaluation of the impact on the target group as well as monitoring the MSP and the relationships between the stakeholders themselves.

What to assess? Possible contents and aims of an evaluation are the monitoring of processes, an examination of the relevance and achievement of objectives, the assessment of impacts and the examination of causal hypotheses.

When to assess Assessment should take place in several stages: ex-ante to improve the planning of an intervention (baseline setting); continuously to improve the processes; and ex-post to assess the actual impact. It should be kept in mind that it is difficult to assess the long-term impact of MSPs.

How to assess? Impact assessment can be both – quantitative and qualitative, whereby triangulation of data is recommended. Standardisation is not the golden way. The aim is to find solutions that work within the respective system. Possible tools and approaches can be found in the toolbox (see box below).

How to proceed? It should be noted that monitoring and evaluation belong together. Questions about the M&E system should be considered in good time in order to establish it as early as possible while staying flexible during the ongoing process.

II Questions an MSP should ask themselves

- Why do we need an M&E system?
- What kind of information does each individual partner need?
- What do we need to know / find out?
- What resources / capacities / conditions do we have?
- What data do we need for this?
- When do we need which data?
- How do we guarantee the quality of data?
- Who needs to be involved?
- Who carries out the M&E process?
- How do we deal with the results internally?
- How do we share the data with others?
- How does the MSP contribute to change? Does the MSP achieve its objectives?
- What do we do if things do not turn out as planned?

III Instruments for impact assessment - Toolbox

Co-operation between the MSP stakeholders

- A network analysis, to find out how the MSP collaboration works: BetterEvaluation. → [Link](#)
- Surveys with members and stakeholders, to find out how satisfied the stakeholders are and what the status of the partnership is. (e.g. Survey Monkey)
- The Collaboration Continuum, to enable self-assessment of the partners: Austin & Seitanidi (2012). Collaborative Value Creation: A Review of Partnering Between Nonprofits and Businesses: Part I. Value Creation Spectrum and Collaboration Stages. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly xx(x) 1-33. → [Link](#)
- The Partnering Process Tool, to assess the cooperation of the partnership: PPP Lab. → [Link](#)
- The Promoting Effective Partnering Toolbox for ensuring effective partnerships: The Partnerships Resource Centre; Collective Leadership Institute; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs et al. → [Link](#)

Defining objectives and assessing impact

- A contribution analysis, for assessing the contribution of the MSP: BetterEvaluation. → [Link](#)
- A guide to the approach of Social Return on Investment (SROI). UK Cabinet Office. → [Link](#)
- The Dialogic Change Model of the Collective Leadership Institut, to be used for monitoring → [Link](#)
- The Impact Pathways, to navigate if the MSP is on track: The Partnerships Resource Centre of the Rotterdam School of Management of Erasmus University Rotterdam, Wageningen University, 2SCALE project. → [Link](#)
- The MSP Guide, to gain comprehensive information and tools for the work in MSPs: the Centre of Development Innovation (CDI) of Wageningen University. → [Link](#)
- The PPPCanvas, to analyse the business model: PPP Lab. → [Link](#)
- The Scaling Scan, to develop realistic ambitions: PPP Lab. → [Link](#)
- The Social Impact Navigator: Doing Good – Achieving The Best. Bertelsmann foundation and PHINEO (→ [PDF Link](#) and → [online version Link](#))

Communicating outcome and impact

- Audio-visual representation of information (infographic, video, pictures, podcast, digital storytelling, photo book, interviews)
- Database with information on company reports: Business and Human Rights Research Center in London → [Link](#).
- Presenting case studies and narratives (storytelling), to create context and show results

IV Exemplary illustration of the M&E process

The MSP for sustainable tuna, which is cofinanced by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), serves as a case study to illustrate the M&E process of an MSP and to offer practical tips. This MSP is about sustainable tuna fishing and better income opportunities for small-scale handline fishers in two project regions in the Philippines. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) acts as the backbone organisation for this MSP.

The MSP's objective is:

The establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships dialogue structures to promote fairer tuna supply chains and sustainable management of yellowfin tuna stocks in the Philippines; and promotes an improvement of the socio-economic situation of small-scale handline fishers, as well as the long-term securing of their livelihoods.

The M&E process of the MSP for sustainable tuna in the Philippines

Step 1 – Project idea, topic & rough goal

The MSP is the result of a predecessor project. Idea, topic and goal developed in a dialogical exchange.

Step 2 – Common objectives

The vision and the overall objective as well as the project and sub-objectives were developed. Objectives for the content and the process were defined. The process objectives deal with the development of dialogue structures and institutionalisation.

Step 3 – Deciding on the format

Is an MSP the right instrument to achieve the objectives?
Which stakeholder have which reasons for their engagement?

Step 4 – Objective and sub-objectives with indicators

In a workshop, advised by the Collective Leadership Institute (CLI), a core group (also known as a container of change) agreed on the definition of the overall objective and formulation of six sub-objectives linked to indicators.

Step 5 – On-going M&E

- In the project application, training sessions with external experts on the monitoring process were included.
- In the planning phase, personnel resources have been considered and dedicated to M&E activities. A person, responsible for the monitoring process of the MSP, was appointed.
- Every three months, the backbone organisation receives an internal report on current events and discussions. The aim is to reflect consciously on the process. It can be a short report, (internal / external) newsletter or anything else.
- For reviewing the indicators and the progress of the process, a comprehensive report informs the donor annually.
- Once a year, external experts conduct an assessment in order to verify the certification.
- The following activities support the assessment of impact: Surveys with households about their income situation and indebtedness, number of harmful/ dubious and sustainable subsidies of the authorities to the fisheries of the project, measurement of the fishing capacity of handline fishing in the project areas, analysis of sales along the supply chain.
- If findings turn out to be meaningful in light of delivering the overall objective, sub-objectives, indicators and activities will be modified.
- Consultancy and support from external proves to be helpful in selective matters.

For further information on the MSP partnership program towards sustainable tuna, please check → [here](#)

Figure 4: Impact and Impact Assessment of MSP

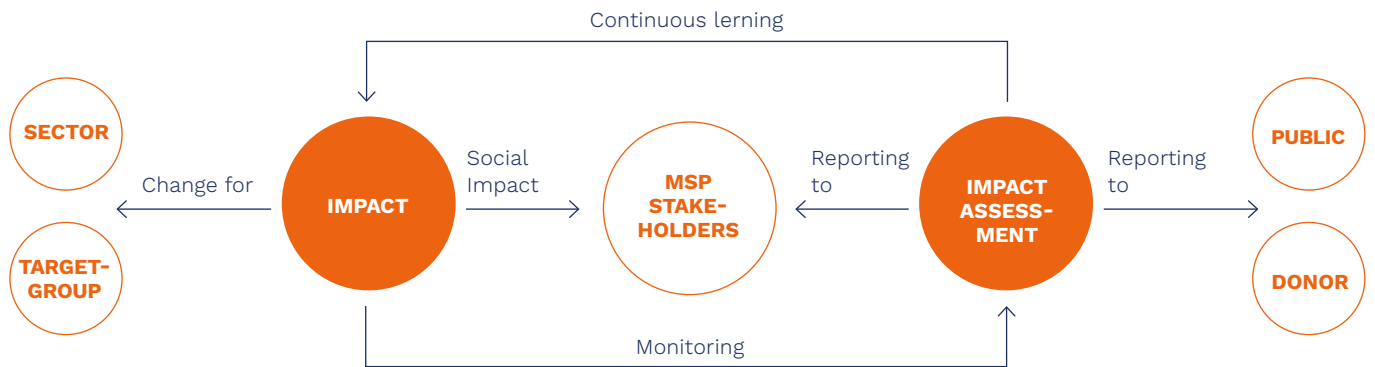


Figure 4 summarises how impact and impact assessment relate to MSPs. MSPs affect the sector and the target group on the one hand and the MSP stakeholders on the other (referred to as social impact). Assessing the impact of an MSP is relevant for the MSP stakeholders, for the public and the donors. The impact of an MSP is captured via impact assessment and ensures continuous learning.