



International
Labour
Organization

A Guide to Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

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Introduction

With the adoption of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 and the subsequent drive to realise the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), interest in Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs) as a means of accelerating essential transformations has increased. The central importance of decent work as both a means and an end to achieving the SDGs makes the ILO a key player in several MSPs.

Building on its experience and learning from other partnerships, ILO can engage in a resolute approach to promote the formation and implementation of MSPs. This can draw on the already extensive practical knowledge acquired over recent years by the ILO and its partners in a number of diverse MSPs. The purpose of this ILO Tool is to compile and present valuable learnings in a format, which can support staff in making full use of the opportunities partnering offers.

The mandate for strengthened policy coherence for Decent Work

The ILO's 2019 annual Conference adopted the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, which, *inter alia*, declared “a fair, inclusive and secure future of work with full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all ... is fundamental for sustainable development that puts an end to poverty and leaves no one behind.”

Welcoming the ILO Declaration a 2019 UN General Assembly resolution which recognized

“the particular relevance of the International Labour Organization Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work in informing the work of the United Nations system to shape a human-centred approach to the future of work, and in this regard encourages active dialogue and collaboration among the various bodies, funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, including representatives of employers’ and workers’ organizations, the private sector, civil society and other non-governmental organizations, with a view to strengthening policy coherence.”

Designed to address the key issues identified in the Centenary discussions on the future of work, the ILO's 2020/21 Programme includes an enabling outcome on authoritative knowledge and high-impact partnerships for promoting decent work. It aims to deliver “enhanced structured engagement with UN member States and UN entities, international financial institutions and other international institutions through appropriate instruments, including agreed joint deliverables and multi-stakeholder partnerships.”

Many of the ILO's existing MSPs involve other UN entities reflecting both the ILO's commitment to enhanced policy coherence and the UN Secretary-General's reform agenda, which emphasises the need to address fragmentation in the UN development system's approach to partnerships and the need to scale up and improve their effectiveness. Looking ahead over the next decade to 2030, MSPs are set to become increasingly important for the ILO and its role in a strong UN sustainable development system.

Objectives of the tool

The present tool provides practical guidance for ILO staff engaged in multi-stakeholder partnerships. It explains the processes and accompanying challenges that characterize working in and with multi-stakeholder partnerships in their typical phases of development and implementation (Section III). Although still evolving several basic principles have been identified and agreed (Section II).

Background and key terms

For the purpose of clarity in this tool, a Multi-stakeholder partnership is defined as a formal/partially formal alliance of partners involving partners from at least two of these groups in addition to ILO social partners: government and government driven institutions, civil society actors, private sector, UN and multilateral organisations

Taking a multi-stakeholder approach is thus inclusive and participatory, involving actors with relevant knowledge, skills and resources, preferably from an early stage. MSPs can be arranged among any combination of partners, including governments, employers and workers organisations, regional groups, local authorities, non-governmental actors, international institutions, private sector partners and others, and may remain open for including additional partners as the MSP evolves.

Drivers of ILO engagement in MSPs include:

- ▶ Policy alignment and advocacy
- ▶ Knowledge, research and technical support sharing
- ▶ Country delivery and project implementation
- ▶ Resource mobilization and sharing for resources

Section I – Principles for establishing and operating MSPs

Each MSP is unique – topics and objectives, partners, resources, history, and strategies differ. Yet all should be guided by some basic principles concerning how they are set up and run. These can be found in intergovernmental resolutions and guidelines.

The most comprehensive UN decision on multi-stakeholder partnerships to date is contained in paragraphs 21-24 of the ECOSOC decision at its 61st session in 2003. Others building on the UN are listed in Section IV.

The main guiding principles contained in these decisions can be summarized as follows:

- ▶ **Voluntary nature:** actors and stakeholders come together in partnerships at their free will, and with everyone benefitting in ways they desire and need;
- ▶ **Transparency:** public announcements; registration; regular reporting;
- ▶ **Credibility:** putting announced activities into practice and reaching stated objectives;
- ▶ **Accountability:** exchanging relevant information with governments and other stakeholders; regular reporting;
- ▶ **Participation:** open and participatory processes;
- ▶ **Multi-stakeholder:** including three or more stakeholders in the partnership;
- ▶ Reflecting sectoral and **geographical balance**;
- ▶ Integrating the three pillars of **sustainable development**: ecological, economic, and social;
- ▶ Resulting in **technology transfer** and capacity building in developing countries;
- ▶ Making a **genuine, concrete, additional contribution** to sustainable development;
- ▶ Adhering to **agreed plans and priorities** at national level;
- ▶ Conforming with **inter-governmentally agreed mandates**;
- ▶ Based on predictable and sustained **financial resources** while not drawing funds away from other agreed mandates; and
- ▶ Aiming at **transforming our world** towards sustainable development.

The UNSDG's *Common minimum standard for multi-stakeholder engagement in the UN Development Assistant Framework* while reviewing existing guidelines propose to apply a set of four guiding principles :

- ▶ **Civic space inclusivity, diversity, and representation.** “UNCTs have a key role to play in supporting Member states in implementing the commitment of inclusive and transparent participation of all stakeholders in the 2030 agenda”. In particular, they “should ensure fair and representative participation of various constituents of society”
- ▶ **Transparency and accountability.** “UNCTs should demonstrate accountability to stakeholders, as well as transparency regarding “activities, inputs and results”.
- ▶ **Accessibility and safety.** UNCT should take measures so that stakeholder have a safe access to information and facilities where activities are taking place.
- ▶ **Respect for human rights, democracy and sustainability.** Stakeholders engaged with the UN should demonstrate a fundamental respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Section II – Working in and with MSPs

II.1 Introduction

The following section describes typical phases of MSPs and provides practical advice for the processes and accompanying challenges that characterize developing and working in partnerships.

It is also useful to differentiate between different MSPs depending on the respective role(s) that ILO is playing in them. The Organization can be an initiator, convener, lead, founder or co-founder. It can host the secretariat and governance structures, or simply be one of a number of members of a partnership. The different roles correspond to different institutional responsibilities, the capacities and resources available as well as the amount and kind of influence that ILO wishes to have in shaping the direction of the partnership.

MSPs include typical steps and decisions along the way, but there's no one size fits all recipe for initiating, building, implementing or monitoring partnerships. Hence, planning procedures, and project management tools should be used to support and guide the development and implementation of a partnership.

MSPs are costly and time-consuming, often difficult to handle and not always successful. These challenges should not be underestimated and clear-eyed realism is needed from the outset.

There are, however, some important potential benefits that can justify ILO investment in MSPs:

- ▶ **Mainstreaming Decent Work:** Several ILO policy documents, most recently the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, stress the necessity of an integrated approach to the promotion of decent work for sustainable development across the multilateral system. MSPs are important mechanisms for operationalizing this integrated approach.
- ▶ **Outreach:** Involving other stakeholders in the process of decision-finding (and possibly decision-making) spreads information about decent work to their constituencies, so these are better prepared to engage in implementation when decisions are made and plans are agreed.
- ▶ **Quality of cross-sector relationships:** In MSPs, participants realize their differences, but also their commonalities. Successful collaboration can enhance cross-sector communication and build relationships. This helps to overcome stereotypes, and can increase social cohesion and thus contribute to enabling fundamental transformation. For the ILO, MSPs encourage better understanding of the mandates and institutional cultures of key partners and how they can connect to the Decent Work Agenda.
- ▶ **Quality of decisions:** MSPs often bring together a wide range of knowledge and expertise. More and more varied knowledge can improve decision-making.
- ▶ **Innovation:** The diversity inherent in the groups and teams that constitute MSPs spurs creativity (s. Enayati 2002). MSPs can increase the likelihood of finding innovative, integrative solutions.
- ▶ **Credibility/representability of decisions:** Knowing that various interests have been balanced or integrated increases perceived credibility and legitimacy.
- ▶ **Likelihood of implementation:** 'Participation breeds ownership', and enhanced ownership through partnering can increase the likelihood of implementation of agreed plans and actions.

II.2 Elements for Effectiveness in Typical MSP Phases

The MSP process can be articulated in four iterative phases:

- ▶ **Initiating**
- ▶ **Adaptive planning**
- ▶ **Collaborative action**
- ▶ **Reflective monitoring**

The focus of each phase is to be repeatedly revisited as the partnership progresses. In each of these phases, we propose to address:



Issues, situations and challenges

What issues, technical areas, and context are to be identified and tackled.



Working with partners

Identifying partners and developing partnerships



Governance

This is a about decision-making and mutual accountability among partners.



Resources

This is related to the development and implementation of broadly conceived resource strategy.



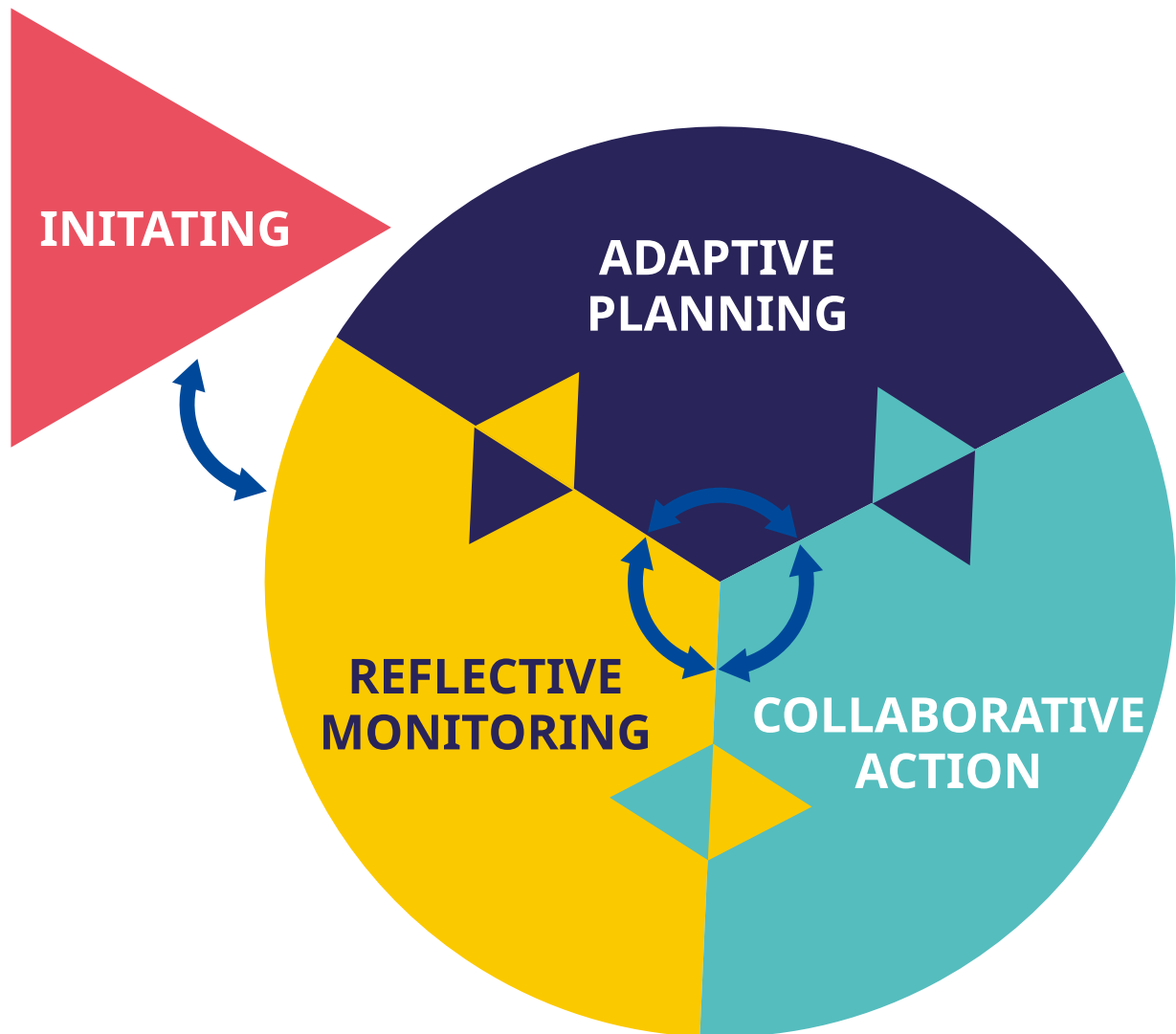
Communication

What issues, technical areas, and context are to be identified and tackled.



ILO as a partner

As ILO engages in a partnership, it is important that the organisation itself assess the scope of its commitments and review it effectively.



Source: MSP Guide 2016, p29

II.2.A. Initiating

The phase of initiating MSPs is characterized by deepening the understanding of the issues and problems that the MSP is meant to address, identifying and engaging the relevant stakeholders, mapping possible solutions, and developing a process design that charts a path from adaptive planning through collaborative implementation to ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning.



Issues, situations, challenges

In the development phase, an initial idea develops into a plan of activities to engage partners and work together. Plans change as thinking develops and more partners are identified and become engaged in the process. This is the beginning of an iterative process of defining issues and context, understanding stakeholders, and assessing best solutions to engage.

Actions:

- ▶ Developing a broad understanding of issues and context: MSPs are created to address a certain issue and achieve a certain goal, for example a specific target among the SDGs.
- ▶ Gathering information, knowledge and existing opinions about the issue will enable you to create a useful initial definition of your MSP goal, and start defining priority areas of work. It often helps to have individual conversations with a range of stakeholders, and of course with colleagues within the organisation. While you do this, a core group of champions from different organisations may emerge. Issues and priorities should be identified together with the core group in preparation of a first, broader face-to face meeting.

This includes:

- ▶ Identifying relevant policy framework to be identified (SDGs, ILO policies, relevant SDGs, P and B etc).
- ▶ Mapping and understanding the stakeholders with a view of identifying
 - ▶ who to engage,
 - ▶ why,
 - ▶ in which potential role(s)
- ▶ Engagement strategies for each of them should be defined.
- ▶ Mapping existing solutions and good practices: Existing solutions, initiatives, programmes, tools and resources that address the same or overlapping issues as you envisaged MSP should be mapped and considered.
- ▶ Defining priority areas: Understanding issues and context, mapping relevant stakeholders, and considering previous experience and ongoing work will help you further define the priority areas that your MSP shall work in.
- ▶ Building an MSP process design including a definition of goals and objectives, a list of partners and stakeholders, a core group of champion, draft governance structures and processes, draft action plans (or workplan), with concrete targets, indicators, milestones.



Working with your partners

During the initiating phase, a core group of champions can emerge which is very helpful in order to keep the partnership manageable, identify partners and sponsors and further develop the vision, objectives and activities.

Actions:

Three priorities can be identified:

- ▶ Identifying the partners among the stakeholders: In most cases, not all stakeholders relevant to an issue need or can indeed be partners in an MSP. Rather, you need to identify who is needed to achieve the partnerships goals, who can contribute, who should not be left out.
- ▶ Building a core group: Developing a multi-stakeholder partnership and working together begins with building a core group of 'champions' – colleagues inside ILO and from other stakeholders who are keen to work on the issue, and are willing and able to work together to guide the process. The core group aims at co-creating the MSP process, help engage others and convince organisations and constituencies to get involved. Developing a multi-stakeholder partnership and working together begins with building a core group of 'champions' – colleagues inside ILO and from other stakeholders who are keen to work on the issue, and are willing and able to work together to guide the process. The core group also needs to be balanced in terms of stakeholders, sectors and interests.
- ▶ Building a common vision, agreeing on shared objectives. Stakeholders often share fundamental values and overarching principles, these are essential to build a positive vision. A small task force can be dedicated to come up with SMART objectives.



Governance

Part of developing an MSP is to build governance structures and processes that support exchange and implementation in effective and efficient ways. The matter can be built step by step, relying on initial experiences and not before the main issues and work programmes have been defined. In most partnerships, the process is iterative and usually takes a bit of time, re-structuring and refining along the way. During the initial development phase, agree among partners to do this step-by-step and design the first elements of governance structure.

Actions:

- ▶ Developing a basic partnership agreement that identifies organizing principles, boards or steering committees, working groups or task forces. Many MSPs create secretariats with teams that run the day-to-day work, organize meetings, facilitate working groups, manage communications and budgets, and so on. Most partnerships have a steering or executive committee, which meets, periodically either in person or by teleconference. Some also have annual forums where all partners or members can attend.
- ▶ Clarifying the relationship between the MSP and the different partners governance systems, including the ILO's.
- ▶ Establishing an initial workplan for the partnership including task descriptions for agreed elements like secretariat, working groups) all of which requiring further attention in section B and C.



Resources

Partners engaging in the MSPs should also consider developing jointly a broad and forward-looking resource strategy. Each of the partners can bring and contribute in terms of technical and administrative support. However, together they should also seek to develop a consolidated financial strategy.

Several key priorities can be identified:

- ▶ Identify partners resources that can be aligned with the MSPs. (work plan, programs, project, etc...)
- ▶ Undertake a review of potential financial partners. The review should be broad including international organisations, governments, private sector (foundations as well as companies). For each of them, it will be necessary to assess the modality of its engagement and whether the partner shall be included formally in the MSP or remain an external contributor (for instance supporting the design and implementation, contributing to specific activities or projects under the MSP). As the financial strategy should be agreed upon across the core members of the MSPs, it could be useful to set up a small task force to design it and oversee its implementation.
- ▶ Align the financial strategy with the workplan of the MSP. The financial strategy should be timebound and articulated with the other activities of the MSPs.



Communication

At this stage, the communications network should be in place and able to facilitate joint communications. You also need to assess planned activities for potential communications value and choose which activities shall be communicated in which ways.

Actions:

Key activities during this phase include the following:

- ▶ Finalize the joint communications plan, including the key messages
- ▶ Establish a joint communication platform supported by communications focal points, across all partners (if possible) and complement this with the development of a communications team within the MSP Secretariat
- ▶ Plan for contingencies to prevent joint communications challenges from blocking other partnership activities.
- ▶ Launching event: this should not be the priority as such event requires often time and preparation. Better to wait until a significant group of partners is on board.



ILO as a partner

In the initial development phase, the role of ILO in the partnership needs to be defined. Sometimes ILO is the initiator and broker of an MSP. Sometimes ILO later continues as the convener and home of the MSP Secretariat or MSP Team, also leading the governance mechanisms, administering the MSP budget and coordinating much of the work. In MSPs, however, leadership is more of a facilitative role, not a top-down affair. Sometimes, ILO gets invited to join a partnership, either in a co-leading, co-founding role, as part of a core group that someone else is building, or as a member of a partnership. Finally, the role

of ILO might also evolve over time – as the partnership evolves, other partners join, and new activities may be pursued and ILO may play a smaller or a bigger role. Three areas deserve special attention:

Reporting lines and management

To be engaged in a partnership, ILO needs to “organize” itself to be able to contribute in the different phases of the MSP, it entails in particular:

- ▶ Establishing regular communications and primary reporting lines between ILO focal point to the MSPs, ILO management and colleagues.
- ▶ Evaluate MSPs possible alignment with Program and Budget, Flagships programs and ongoing projects and in particular locate primary resources to be able to assess and define ILO potential contribution (through technical and logistic support as well as through financial contribution).

ILO resources

Available resources within the ILO (RB, RBTC, RBSA, DC) are to be assessed to carry out the initial MSP activities. The following questions are of primary importance:

- ▶ Does the ILO have the capacities and resources to develop this partnership?
- ▶ Can the ILO spend the time and effort getting a core group together to take things forward? Does it have resources for inviting and meeting people in other organisations? If not, who could help, or who would you need to convince (and how?) in order to generate more resources?

Similar questions apply if the ILO is invited to join a partnership: do you have the capacities to fulfil a partner role in this MSP.

Staff and staff development

From the onset of the MSP, a critical level of engagement is required from staff and management, with proper reporting channels to ensure ILO engagement is assessed and developed as needs and opportunities develop. This entails:

- ▶ Identify staff and allocate staff time to MSP initiation. When creating secretariats and teams servicing specific MSPs, there is a need to adjust job descriptions. In order to ensure good working conditions and avoid burnout, anything relating to initiating partnerships may need to be included in the job descriptions of people who are prospecting and brokering MSPs.
- ▶ Staff and organisational development. There’s a set of skills and capacities needed for MSPs, most of them are “soft skills”: intercultural communication, listening, networking, team building, facilitative leadership and facilitation. In addition, skills are also needed to understand different organizations, values, and objectives these are developing. It may be worth considering creating career incentives for working with MSPs.
- ▶ Developing the organizational culture to embrace collaboration and overcoming silos internally and externally. Leadership statements and examples from engagement, exchange and networking among colleagues, are useful complement to job descriptions and career incentives.

II.2.B. Adaptative planning

Partnership building and planning are iterative processes: “Adaptive planning means developing plans based on the present situation, and adjusting them as the situation changes. Essentially it is ‘responsive’ rather than ‘prescriptive’” (Brouwer et al 2016, p30).

Elements of the iterative process include for instance:

- ▶ The kind and number of partners who are engaged including the sponsors who contribute to the partnership budget
- ▶ The governance structure and processes,
- ▶ The solutions being implemented,
- ▶ The activities being carried out,
- ▶ The evaluation procedures conducted

People working in MSPs need to cultivate an open mind in order to learn along the way what works best, and they need to think in processes and in opportunities.



Issues, situations, challenges

During the planning phase, focus and priorities for action are being developed and agreed: advocacy, policy alignment, capacity building, knowledge sharing, and/or financing. This is also the phase of securing financial resources and setting up structures and processes to run and implement the partnership.

Actions:

- ▶ Consolidating the joint theory of change in the partnership so as to secure the best understanding among partners, bearing in mind that each of them may refer to a different theory of change. A balanced working group can help move forward.
- ▶ Developing SMART objectives is key. Objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable, and time-bound. A small working group can develop a draft set of SMART objectives based on the overall vision, which can then be finalized among all partners.
- ▶ Developing a road map of activities addressing the partnerships issue(s) is also part of the planning process. The planned set of activities should include as many partners as possible as actively contributing to the MSP.
- ▶ Part of the road map can be to develop pilot activities so as to «test» synergies and compatibilities among partners actually working together.



Working with partners

More detailed planning leads to agreement on who should do what, when and with whom and with which resources.

Actions:

In this phase, key actions include :

- ▶ Continue building relationships among partners and establishing understanding and trust. Diversity among partners ought to become an asset. Methods for dialogue exist (feedback methods, dialogue in pairs or small groups). An external facilitator may be fruitful.
- ▶ Furthering the understanding among partners : it is essential to help partners increase awareness of how different stakeholders work (their systems, structures, governance, working culture, etc). ILO, in particular, is unique in the UN system, including because of its tripartite structure. Outside partners will need some time to understand this and what it may mean for the MSP practice. This can be discussed openly through workshops, presentations, seminars.
- ▶ Developing strategies and action plans: balanced working groups can help develop strategies and activities, targets and milestones through a participatory process with as many partners as possible contributing. It is the time when additional stakeholders may be identified and engaged as they can make a significant contribution.
- ▶ Assigning roles and responsibilities, defining who does what with whom, when and with which resources is important at this stake.
- ▶ Celebrate first successful steps to acknowledge the work done and celebrate what has been achieved as well as providing an opportunity to communicate around the alliance.



Governance

Governance processes and structures need to evolve and adapt to integrate results from action and welcome new partners if needed. At this stage, they are probably not fully in place.

Actions:

- ▶ Governance structures and processes: a continuous process of formalization can be set up. This include for instance agreeing on common partnerships charter of declaration, letters of intent among partners, memoranda of understanding. These should be aligned with the basic principles and vision of the MSPs and help achieving its goals. It is also important to take account partners needs and possibilities.



Resources

This is the time to secure financial resources and set up the necessary structures and processes.

Actions:

- ▶ Implementing the funding and financial strategy with a view of adapting it to new needs and opportunities and ensuring in-time allocation of resources as planned.

- ▶ Defining the fiduciary agent for all and/or individual activities. The leading partner can take the fiduciary agent role. Alternatively, it can rotate among the core partners.
- ▶ Defining the financial channels for each activity in anticipation as necessary.



Communication

The communications strategy and network should be in place and able to facilitate joint communications and priorities set with respect to activities being implemented.

- ▶ Launching and communicating: this should be organized when sufficient support is secured. It does not need to precede all activities.
- ▶ Communications strategy can be further refined as necessary according to the plan of activities. It also include setting priorities among potential audience : general public, selective professional audience. A specific attention can be devoted to attracting new partners.



ILO as a partner

It is important to identify and assess potential synergies with existing projects and activities led by the ILO. These could possibly be integrated in the partnership, thus creating new opportunities for ILO leadership and engagement on pertinent issues.

Reporting, management, internal communication

Actions include:

- ▶ Developing communication with colleagues, management and social partners to continue identify potential synergies and ensure alignment.
- ▶ Looking at ongoing activities and projects with a view to potential contributions to the MSP goals and objectives. MSPs can also organized the scaling up of a related project.
- ▶ Continuing developing suitable reporting mechanisms for your partnership within ILO.

Staff and staff development

Staffing and continuity of staffing is key during MSPs, this stage is a key moment to identify competencies and possible training or hiring needs.

Potential actions include:

- ▶ Developing a staffing plan for the MSP and its activities. This needs to be done internally in ILO as well as in the MSP as a whole checking on what other partner can contribute in terms of competencies.
- ▶ Enriching existing competencies through training and capacity building for staff, either for the ILO or jointly with the other partners.

Staffing needs and plans may need to be adapted as the MSP is being developed, including further down the line when you have results from pilot projects and other implementation activities. Your monitoring, evaluation and learning (phase D) may indeed influence your staffing needs and plans.



II.2.C. Collaborative action

Collaboration in “real” activities, provide opportunities to develop and deepen the synergies of the different partners’ competencies, reach, and other contributions. The roadmap of activities often include joined projects together with knowledge exchanges, dialogues or outreach events organized with the partners.



Issues, situations, challenges

Collaborative action is the «real test» of the partnership: beyond dialogue and discussion, it makes evident if and how partners are indeed able to work together effectively, to produce results and have the desired impact.

Actions:

Emphasis should be placed on:

- ▶ Developing joint activities in a collaborative manner, engaging those who should work together right from the beginning. This can be cumbersome, and take more time than doing them alone.
- ▶ Staying focused on the issues and work according to priorities with respect to partners and issues, as defined in the adaptive planning phase.
- ▶ Paying attention to the benefits of the diverse set of expertise and competences of the different partners.
- ▶ Maintaining commitment among MSP partners and so keeping regular communication and recognizing each successful step of implementation.



Working with your partners

During this phase, it is essential to focus on collaboration and creating synergies among partners, as well as communication and knowledge sharing within the partnership.

Actions:

- ▶ Developing working groups, task forces and teams to implement projects and actions with a multi-stakeholder approach, avoiding over delegating it all to one organization or the Secretariat. Such close collaboration on partnership activities also helps to further build communication, shared understanding and trust among partners.
- ▶ Making sure to include additional stakeholders and potential new partners during implementation as contributors for this phase or in preparation for an other wave of activities. They could include local, regional or global stakeholders. Attention could be given to their suitable role. They could help developing the partnerships’ understanding of the problem, its goals and strategies, and may shift the (power) dynamics in the group – it often creates moments of learning and readjustment.





Governance

Governance structures and processes are designed to support the implementation of activities.

Actions:

- ▶ Create suitable management structures. Adjustment may be required specifically to include additional stakeholders or to develop different management level (national or regional for instance) beyond the governance and structures already established. as there are different needs for implementation projects.



Resources

At this stage, emphasis should be placed on the consolidation of the financial partnership while looking at possibilities to secure additional resources.

Actions:

- ▶ Ensure smooth communication on the implementation plan with financial partner (including reporting, communication, invitation to meeting and gatherings).
- ▶ Explore the possibility to add additional partners (invitations to meetings or activities)



Communication

It will be key to communicate not only the added value of the partnership activities and their impact but also clearly communicate the role of the partnership and in particular the MSP approach in these achievements. MSPs require a lot of time and resources, and it is important to communicate the value they can create: what is it that cannot be achieved otherwise, what makes it worth all the effort?

Actions:

- ▶ Developing communications materials: actions have been identified in the communications plan. They are developed with the partners. Focus should be on people and results. ILO branding needs to appear clearly.
- ▶ Reporting beyond the stakeholders: an annual global report is a useful tool to develop a common understanding among the stakeholders, serve as a basis of advocacy and help broadcast information. Some reports include formal monitoring and evaluation either of sub-projects and/or the overall programme.
- ▶ Enhance communication among stakeholders: Multi-stakeholder partnerships are often be characterized by efforts to create opportunities for dialogue, openly sharing considerations, explaining suggestions, and listening intently to what others have to say. Whenever stakeholders engage in joint decision-making, an integration of views is preferable to mere deal-making or negotiation.
- ▶ Placing emphasis on quality in the exchange among stakeholders. Good listening is a particularly important component of high-quality conversations. It seems simple but is often not easy, especially if you are listening to someone with very different opinions, using different terms, or proposing a perspective that you find problematic. Traditions of discussion and decision-making can be different in different cultures and also need to be taken into account.



ILO as a partner

Working with constituents

ILO has a comparative advantage to other organisations that are learning to navigate the field of multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral partnerships. In some ways, its tripartite structure makes the ILO the oldest MSP among UN organisations. Actions include

- ▶ Facilitating the contribution of ILO constituents to the different activities and engagements of the MSP through their knowledge, capacities and expertise.
- ▶ Bringing ILO expertise as an institutional MSP upfront whenever required to facilitate understanding and negotiation processes among stakeholders.

Reporting lines, management, communication

- ▶ Ensuring and anticipating that the proper level of ILO management is engaged in the partnership activities. Collaborative implementation activities at the country level may require different management representatives to get engaged.
- ▶ Assessing continuously the benefit of ILO engagement in the partnership, especially of new opportunities emerging during the action phase, and they may contribute to the value created by the partnership

ILO resources

- ▶ Providing the necessary technical and administrative support is essential especially if the ILO is the lead and/or hosting the Secretariat of a partnership or an activity lead.
- ▶ Creating synergies between existing work programmes and partnership activities is key. This requires communication and coordination between programs and departments, and between headquarters and regional and country offices.

Staff and staff development

- ▶ Ensuring that staffing plans are up to date and can be adapted according to the activity plan. As activities develop, this requires continuous communication between HQ, Regional offices and Country office as well as taking full advantage of potential synergies between MSP activities and other ILO activities.
- ▶ Consider external support: professional expertise and experience can provide advice, encouragement, coaching and help ensure impartial process design. Consultants should at least be familiar with MSP approach, UN and ILO processes. Excellent skills in intercultural communication and facilitating processes are always a plus in MSP.

II.2.D. Reflective monitoring

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) is something to do continuously in all phases of MSPs. It can indeed “be one of your most valuable resources – the best way to learn about what is working and what isn’t, and what you should change. Reflective monitoring is an integral part of adaptive management and is critical for building learning loops into activities.” (Brouwer et al 2016, p37). Such MEL supports the MSP in a structured and systematic way and also keeps (development) partners engaged.



Issues, situations, challenges

An essential feature of the MEL process is to build learning loops into the core of the MSP. Partnerships begin with certain assumptions on the issues, the context, the stakeholders, and how the process works. However, views and expectations develop as understanding deepens through the practical experience of implementation activities.

Actions:

- ▶ Reviewing existing MEL procedures that partner organisations use and/or that sponsors and donors expect in order to make sure that the MEL process meet all necessary requirements, before . In many cases, the MEL of a partnership will reflect a mixture of existing procedures, adapted for the benefit of the specific partnership.
- ▶ Deciding on who is doing the monitoring and evaluation process is an important step. It can be done internally or externally, but discussions should ensure that the evaluation meets all the partners expectations and requirements, as well be aligned with the MSP initial vision and objectives.
- ▶ Defining success criteria and indicators for common targets and milestones is the first step of the MEL process. Indicators can include long-term impact and structural changes (e.g. policy changes, incremental institutional change); ideas generated; skills learned, and/or attitudes changed.



Working with partners

Monitoring and evaluation provide accountability towards all partners, including donors, target groups and active stakeholders of an MSP, documenting successes and ensuring refinement of strategies.

Actions:

- ▶ Evaluating the strategic alignment created in the MSPs among partners. An approach is to focus on the synergies being developed between partners and stakeholders. This include reviewing Secretariats of MSPs role as they have a particular role to play in achieving alignment.
- ▶ Consolidating and learning from the MEL conducted in each organisation, when possible. Every partner in the MSP have their own experiences, learnings, and recommendations that can enrich the MSP learning process. This can also help increasing transparency within the partnership. It is also an interesting step in case of disengagements and a new line-up of partners so that change in partners can lead to consolidation of the MSPs.
- ▶ Evaluating meetings is an important component, especially to check if participants felt treated fairly and agree that important issues were discussed (see tools below).



Governance

Governance and leadership of the partnership should be strongly involved in developing, implementing and using the MEL strategy and results.

Actions:

- ▶ Ensuring that all levels of the governance structure of the MSP (boards, core group, steering committees, working groups, task forces, secretariat) is involved in the MEL process. The secretariat should be particularly active in reviewing its own practices.



Resources

The focus of MEL as regards resource use is to assess how effectively resources can be mobilized and used in the partnership, including in-kind resources. This is an essential part of reporting to those who contribute to the partnership.

Actions:

- ▶ Design and implement specific MEL procedures for resources so as to reflect as much as possible how financial, technical and other competences have been made available to the partnership and how they have been used. As each partnership is different in this respect, it will be important to ensure good coordination among partners on this. It will be essential to showcase good practice of resource use.



Communication

Reflective monitoring is more an internal process, and does not necessarily require external communication. However, it may support documenting and communicating key achievements that can be repackaged into communications materials.



ILO as a partner

Considering MEL of partnerships that ILO is engaged in, this should always be done with a view to learning as much as possible about how to capitalize on engagement in MSPs, how to reflect on future commitments, and how to best communicate with social partners.

Management, reporting

- ▶ Conducting an internal ILO assessment of its engagement in addition to the MEL assessment of the partnership, in order to reflect on the results as well as on the impact of the MSP on the ILO, its ability to engage its constituents in the entire MSP process. In addition, it will be important to obtain feedback from partners about ILOs performance in the MSP, including its strengths and weaknesses. This can help ILO to learn and develop, and to strengthen communication and relationships in the partnership. The assessment could also help consider whether the ILO continue to engage in the MSP.

Staff and staff development

Reviews and learning procedures should be the basis of developing the strategy for further engagement in the MSP, in terms of objectives, resources and investments, engagement in specific activities and working groups, as well as the overall design of the partnership and working with the partners.

- ▶ Review staff experience: the MEL provides an opportunity for ILO staff to review their experiences working in the MSP (for instance through individual interviews, focus groups and team discussions), using simple knowledge management tools to identify what works, what doesn't, and what should be done differently. In the long run, this will help establish a learning culture on MSPs.
- ▶ Assessing needs and gaps in terms of staffing in the MSP. Experience over time usually shows more clearly, which and how many resources, including human resources, are needed to cover ILOs engagement in a partnership.

