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# MULTI-ACTOR INITIATIVES AS A HIVOS STRATEGY

A primer for design and facilitation

**Hivos**
people unlimited

MULTI-ACTOR
INITIATIVES AS
**A HIVOS STRATEGY**

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# MULTI-ACTOR INITIATIVES:
# **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Hivos is an international non-governmental development organization working for a world where people can realize their full potential, unleashing their ingenuity and creativity to build fair, just and life-sustaining societies for themselves and generations to come. Hivos has developed five strategies for promoting the voices and choices of marginalized people, while strengthening civil society overall.

These are:
1. Supporting frontrunners
2. Forging multi-actor initiatives
3. Influencing policies and practices
4. Moving the middle
5. Boosting local ownership

This primer is about the second strategy: *forging multi-actor initiatives.* While Hivos uses the term 'multi-actor initiatives,' such initiatives are more generally known by the acronym MSPs (multi-stakeholder processes or partnerships). In this primer, we will therefore use the acronym MSP.

A working definition of MSPs is that they are processes aimed at bringing together (representatives from) different stakeholder groups to communicate and share about,

to work on, co-create, and sometimes collaborate and make decisions about a particular issue. As Hivos, we believe that sustainable change will only happen if people undertake concerted and collective action. Ideas are best forged into viable solutions by the joined hands of rights holders and their organizations, government and business representatives, creatives and technologists.[1] Two examples are: 'All Eyes on the Amazon', where Hivos, Greenpeace, 24 international and local partners support indigenous peoples in the Amazon; and the second is the 'Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Environment (SAFE) Platform', which is a collaboration of private sector parties, donors and NGOs, and managed by Hivos.

Our multi-actor initiatives take different forms, have different objectives, follow different processes and engage with different stakeholders. Nevertheless, by bringing together our own experiences and those of others, we can point out insights and guidelines that are useful across initiatives and regions.[2] The insights and guidelines captured in this primer are meant for all who engage with MSPs, either to coordinate, strategize, manage, implement, monitor and reflect on different aspects of multi-actor initiatives. At Hivos, this includes program managers, BDU staff, design, monitoring, evaluation and learning (DMEL) advisors, and project officers, among others.

As a primer, the intention is to provide an introductory overview. Individual projects and programs within Hivos may have developed (or plan to develop) more detailed manuals that are more tailored for their needs and audiences.[3]

This primer contains the following sections:

1. When does it make sense to embark on an MSP?
2. Diversity of MSPs
3. Complexity concepts to guide working with MSPs
4. Common elements in an MSP process
5. Specific DMEL aspects, such as:

a. Navigating as a key concept in design, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and learning of MSPs
b. Where are we heading to: Creating a horizon
c. How to move towards that horizon: MSP and Adaptive Management
d. Specific DMEL aspects of MSPs

While we have observed linkages between the five Hivos strategies, this primer does not dwell on that. Similarly, this document does not contain an evaluation of past or existing MSP processes. Yet, it does bring in lessons learned from a review of MSPs, both past and present.[4]

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**Intermezzo:**

From our advocacy work in the Green and Inclusive Energy program, we have learned that by setting up and engaging in multi-stakeholder processes, Hivos has been able to gain access to high-level political processes. As members of multi-stakeholder groups in which governments participate, among others, we can have a voice in processes that are normally closed to civic organizations. Doors that are normally hard to open for us single-handedly can be opened thanks to the multi-stakeholder coalition. Also, we are seen as a relevant player because of our diverse and high-level connections gained from participating in the multi-stakeholder group. Thanks to governments in our multi-stakeholder coalition, we can contribute to the organization of official UN events, which are normally hosted by governments. Also, applications to organize side events at international fora are more readily accepted because of the multi-stakeholder nature of our coalition.

From: a 2018 outcome from Green and Inclusive Energy

# 01   WHEN DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO **EMBARK ON AN MSP?**[5]

We know from experience that convening, facilitating and engaging in multi-stakeholder processes is demanding and costly, in terms of time and resources, not to mention facilitation skills. MSP processes can go on for a long time with many (re)starts and stops. Hosting an MSP with high-level participants may require the facilitation services of expensive consultants. Hence, all this points to the importance of deliberately thinking about if and when it is justified to embark on an MSP journey, as well as when it no longer makes sense and one needs to stop.

Across sectors and processes, six issues emerge that influence the potential success and efficacy of an MSP. These issues form criteria for deciding whether to embark on an MSP journey. When this decision is positive, they offer additional success factors to consider for determining the design and facilitation. These six issues and factors are as follows:

1. **Systemic issue.** Whether or not you are dealing with systems is a first decision-making point. Not all issues require an MSP approach. It makes sense to initiate an MSP only if the issue at hand explicitly or implicitly entails a systemic challenge or goal (e.g. strengthening sustainable food systems). When you notice that your program is growing into systemic issues, for example by up- or outscaling an experiment, or when an initiative starts building relations with a growing number of diverse stakeholders, then consciously expanding into an MSP approach can be a strategic choice.

2. **Change potential.** This issue regards the perspective for change, i. e. the change potential, including the potential for finding common ground. Countless multi-actor platforms, roundtables, or alliances of all sorts have been called into life without much prior analysis of the potential for change. While it does not mean that all conditions need to be met from the start, the potential for change is a factor to be analyzed and monitored closely, right from the beginning. Importantly, change potential also relates to Hivos' ability to influence. For example, the change potential is deemed to be low when power relations are too skewed and the risks for rights holders may therefore be too high. Starting with an MSP may not

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be the best strategy then, and other options, such as capacity building, can provide better entry points.

Before embarking on any MSP journey that may become costly without much potential to yield the desired results, we need to carefully examine whether the initiative has a chance of success. Three pillars of an MSP need to be critically reviewed for their 'yes, we can' – potential. For each MSP, other specific success factors may also need to be looked into, but the three listed here below have a decisive influence on the change potential across all multi-stakeholder processes.

These three pillars are: 1. an individual's competencies and capacities to change; 2. those of the facilitator or facilitating team; and finally, 3. the competencies and capacities of the organizations comprising the multi-stakeholder group (e.g. network, platform, alliance, etc.). All three are essential to assess. Furthermore, in a way, these three pillars are like the legs of a stool: it gets wobbly if one of the legs is shorter than the others.  Similar to this metaphor, it is the combined potential of the three pillars that helps an MSP to develop successfully. Although the specifics are beyond this primer, it is necessary to look into and monitor the change potential of each MSP, and to work on ways to expand that.

3.  **Key actors involved**.  Having the right actors around the table is of key importance to generate the conditions for change. However, who those right actors are depends on the issue at hand. While the answer differs per situation or context and even for each 'stage' of a change process,[6] it is always important to consider how relevant rights holders or their representatives can meaningfully be included directly or indirectly in an MSP.  In practice, for rights holders to participate in ways that make sense to them, some preparatory steps may be required, such as capacity building. This can be on topics like leadership, speaking in public, legal rights, mediation and conflict management, or on other topics that may enable them to engage meaningfully and reduce possible risks (see also #4).

4.  **Degree of politicization and risks.** During an MSP, one often comes across moments that have a political flavor (not necessarily related to party politics). This is the case when, for example, there is a power play going on, or when special work needs to be undertaken to create a workable, level playing field. The degree of politicization and risk involved is directly related to the change potential (see #2). If, for example, a particular actor's participation in an MSP is so politically charged that a participant runs the risk of being jailed, one needs to think twice before encouraging setting up or engaging in an MSP where opponents are supposed to collaborate. While a risk analysis may be standard practice in certain sectors, it is certainly something that requires more systematic and continuous attention in an MSP process.

5.  **Ownership issues in relation to MSP.** Although 'forging multi-actor initiatives' seems to assign Hivos the role of instigator or creator of MSPs, this may not always be the case, or the most strategic option. It is sensible to carefully assess existing ways of collaboration and options to strengthen relevant ones before starting new initiatives. This does not only improve sustainability of an initiative, and limits costs, time, use of resources, etc. which comes with starting from scratch, but furthermore contributes to enhancing local ownership and partnership.

6.  **Resources.** It may sound trivial, but securing sufficient resources is an important factor, not only at the start, but also during the lifetime of an MSP. This is an issue to be considered when convening and facilitating an MSP. A multi-stakeholder process that fizzles out because the funds to hold regular meetings run out sets a bad precedent. The obvious resource is finance, but there are other resources such as time availability and human resources (including facilitating capacities) that play an equally significant role. With regard to resources, it is important to look at quantity and quality aspects. For example, a good facilitator needs to combine a range of abilities including the ability to enhance ownership and generate safe spaces for dialogue and dissent among a range of actors.

It is important to keep in mind that how these issues play out over time can change, as the context and the MSP changes over time. A situation where there is a blazing start followed by participants one by one keeping silent, or even leave the MSP like rats fleeing a sinking ship, is not a pleasant experience. Hence, it is advisable to regularly take the pulse of whether the MSP still makes sense, and deliberate what is needed to keep the initiative alive and vigorous.

# 02

# DIVERSITY
## OF MSPs

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of MSPs – from the local to global levels – with international organizations now proclaiming MSPs as a key strategy for change. However, an MSP is not one intervention strategy, one process, or one approach. It is important to keep in mind that in terms of multi-stakeholder processes, there is an overwhelming diversity of MSP types and many different ways to classify or to name MSPs. Having a notion of the different types, helps to think out a suitable MSP design, decide on appropriate tools and resourcing, and monitor its functioning.

Generally speaking, the following aspects can be used to distinguish MSPs: purpose, subject, scale, participants, process. (see table on the following page).

Of course, these aspects do not lead to mutually exclusive categories. Combinations are possible, leading to an almost bewildering diversity of MSPs over time. To add to the confusion, MSPs may be given different names at different stages, such as partnerships, platforms, networks, or roundtables. Still, it is important to have a general idea of the possible categories. The reason is that the different categories have implications for the design, development and monitoring of an MSP. For example, if the primary purpose for actors to engage in a multi-stakeholder process is to consult about the location for a new school, then that will have different requirements for the set-up, structure, and facilitation requirements than if the primary purpose is collective action for women's voting rights.

| MSPs distinguishing aspect | Possible Categories *(Note that these can change during the life span of an MSP)* |
|---|---|
| **Purpose** | **Four main reasons why actors engage in an MSP process:**<br><br>1) Joining hands in collective action including experimenting, and lobby & advocacy (L&A)<br>2) Joint problem solving and decision making<br>3) Overcoming conflicts<br>4) Learning and idea generation (knowledge sharing and co-creation)<br><br>Put differently: some desired changes hoped to be achieved through an MSP include for instance: creating sufficient clout; giving space and access to the voice-deprived; reducing hurdles for change, for example, by roping in decision-makers at an early stage; and increasing the degree of diversity in perspectives and knowledges in a group. |
| **Subject** | • Energy<br>• Human and political rights (transparency & accountability, freedom of expression, civic rights, gender equality, diversity & inclusion (GEDI))<br>• Rural or urban development<br>• Inclusive economic development<br>• Cross-sectoral<br>• Cultural issues<br>• Food & health issues<br>• Other |
| **Scale** | *Local, sub-national, national, regional, global* |
| **Participants** | **Combination of (sub-) groups that consist of:**<br><br>• Government<br>• Business (enterprises of small or bigger scale, and business-related entities such as chamber of commerce)<br>• Civil society organizations<br>• Citizen groups<br>• Knowledge institutions with scientists or academics<br>• Consultancy firms<br>• Individuals<br><br>(\*) To be able to talk about an MSP, different (sub-) groups should participate. An initiative that only has NGO participants is not an MSP. An initiative with participants from the government, academic institutions, civic movements, and schools is.<br>(\*\*) The degree of diversity in participant composition (interest, power, knowledge, gender, assets etc.) is an important aspect for stakeholder mapping and monitoring. |
| **Process** | • Duration: short(er) or long(er) term<br>• Use and combination of different methods such as workshops, bootcamps, search conferences etc.<br>• Degree of formality<br>• Degree of inclusiveness and participation (top-down or bottom-up, type etc.) |

# 03

# COMPLEXITY CONCEPTS TO GUIDE WORKING WITH MSPS

In the previous section, we sketched the diverse landscape of MSPs. In this section, we will explain the three general concepts that guide their design and facilitation.

The changes that Hivos wants to contribute to do not develop in linear ways – they are part of complex systems where actors interact with one another in unpredictable and unplannable ways. As we learn more about the nature of complex systems, it becomes increasingly clear that 'top down and linear' strategies to achieve change do not work in complex situations. What is needed are change strategies that are designed and operationalized in an adaptive way, supported by a change-oriented learning approach. This particularly applies to multi-stakeholder processes.

Three key concepts derived from complexity thinking are explained in this section: emergence, non-linearity, and adaptiveness. All three[7] have enormous implications for how MSPs are designed, convened, facilitated and monitored.

## EMERGENCE
Emergence describes how overall properties of a complex system emerge from interconnections and interaction of the parts (the dynamic feedback between the parts), such that the whole is different to the sum of the parts. This interaction happens without a hierarchical 'top-down' control. As a result, the total system cannot be understood by simply looking at the individual parts. One has to be on the lookout for emerging patterns of interaction to probe their significance, meaning and implications. This does not mean that intended results will no longer be monitored, but that one should also be open to what emerges, and to what disappears or declines. Tracking developments over time and making sense of what they mean is key to using emergence as a sensitizing concept. This is the logic of complexity-inspired M&E approaches such as Outcome Harvesting.

In an MSP, actors play the role of 'parts'. If a government official participating in a multi-stakeholder food council gets food poisoning during a visit to street food vendors, his or her reaction is unpredictable, but may have a determining influence on the success of the MSP. Even though Hivos, as the MSP facilitator, may try to steer

the process, how the food vendors association reacts to the government official's reaction, possibly setting off an unpredictable chain reaction, leads to another unplannable factor.

Another important consequence of emergence is that approaches that overly exert control will not work well within complex systems. In order to maximize system adaptiveness, there must be space to be flexible, for innovation and novelty to occur. This is a key point for the design and facilitation of MSPs: taking control of what comes out of an MSP conflicts with the idea of inclusiveness and the co-creation of proposals or solutions.

## NON-LINEARITY AND ADAPTIVENESS
As probably everyone who has tried to intervene in a complex situation has experienced, change in such a situation does not happen in a straightforward, linear way. The effect of an intervention may seem to bear no relationship or measure with the intervention itself. This is the case with, for example, advocacy efforts where intense investment may result in little tangible change in agenda setting or policy practice.

The reason is that as a result and accompaniment of emergence, interactions and feedback mechanisms are created between parts (or actors in an MSP) that are interdependent and can be positive or negative to varying degrees. This means that how one actor reacts depends on how the other(s) act(s), and that the reaction can be positive or negative.

For example, while program A is pushing for LGBTI rights in Uganda, program B is financing training for politicians on pro-life aspects. Meanwhile, Minister X, during her studies in the UK, became convinced of the importance of human rights and is in the process of aligning her cabinet around that. In this example, there are many more actors who create pushes and pulls through feedback mechanisms around intended changes. Non-linearity is a direct result of these feedback mechanisms. They reduce the degree of predictability to zero and seriously complicate the traceability of causal relations.

One consequence of emergence is that through the mentioned network of interactions and feedback relations,

parts in the system are constantly adapting in response to, or in anticipation of, external and internal dynamics.

In the above-mentioned example, Minister X may change her ambitions due to harassment by pro-life politicians. Or perhaps a communiqué by the minister widens the scope of the LGBTI program so that the donors of the pro-life training program decide to wind down their program in Uganda and move to Malawi. There are any number of possibilities in any given situation.

For the design and facilitation of an MSP, implications are therefore far reaching. We will describe these in the section on the DMEL of MSPs.

8. Nevertheless, as some multi-stakeholder processes are purely designed to be consultative, not all pass through a collaborative action phase.

# 04

# COMMON ELEMENTS IN AN **MSP PROCESS**

While every MSP needs to be tailor-made for a particular situation and program, there are at least three elements that every MSP shares. Experience has shown that taking these elements into consideration in the design, implementation and facilitation of an MSP already helps to strengthen the effectiveness of the overall process. These three elements are:

1. **Co-creation:** Per definition, with multiple stakeholders involved, co-creation is a central element to an MSP. Co-creation can refer to problem definition, solution or knowledge creation, and so on. Co-creation is not a 'plug-and-play' approach, its requirements and principles need to be adapted to the context and MSP. For one, special management and organizational arrangements may be required to allow for and stimulate co-creation. Special tools can be applied, such as joint fact-finding missions, or prototyping in multi-stakeholder groups. Secondly, not everything has to be done with all the stakeholders. Sometimes a certain stakeholder group needs a special training prior to an event, or to have a specific preparatory space to first discuss in order to gain confidence as a group, so they are capable to engage in the co-creation stage.

2. **Collaborative action:** Often, MSPs fail or lead to disillusionment because the ideas and plans generated through multi-stakeholder engagement are not followed through and put into action. Taking action requires a different level of commitment, ownership and resources – all of which are sometimes taken for

granted. Similar to co-creation, special management and organizational arrangements may be required to enable collaborative action in an MSP.[8]

3. **Learning and reflexive monitoring:** Reflexive monitoring is used here to refer to monitoring approaches that explicitly enable the actors to reflect and learn, and to adapt the MSP as it unfolds. It is important to monitor more than just the anticipated and unanticipated outcomes of the process, such as the expectations and quality of the process itself. Engaging stakeholders in a discussion about what would constitute a quality MSP for them and then setting up systems for monitoring and regularly reviewing this, can be a very powerful tool. It can not only improve the process, but also maintain stakeholders' commitments.

Together, these three elements of Co-creation, Collaborative Action, and Learning and Reflexive Monitoring form the bedrock of an MSP process. One can compare this with stringing beads together to form a necklace, with these three elements forming the beads that capture the eye. The three elements form the core of the proposition for Hivos that as a strategy, an MSP is more than a one-off event where a number of stakeholders participate. As a consequence, the overarching concept that dominates working with MSP is *process:* central to the thinking behind an MSP is an unfolding, progressive and adaptive process.

One example of an MSP process is presented in figure 4.1:

**FIGURE 4.1:**
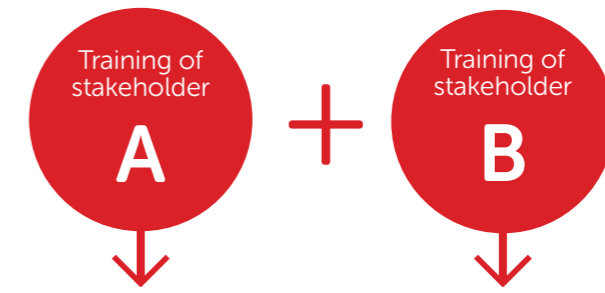


Figure 4.1 shows that as a first step, groups of stakeholders are separately trained. This enables them to participate meaningfully in the subsequently organized search conference with all stakeholders (SHs), a participative planning method. Multi-stakeholder working groups are then formed on different topics. Periodically short but intensive bootcamps are organized to enhance skills and knowledge on joint interests. The stakeholders are then ready to move to collaborative action. For instance, one group is co-creating an experiment to work with street corner workers, another on preparing a joint declaration, and a third is taking on the challenge of setting up a digital sharing platform, so the groups can periodically interact before their next meeting together.

This example of a string of events can be followed by a meeting focused on collective reflection and review, where stakeholders share lessons and strategize. This third element of learning and reflective monitoring points to the need for creating fast cycles of rethinking and adapting about the three main aspects of the MSP (see Figure 4.2):

1) The **WHY:** understanding the emerging situation and how the unfolding MSP process will achieve change.

2) The **WHAT:** developing a change strategy guided by the MSP principles by (re-) combining the three elements of co-creation, collective action and learning and reflexive monitoring.
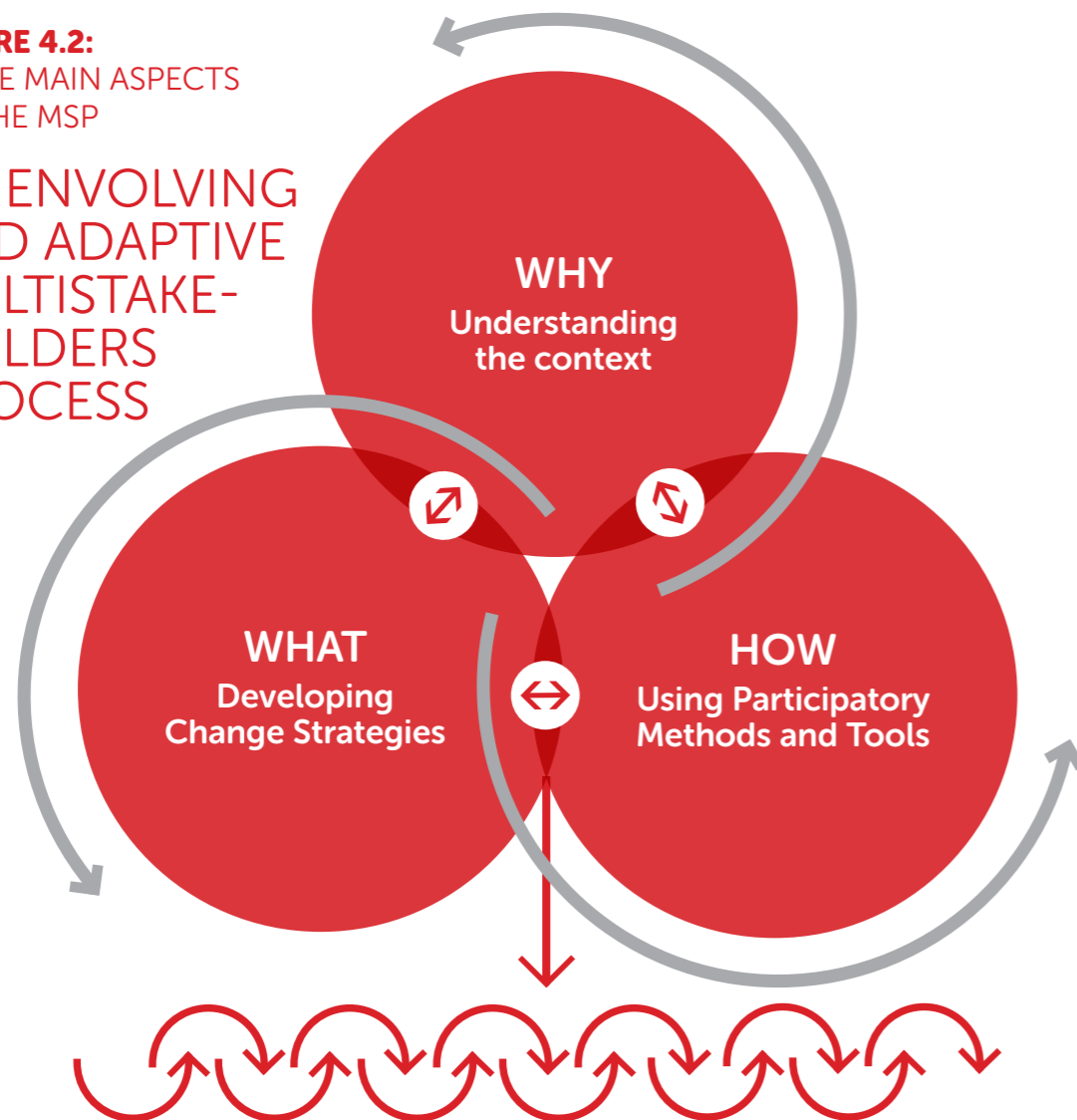
3) The **HOW:** deciding which tool needs to be used or combined for each step in the process for how to best engage stakeholders in relationship building, analysis and learning, planning or collective action. In the example, tools refer to a search conference, working group, etc. See box 4.1

In designing and redesigning an MSP, the three elements of co-creation, collaborative action, and learning and reflexive monitoring are to be flexibly, but consciously sequenced, also in response to emerging issues (needs, windows of opportunities, effects, etc.). As we can see from the example in figure 4.1, each element can comprise different activities or events. For example, learning and reflexive monitoring can consist of peer visits followed by a knowledge sharing workshop, or start with a joint review of a learning topic, a validation workshop and an external sharing event. Each element can have individual/ sub-group/collective events, e.g. individual reflection, training in single stakeholder groups, or a search conference where all important stakeholders participate.
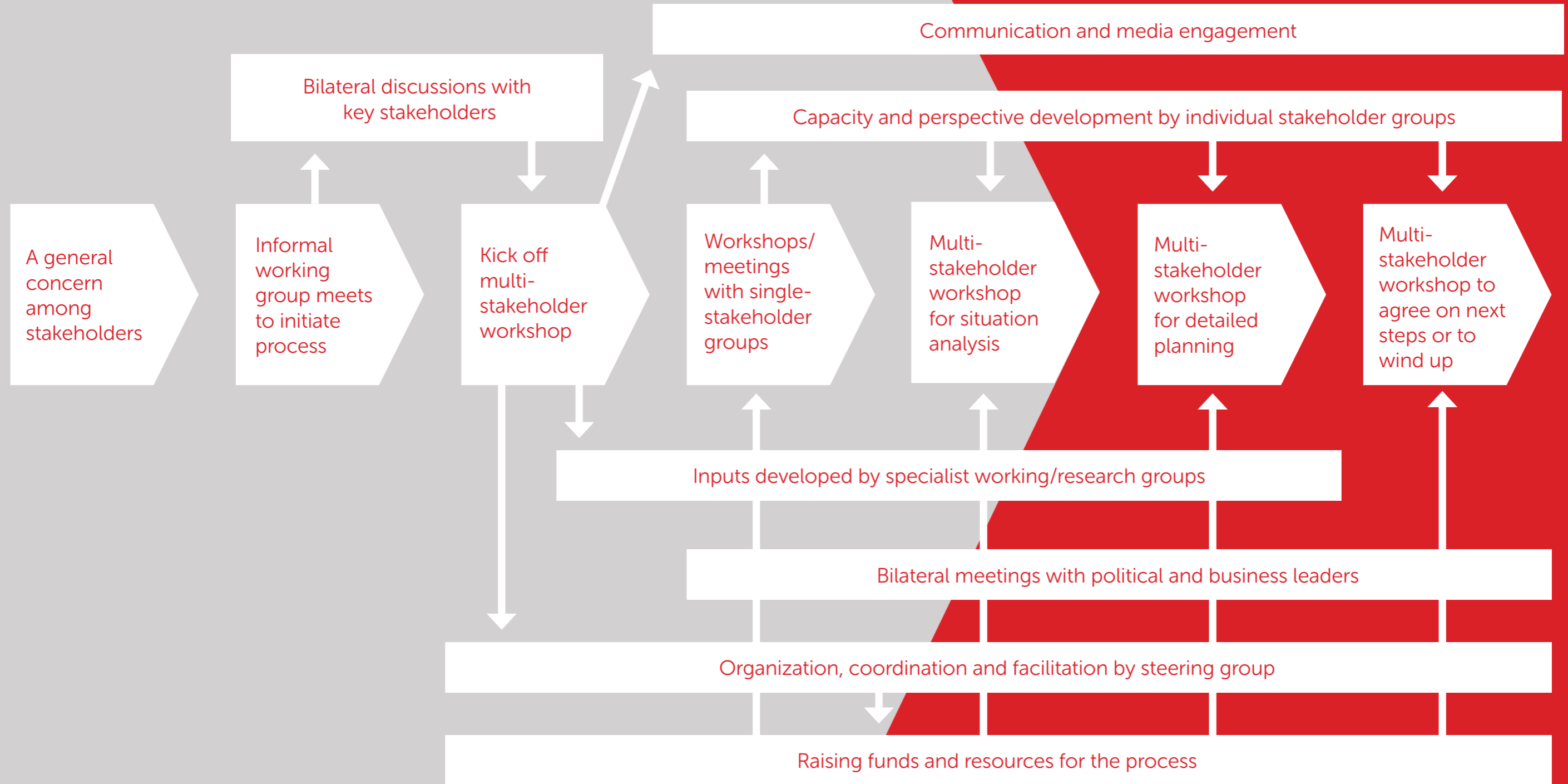
Events can take place simultaneously or sequentially, depending on the needs and objectives. An example is the simultaneous organization of awareness-raising workshops for certain single groups of stakeholders with capacity building events for other selected groups, making it possible that all can participate on equal footing in a general stakeholder meeting. Deciding on the specific participants for an activity or event also depends on the unfolding of the MSP and emerging needs and issues.

Box 4.1 provides examples of different process tools: activities and events that may concretize the 'how' of an overall MSP. Figure 4.3 illustrates what this might look like in a timeline.

**FIGURE 4.2:**
THREE MAIN ASPECTS
OF THE MSP

AN ENVOLVING
AND ADAPTIVE
MULTISTAKE-
HOLDERS
PROCESS



**Box 4.1: Examples of process tools that can be combined in an MSP:**

- Preparation and planning meetings involving those who are initiating, or facilitating the process
- Individual or small group meetings with key people to gain their critical support and influence
- Meetings of a steering or advisory group that are to help guide and support the overall process
- Multi-stakeholder workshops involving various combinations of relevant stakeholders
- Theory U related methods, e.g. learning or sensing journeys, and 3D sculpting
- Single-stakeholder training events to enable a single group or sector to prepare for engaging in the overall process
- Change Lab-related methods, e.g. prototyping
- Working groups that undertake specific organizational, research or communication activities to support the process
- Reflection meetings where insights obtained during learning journeys are discussed
- Field visits and study tours, in mixed or single-actor groups
- Seminars or conferences that engage

**FIGURE 4.3:**

## EXAMPLE OF HOW PROCESS TOOLS
## CAN BE COMBINED IN A TIMELINE

Communication and media engagement

Bilateral discussions with key stakeholders

Capacity and perspective development by individual stakeholder groups

A general concern among stakeholders

Informal working group meets to initiate process

Kick off multi-stakeholder workshop

Workshops/meetings with single-stakeholder groups

Multi-stakeholder workshop for situation analysis

Multi-stakeholder workshop for detailed planning

Multi-stakeholder workshop to agree on next steps or to wind up

Inputs developed by specialist working/research groups

Bilateral meetings with political and business leaders

Organization, coordination and facilitation by steering group

Raising funds and resources for the process

Time frame in months

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12

In the previous section, we saw that effective multi-stake-holder processes don't just happen – they need to be designed deliberately, even if it is just in reaction to an unfolding change process. The sequencing of activities and events needs to be organized and facilitated in a way that puts values and principles into practice. By **'deliberate design'** we mean that we need to consciously think through and plan what is likely to work best in view of the stage, requirements and dynamics of a particular MSP. Given that this is based on assumptions, we need to monitor closely and learn to what extent the design generates the desired hypothesized process or not. There will never be a simple 'recipe' or 'blueprint' to follow. Instead, designing an MSP will involve a progressively iterative process, co-created with the engaged stakeholders.

**In summary: Conscious design contributes to the effectiveness of an MSP process.**

With conscious design we don't mean creating a fixed plan from the start. Taking the earlier mentioned concepts of emergence and adaptiveness, designing entails constantly thinking through what is likely to work best given the situation that is emerging (partly thanks to our efforts) and the desired change.

In other words, every MSP process should be tailor-made according to its own path and logic. Furthermore, experience has shown that effectiveness of the process can be improved by consciously designing for the three MSP elements: co-creation, collaborative action, and learning and reflexive monitoring (see above section).

Conscious design then refers to deliberate sequencing at two levels of the MSP process:
1. Of the three elements: co-creation, collaborative action, learning and reflexive monitoring
2. Of the different activities or tools that form the element in that moment, e.g. workshops, learning journeys, bootcamps, etc.

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9. Theories of change are the ideas and hypotheses ('theories') people and organizations have about how change happens. These theories can be conscious or unconscious and are based on personal beliefs, assumptions and a necessarily limited, personal perception of reality. Theory of Change has been widely hailed as an approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation in the field of international development by which more justice can be done to complexity.

10. As this primer refers specifically to MSPs, only some Theory of Change aspects are explained here. Other materials will offer more details on Hivos way of working with Theory of Change thinking, including the Hivos guide on Theory of Change, 2015.

# 05

# SPECIFIC **DESIGN, MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING** ASPECTS

This section deals with specific aspects of design, monitoring, evaluation and learning (DMEL). While these aspects are supposed to be carried out by a Hivos DMEL officer, the D-M-E-L should have the attention of all who coordinate, manage, and implement MSPs. This chapter first explains DMEL as a way of working with MSP processes, followed by a section on the component parts of DMEL.

## 5A
### NAVIGATING AS A KEY CONCEPT IN THE DMEL OF MSPS
What do you do when you are sailing offshore in choppy waters? You navigate! This is a concept that has evolved over many years to get sailors safely to their destination. The prime approach for navigating is *Theory of Change thinking*.[9] This is further explained in the next section. Having a mindset of navigating helps significantly when working with MSPs. A navigating mindset requires three things: a horizon, a boat (or something to get you across the waves) and a compass. Of course, all three, the horizon, boat and compass are referred to here metaphorically. In practical terms, they are as follows:

1. The 'horizon' is the goal of the journey. In MSP terms, this refers to the longer-term change that we want to see (the long-term goal described in a Theory of Change) and for which we are engaging in the MSP (possibly complemented by other strategies);
2. The 'boat' helps us to move towards that the horizon, making intermediary stops where appropriate. It refers to how we think that change will happen (the pathways

of change). At a more concrete level (between strategy and activity), in MSP terms, we can see these as the process tools that string together the three elements of co-creation, collaborative action, and learning and reflexive monitoring. Examples are prototyping workshops, learning journeys, bootcamps, working groups, etc. (see Chapter 4);
3. The 'compass' serves to establish whether you are still on course. In MSP terms, we look at the compass during the events designed to collectively reflect and review, synthesize experiences and distil lessons, to (re-)strategize and decide on adjustments. Generally, the Theory of Change (ToC) is used as boundary for the learning and review.

## 5B
### WHERE ARE WE HEADING TO: CREATING A HORIZON
In 'choppy' waters, the ToC – that is, how one thinks that change happens and what one can do to achieve a desired change – is a concept and approach that can give handles to sequence and structure interventions and monitor their effects towards the desired changes. It is closely interwoven with the ideas of emergence, non-linearity and adaptiveness. While organizations use Theory of Change in many ways, there are two central aspects that are crucial to any use of Theory of Change: process mapping, and the reflective aspects of a theory of change approach:

1. Process mapping requires the description and monitoring of a pathway of change. That is a sequence of intermediate changes to which interventions are

thought to contribute and which is expected to lead to a particular desired outcome (this is what is called a pathway of change). Through the mapping, you see whether you are off-course or advancing along the hypothesized pathway;
2. The second central aspect is an ongoing process of reflection and learning to explore change and how it has happened. It also entails examining what that change means for our contribution in a particular context, sector and/or group of people (see the above section on Compass).

At Hivos, we have embraced the idea of Theory of Change thinking as a flexible approach to continuously think through the fundamental questions of:
- What intermediate outcomes do we need to achieve in order to arrive at our desired change?
- What interventions do we assume will contribute to achieving that change?
- What changes have we actually achieved?
- What does that tell us about our assumed pathway of change and the contribution of our interventions?

With regard to MSP, a key issue in *ToC thinking*[10] is working with the fact that different actors (stakeholders) will have different perspectives on what would be a desirable change, and how this change could be brought about. Each brings her or his stakes to the process. During an MSP process, stakeholders articulate and explore their underlying assumptions and strategies that guide their actions to bring about desirable changes. Importantly, a strategy can be explicit and documented or implicit, informal or even intuitive. Whether explicit, formal or not, in order for all three MSP elements of co-creation, collaborative action, and learning and reflexive monitoring to bring about productive collaborative processes, exploring and consciously moving towards a workable and productive *balance of divergence* and convergence, is a must. Divergence is productive where it enriches thinking and helps to stretch our boundaries of imagination. Convergence is productive where it contributes to arriving at a common language, a common dot on the horizon, and feeling part of an alliance.

In any complex situation and therefore also with an MSP process, the Theory of Change needs constant updating.

Revisiting original assumptions in light of experiences, adjusting interventions based on outcomes and emerging realities, and repeatedly updating the context and stakeholder analysis, forms the basis for a continual adjustment of the ToC. For MSPs, it is important to bear in mind that doing this collectively, contributes to joint learning and enhancing collective understanding. This in turn, can help to increase the sense of joint ownership.

As explained earlier, process is key in an MSP. The rigor of the process can make an MSP process qualitatively distinct from others. Process design therefore is not left to chance, but requires a conscious thinking through.

## 5C
### HOW TO MOVE TOWARDS THAT HORIZON: MSP AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT
In the previous section, we pointed out the need for an ongoing process of learning and review. This section explains how a discipline of regular learning and review can be built into the MSP process based on adaptive management principles.

The three elements of co-creation, collaborative action, and learning and reflexive monitoring, presented earlier have consequences for the type of planning and management approaches that are suitable for MSPs. Adoption of Theory of Change thinking requires, for example, abandoning fixed timeframes and control-oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) systems, and allowing for a degree of flexibility and adaptive planning.

To do this, a first requirement for all planning and management approaches is that spaces and tools enabling regular moments of stock taking and decision making are built into an MSP process. These spaces and tools are about engaging the different stakeholders or interest groups in processes of analysis, vision building, experience sharing, knowledge and evidence creation, strategy development or action planning. Therefore, each of these spaces and tools should be adapted for the specific moment or phase (e.g. start or mature) in the MSP process. Each moment brings specific conditions for absorbing lessons, experiences and insights and transforming them into direction and strategy setting of

# CLOSING REMARKS

the MSP. This means that the design of spaces and choice of tools is informed by the possibilities they offer, for example, to enable participation or to achieve a certain level of reflection and analysis.[11]

A second requirement is that the systems created for the program or project need to support working in such an adaptive and flexible way. This means that especially learning, M&E, resourcing, capacity assessment and development, and decision-making processes need to be adapted to this logic of emergence and flexibility.

## 5D
### SPECIFIC DMEL ASPECTS OF MSPS
In this primer, we only provide a glimpse of the DMEL aspects of MSPs. More detailed guidance can be found in online resources.

### THE D FOR DESIGN
As already highlighted in the previous sections, working with MSPs requires an emergent design, accompanied by adaptive planning and iterative process approaches. Despite the emergent characteristic, the design of the MSP process should be intentional and rigorous:
1. There should be greater intentionality and rigor in development and testing of concepts and ideas;
2. The three MSP elements of co-creation, collaborative action and learning and reflexive monitoring need to be built into the design; and,
3. The design should include well-defined moments for decision making with clear criteria for testing ideas or concepts. Collective ownership and inclusiveness need to be intentionally included in the design principles, and based on a repeated mapping of power relations.

### THE M FOR MONITORING
As can be derived from the above sections, monitoring an MSP process asks for moving away from certain aspects of conventional results-based monitoring. First, M&E is to cater for non-linear processes of change with adjusted metrics for assessing progress and markers for what constitutes success in MSP. Second, an MSP requires constant monitoring, for example, with regular scanning, power mapping and social network analysis. Third, as an MSP is about multiple perspectives, interests,

knowledge, and resources, SPICED indicators may trump SMART ones. SPICED stands for Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted, Cross-checked, Empowering, and Diverse and Disaggregated.[12] Additionally, given the intensive resourcing required for an MSP, the monitoring may include regular rigorous readiness assessment, connected to decision-making moments. Finally, monitoring in an MSP needs to also cover aspects specific to working with MSPs: process rigor, the testing of concepts, and the palette of possible allies, and intervention strategies.

### THE L FOR LEARNING
Since learning about how the assumptions and process logic and design play out is key in MSP, tight feedback loops need to be built into the process. A quick learning cycle to understand if and what works in relation to desired changes forms an efficient response to the need in MSPs to 'probe'. That is to experimentally test a range of innovations and interventions, figure out what works, how and why, and then opportunistically 'go' with what works. Disciplined, real-time learning processes that intimately and rigorously follow the change as it is happening, greatly support timely adaptation. Importantly, an MSP requires going beyond the creation of learning spaces and mechanisms. Designing the learning in an MSP involves examining and testing ideas, accounting for and building the ability to develop and adopt a systematic approach to experimenting and learning from failure (capacity for experiential learning), including from others. The quality of systematic, intentional and critical reflection, analysis and learning is often what makes the difference between a lean and successful MSP and a costly, weak MSP that may fail.

### THE E FOR EVALUATION
What has been described in the monitoring section also applies to evaluation (e.g. the need for clarity of what success would look like in MSP). The addition is that there is a need to understand what can constitute valid evidence in a multi-actor setting designed around co-creation and collaborative action. What is credible for one actor is not necessarily acceptable for another. Evaluation approaches and tools are needed that can take that into consideration.

This primer deals with multi-actor initiatives, one of the five intervention strategies selected by Hivos. The primer does not explain how the intervention strategies can be combined to achieve change, how they interact or influence each other. Although that is a vast area for learning, it falls outside the scope of this document.

This primer provides a basic orientation and principles for engaging with MSP, to support –not replace – the skills, human intelligence, relation- and partnership building capacities and dedication that underscore any successful MSP.

Finally, the primer does not represent an end point. Feedback and suggestions for further improvement are most welcome and can be shared with Wenny Ho at wenny.ho@hivos.org, or sent to SIL@hivos.org.


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# A primer for design and facilitation of multi-actor initiatives