Multi-Stakeholder Processes

A Methodological Framework

Executive Summary
Principles
Step-By-Step Guide

A UNED Forum (Draft) Report, April 2001

By Minu Hemmati
with contributions from
Felix Dodds, Jasmin Enayati & Jan McHarry

Acknowledgements

A Call to Readers

Sustainable development is a process; and multi-stakeholder processes are one of the tools that can help us to achieve a more sustainable future. Increasing the utility of MSPs requires that we understand and evaluate how they have been used in the past and that we gain more experiences in more such processes.

"Since the answers to fundamental and serious concerns are not at hand, there is no alternative but to keep on trying to find them" (Brundtland 1987: ix).

As one commentator has recently observed: "Business as usual, government as usual, and perhaps even protest as usual are not giving us the progress needed to achieve sustainable development. Let's see if we can't work together to find better paths forward" (Hohnen 2001).

We very much want our readers to join us in our learning process. We are looking forward to hearing from you - to experiment in theory, in discussion, and in practice.

Executive Summary

"Traditional processes of coordination need to be supplemented by a series of practical arrangements which provide for more active, cooperative management (…) both within the United Nations system and extending to other involved intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations" (UN Secretary General Kofi Annan 2000a).

The present report puts forward a methodological framework for designing multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs)[1], aiming to contribute to the advancement of such practical arrangements as the UN Secretary General is referring to. We believe that MSPs represent a promising path, both around (inter)governmental processes and independent of them. However, it is necessary to further clarify the nature of such processes and their principles; develop guidelines on how to effectively conduct them; and learn from experience.

The term multi-stakeholder processes is used to describe **processes which aim to bring together all major stakeholders** in a new form of decision-finding (and possibly decision-making) structure on a particular issue. They are also based on recognition of the importance of achieving equity and accountability in communication between stakeholders, involving equitable representation of three or more stakeholder groups and their views. They are based on democratic principles of transparency and participation, and aim to develop partnerships and strengthened networks between stakeholders. MSPs cover a wide spectrum of structures and levels of engagement. They can comprise of dialogue (statements, exchange and discussion), or grow into processes encompassing consensus-building, decision-making and implementation. The exact nature of any MSP will depend the issue, the participants, the time-frame, etc.

MSPs are akin to a **new species in the eco-system of decision-finding and governance structures and processes**. They have emerged because there is a perceived need for a more inclusive, effective manner for addressing the urgent sustainability issues of our time. A lack of inclusiveness has resulted in many good decisions for which there is no broad constituency, thus making implementation difficult. Because MSPs are new, they are still evolving. Because they are people-centred, people need to take ownership and responsibility for them, using and refining them to serve their own purposes and the larger purposes of the global community of which they are part.

The report presents **a number of building blocks** as a basis for the suggested framework and guide: clarifying the goals of MSPs (Chapter 2); looking at MSPs in the context of the ongoing debate on global governance and global governance reform (Chapter 3, by Felix Dodds); clarifying the terms and definitions of various forms of stakeholder involvement and engagement (Chapter 4); identifying different types of MSPs (Chapter 5); clarifying the value and ideological basis of MSPs (Chapter 6); analysing scientific findings relevant to designing MSPs (Chapter 7, by Jasmin Enayati); and analysing existing examples of various types of MSPs (Chapter 8). Chapter 9 presents a framework mainly based on the sequence of possible stages in the 'life-span' of an MSP which is the basis of the step-by-step guide.

Multi-stakeholder processes are an **important tool** for sustainable development. Their **objective** is to promote better decisions by means of wider input; to integrate diverse viewpoints; to bring together the principal actors; to create trust through honouring each participant as contributing a necessary component of the bigger picture; to create mutual benefits (win/win rather than win/lose situations); to develop shared power with a partnership approach; to reduce the waste of time and other scare resources associated with processes that generate recommendations that lack broad support; to create commitment through participants identifying with the outcome and thus increasing the likelihood of successful implementation. They are designed to put people into the centre of decision-finding, decision-making and implementation.

MSPs relate to the **ongoing debate on global governance** and global governance reform. Chapter 3 discusses some of the history and the increase of stakeholder involvement with the United Nations and the impact of recent UN reform packages. Mechanisms of stakeholder involvement developed by the UN

---

[1] "(…) the word 'stakeholder' refers to people who have an interest in a particular decision, either as individuals or representatives of a group" (The Environment Council)[1]. This includes people who (can) influence a decision as well as those affected by it.

Commission on Sustainable Development receive particular attention as they are the most interesting political space for Major Groups within the United Nations and in the area of sustainable development (also see Chapter 8 & Annex I). UNAIDS offers another innovative example. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the supplementary and complementary role of stakeholder involvement vis-à-vis the roles and responsibilities of governments, and a call for clear norms and standards. MSPs are meant to *give voices, not votes* to stakeholders and the suggestions made here are aiming to make these voices heard and used most effectively.

In the past few years, terms such as "stakeholder statements", "(multi-)stakeholder dialogue", "stakeholder forum", "stakeholder consultation", "discussion" and "process" have been used by various actors. Meanings of these terms overlap and refer to a variety of settings and modes of stakeholder communication. Chapter 4 clarifies the **various terms** referring to multi-stakeholder processes and outlines the definitions used in this report.

There are **different types of MSPs**, varying with regard to their scope, level and diversity of stakeholder groups involved (Chapter 5). They range from informing processes to monitoring processes and mechanisms, implementation processes, and what we call 'advanced multi-stakeholder processes' which include not only dialogues but consensus-building, decision-making and implementation. MSPs can also be conducted at local, national, or international levels, with some processes involving activities at several levels. Finally, MSPs can involve different numbers of stakeholder groups und thus vary in diversity, with increased diversity posing specific challenges as well as opportunities.

As with any problem-solving or governance approach, there are certain **value bases or ideological fundaments** underlying the promotion of multi-stakeholder processes. These include fundamental concepts such as: sustainable development; quality of life and economic well-being; good governance; democracy; participation; equity and justice; dignity; respect for others; unity in diversity; leadership; credibility; and public opinion. Other important concepts can be derived from these, such as: achieving quality solutions and concrete implementation; effectiveness; (economic) success; learning; solidarity, collaboration and partnerships; transparency; access to information; inclusiveness; legitimacy; accountability; informed consent; responsibility; and appropriate modes of stakeholder communication. Chapter 6 outlines these concepts as they relate to multi-stakeholder processes. The suggested framework and guide attempt to identify strategies and mechanisms, which allow these values and concepts to be put into practice.

Scientific research relevant to the practical design of MSPs, particularly with regard to modes of stakeholder communication, can be found in social and organisational psychology. Chapter 7 reviews such findings, particularly those on decision-making processes in groups of high diversity, to provide further theoretical and empirical basis for the suggested framework. Among the conclusions are: MSPs and their participants need to take a learning approach to operate within a transparent, agreed and yet flexible framework. Aspects of group composition need to be considered carefully. Trust-building and overcoming stereotypical perceptions are among the first important steps. Formal group procedures are an important tool to successful communication and decision-making. Allowing the space for group members to reflect upon the process they are engaged in is also very important (meta-communication).

Related to an increased interest in public participation and to the implementation of Agenda 21, numerous **examples of multi-stakeholder processes** have been conducted over the last few decades. Not surprisingly, since the 1990s, there has been a significant increase of such processes within the area of environment and sustainable development. Chapter 8 looks at a number of examples, many around official decision-making processes at the international, national or local levels, and some independent initiatives. The examples vary with regard to the issues they address, their size and scale, the way they have been designed, their linkage into official decision-making, etc. We have conducted literature research and interviews with people who have been or are involved in the example processes. The goal was not to evaluate but to obtain a **descriptive analysis** of the respective MSPs and to collect practical approaches, problems encountered, and creative ideas of how to deal with them. The wealth of experiences provides valuable insights and examples of creative solutions to common problems of MSPs, which we have used as an important resource for the suggested framework and guide.

On the basis of these building blocks, we have developed a **list of issues and questions** which need to be addressed when designing MSPs, guided by a step-by-step procedure and including some general

and organisational questions (Chapter 9). This is an attempt to **translate the rhetoric of values and the empirical findings** into practical conclusions and suggestions on how to do it.

Finally, we have summarised our conclusions in **a set pf principles** and a **step-by-step guide to designing multi-stakeholder processes** (see below in this summary).

No "one-size-fits-all" framework exists for all kinds of MSPs and the suggestions made in the guide below do not have the intention of pretending that there is one. Rather, they should be taken as an open-ended check-list of aspects which need to be addressed when designing, carrying out and evaluating an MSP.[2]

---

[2] Part V contains the References and five Annexes to this report: Annex I provides the presentations of the examples we looked at; Annex II describes the methodology of the project; Annexes III and IV offer a glossary and a list of acronyms; and Annex V lists the people who have in one way or the other contributed to the present report.

Principles of Stakeholder Participation and Collaboration

We are suggesting the following as key principles of multi-stakeholder processes:

Accountability	Employing agreed, transparent, democratic mechanisms of engagement, position-finding, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, evaluation.
Effectiveness	Providing a tool for addressing urgent sustainability issues; promoting better decisions by means of wider input; generating recommendations that have broad support; creating commitment through participants identifying with the outcome and thus increasing the likelihood of successful implementation.
Equity	Levelling the playing field between stakeholder groups whose 'traditional' lobbying activities largely depend on their resources and are therefore imbalanced; applying principles of gender and regional balance; providing equitable access to information.
Flexibility	Covering a wide spectrum of structures and levels of engagement, depending on issues, participants, linkage into decision-making, time-frame, etc.
Good governance	Further developing the role of stakeholder participation and collaboration in (inter)governmental systems as supplementary and complementary vis-à-vis the roles and responsibilities of governments, based on clear norms and standards.
Inclusiveness	Allowing all views to be represented and increases the legitimacy and credibility of a participatory process.
Learning	Taking a learning approach throughout their design; requiring participants to learn from each other.
Legitimacy	Requiring democratic, transparent, accountable, equitable processes in their design; requiring participants to adhere to those principles.
Ownership	People-centred processes, allowing ownership for decisions, thus increasing chances of successful implementation.
Participation & Engagement	Bringing together the principal actors; supporting and challenging all stakeholders to be actively engaged.
Partnership / Cooperative Management	Developing partnerships and strengthening networks between stakeholders; addressing conflictual issues; integrating diverse viewpoints; creating mutual benefits (win/win rather than win/lose situations); developing shared power & responsibilities; creating feedback loops between local, national, or international levels and into decision-making.
Societal Gains	Creating trust through honouring each participant as contributing a necessary component of the bigger picture; helping participants to overcome stereotypical perceptions and prejudice.
Strengthening of (inter)governmental Institutions	Developing advanced mechanisms of transparent, equitable, and legitimate stakeholder participation strengthens institutions in terms of democratic governance and increased ability to address global challenges.
Transparency	bringing all relevant stakeholders together in one forum and within an agreed process.
Voices, not votes	Making voices of various stakeholders effectively heard

A Step-by-Guide to Designing Multi-stakeholder Processes

The suggestions made here are based on clarifying the goals, terms and definitions of MSPs; analysing them in the context of the ongoing debate on global governance and global governance reform; clarifying the value and ideological basis of MSPs; reviewing relevant scientific findings and analysing existing examples of various types of MSPs.[3]

Some general considerations

The suggestions made here are addressed to institutions, organisations or groups who are considering designing – or already engaged in the design of an MSP. Who should that be? Ideally, all stakeholders should be able and eligible **to initiate MSPs**. However, in many cases, there is a need to support stakeholder groups to enable them to do so.

Everybody who considers initiating an MSP should do so **in collaboration with other stakeholders**, namely representatives of those groups who should be involved. The purpose is to make the design phase a multi-stakeholder effort itself. As early as possible in the process, initiating bodies should reach out and assemble a small group of representative stakeholders of high diversity. This group can become an initial coordinating group for the process, but this is a decision to be made by the participants at the beginning of the process itself.

MSPs need **precisely defined issues** before them. Questions to be addressed and goals of the process need to be very clear to all participants and agreed by them. Possible changes over the course of an ongoing MSP also need to be agreed by the group, including consultations within constituencies.

Every MSP should take **a learning approach** towards its procedures and, in some cases, issues developing over time. Pre-set agendas, time-tables, definitions of issues, group composition, goals, procedures of communication and decision-making won't work. MSPs will be unique to their issue, composition, specific goal, resources, etc. Participants need to take a learning approach – being prepared to learn from and about others (new knowledge; overcoming stereotypes); to 'teach' others about their views; to learn how to work together as a team and develop suitable solutions together.

MSPs should not only publish their discussions and outcomes but also keep **records of their design**. Information should be made available on who initiated the process, who was involved when and on which issues and questions, which mechanisms were employed to identify stakeholders, issues, goals, rules and procedures, and so on.

Due to the **different types of MSPs**, some of the points and suggestions below don't apply to all MSPs. For example, consensus-building is usually not an issue in pure dialogue processes, and procedures of decision-making do not need to be considered.

---

[3] This guide is meant to be brief and practical. Chapter 9 discusses the points made and the reasoning behind them in greater detail.

Overview

1. Context

| Process Design | Linkage to Decision-making | Issue Identification | Stakeholder Identification | Facilitation Back-Up | Funding |

2. Framing

| Group Composition | Goals | Agenda |

3. Inputs

| Stakeholder Preparations | Agreed Rules & Procedures | Power Gaps | Capacity-building |

4. Dialogue / Meetings

| Communication Channels | Facilitation / Chairing | Rapporteuring | Decision-Making * | Closure |

5. Outputs

| Documentation | Action Plan Implementation | Ongoing MS Processes * | Impact Official Decision-Making * |

Throughout the Process

| Meta-communication | Relating to non-participating Stakeholders | Relating to the General Public |

Arrows indicate reviewing / refining / repeating

* Optional

1. Context

Initial Coordinating Group & Wider Consultations

Process Design

Process & Outputs	**Principles**	**Interaction**
Scale	Democracy	Facilitation
Information	Equity	Communication
(Access; Sharing)	Transparency	Conflict Resolution
Language	Inclusion	Consensus-Building
Timing	Legitimacy	Decision-Making
Possible MOU / TOR	Flexibility	

Linkage Into Official Decision-Making *

Informing	Transparency	Government In-
Implementation	on Consideration	volvement
Feedback Loops	& Use	Agreed Process
		from the Outset

Issue Identification

Develop Clear Agenda &	Scoping
Precise Definitions	Transparency; Time-table
	Agree Key Issues

Stakeholder Identification

Diversity	**Inclusion**	**Structure**	**Legitimacy**	**Participants Identification**
Relevance	Openness	Size / Limits	Accountable;	Transparency
Social Mapping	Voluntary	Focal Groups	Equitable;	Balances
Balances	Clear Criteria	Hierarchy	Democratic	
Experts / Non-experts		Feedback Loops	Processes within; Expertise	

* Optional

Context cont.

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│         Initial Coordinating Group & Wider Consultations      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                ↓               ↓               ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Facilitation / Organisational Back-up            │
├──────────────┬──────────────┬──────────────┬─────────────────┤
│Responsibilities│  Flexibility │  Neutrality  │     Options     │
│  Clear Roles  │   Process;   │  No Direct   │   UN Bodies     │
│ Communication │ Stakeholders;│  Interests   │ MS Organisations│
│   Funding     │    Goals;    │ Acceptable to│Individual Bodies│
│               │  Structures  │     All      │      etc.       │
└──────────────┴──────────────┴──────────────┴─────────────────┘
```

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                           Funding                             │
├──────────────────────────────┬──────────────────────────────┤
│      Sufficient Resources     │          Transparency         │
│    Financial & Non-financial  │       Sources; Structure      │
│         Secure In Time        │   Independence; Non-intrusive │
└──────────────────────────────┴──────────────────────────────┘
```

Process Design

There are many forms that an MSP can take. Each situation, issue or problem prompts the need for participants to design a process specifically suited to their abilities, circumstances and needs.

Make the design phase an MSP: designing the process should be a collaborative effort, not a unilateral one. Involving stakeholders in every aspect of the design process is crucial to achieve the best design, commitment to the process, credibility, legitimacy and trust. A core coordinating group may be required to manage the process, identify the issue to be addressed, approach possible independent facilitators and involve relevant stakeholders. Possible designs can be suggested by individual stakeholders but should be put to a group (e.g. an initial, smaller group).

Procedures need to be agreed to by participants – procedures of preparation, communication ground rules for the meeting, issues around confidentiality, decision-making (if applicable), rapporteuring (i.e. reporting on the group's activities), documentation, relating to the wider public, and even fund-raising. All these procedures need to be part of considerations, ideally multilateral ones, in the design phase of an MSP. As a rule, any changes in procedure (and issues) throughout the process also need to be agreed – they should be suggested to the whole group and dealt with by the whole group.

Procedures should be designed to ensure **democracy, equity, mutual respect, transparency, legitimacy, accountability, and inclusiveness** in order for the process to benefit from diversity; generate mutual understanding, creative outcomes, and win/win solutions; and encourage commitment.

In cases of existing or likely **conflict**, finding mechanisms to help overcome confrontational relationships and distrust will need to be in the centre of designing the process. In such cases, the designing group should consider to include conflict resolution techniques in the process, e.g. bargaining, third-party mediation or other dispute resolution techniques. In cases of stark conflict, however, it might be more appropriate to begin working with individual stakeholder groups first, before bringing various groups together.

It is important to allow **sufficient time** for preparations and the process itself but set time-bound targets to keep participants focused on delivery.

The MSP group should consider preparing and signing a Memorandum of Understanding or Terms of Reference that serves as the basis for cooperative work.

Linkage Into Official Decision-making

Different types of MSPs provide different kinds of linkages into official decision-making bodies, particularly governmental or intergovernmental ones. Linkage into the official decision-making process is **often a weak point** of MSPs. Yet, if an MSP is linked to an official decision-making body or process, it is crucial to establish the linkages into official decision-making at the outset. A document stating clearly the purpose of an MSP and outlining how its outcomes will be considered and used should be made available when inviting stakeholders to participate. In cases of ongoing processes or programmes, developing an Memorandum of Understanding between the partners (see above) could be appropriate.

There is also a need for ensuring more **equity**. Once there is a summary or report being put into an official decision-making process, stakeholders will lobby decision-makers on the points most important to them. Their ability to do so will depend on the resources at their disposal.

A chair's summary or another form of MSP outcome document can be produced and put into the decision-making process. The status of such a document needs to be agreed within the decision-making body beforehand.

MSPs which are meant to inform (inter)governmental decision-making could be complemented by stakeholder involvement in discussions on implementation of (draft) decisions; feedback loops providing information from stakeholders about implementation progress can be built into official processes (see below).

Issue Identification

MSPs need **a clear agenda and precise definitions** of what issue or set of issues they are going to address. Without a precise question before the MSP, participants will not be able to engage in productive dialogue nor reach meaningful agreements.

Issue-identification is therefore the first substantive stage of an MSP. It is helpful to have agreement on what it is that you are trying to do before deciding on the tools you will use. It is also helpful to know what you are trying to do so you can know when you are done. As a general rule, proper problem clarification saves time and reduces conflict later on.

For the sake of ensuring the potential success of a process, appropriate measures need to be taken to **avoid unilateral, non-transparent, and inequitable identification of issues**. These include:

- **scoping the area of an issue** of interest carefully, getting a clear picture of the discussions in/around the area of interest before identifying a particular issue/question as the one to be addressed; such scoping might also lead to identifying research and knowledge gaps;

- based on initial consultations, **setting a time-table** for such identifying discussions and communicating it clearly;

- **supporting stakeholders in** identifying issues of interest, where necessary financially (e.g. by governments, independent foundations), and/including with access to information and resources;

- **involving stakeholders** in discussions about potential issues and communicate to all stakeholders that this is being done, based on initial consultations.

Out of initial scoping and discussions a group of people can emerge who are interested in actively pursuing the setting up of an MSP on a particular issue. This should be used as a starting point for creating a **coordinating group** of representatives from various stakeholder groups (of different views). Upon setting up the MSP, this group needs to be reviewed by all participants of the process and, if necessary, recomposed, so that the process has a coordinating group acceptable to all involved.

It is important to create a mechanism for sharing **information** and a base for a common knowledge base for the process, ensuring that all concerned have equitable access to the relevant information from the outset. This does not need to be in one place, but should be easily accessible to all. Everybody who might be involved in the process should be informed of this information base and how it is being assembled.

In this initial phase, agreement should also be reached on the **language(s)** to be used in the process in order to avoid being exclusive. This will normally depend on the issues and groups who need to be involved. Sufficient resources in terms of money and time need to be available for translations, if appropriate.

Stakeholder Identification

The main issues here are the **issue concerned, inclusiveness, diversity and size**.

Open calls for participation should be the preferred mechanism. The motto could be: **Be as inclusive as necessary and possible – and deal creatively with problems of numbers and diversity**.

Principally, all who have a stake in a policy, process or project, should be part of a multi-stakeholder process relating to that policy, process or project. As issues of sustainable development are of high levels of complexity and affect a great number of stakeholders, a **high degree of diversity** of MSPs is desirable. Participation needs to be based on the same social categories or stakeholder groups as they are relevant to the respective issue ('high-impact categories'). Identifying MSP participants should not without careful reflection be designed merely on the basis of the nine Major Groups as of Agenda 21; in many cases, **"customised" definitions** of the group of relevant stakeholders should be developed. For example, categories such as faith communities, elderly, parliamentarians, the education community, cyclists, or others might be more appropriate, depending on the issue. Increased diversity makes conflict more likely; therefore, one needs to consider appropriate modes of communication depending on the expected amount of conflict, including conflict resolution techniques and/or working with groups separately before commencing the MSP itself.

An MSP does not have to be limited to one group or forum; it can be composed of **several strands or layers** of stakeholder collaboration. This might involve, for example, core groups surrounded by larger 'sounding boards' and groups who (initially) address separate parts of the issue. Different phases of enlargement and downsizing also provide options to deal with large numbers and diversity. Larger groups will also be of help when it comes to the dissemination of MSP outcomes. There is also a need for mechanisms for inviting additional stakeholders into the process if gaps become clear. Feedback loops between different levels (**local, national, international**) can help to inform dialogue and decision-making. If identifying models of implementation is desired, the involvement of groups involved in actual implementation, such as smaller NGOs and community-based organisations, is desirable.

Unilateral decisions that limit the number of participants or compose the group in a certain way should be avoided. It is better for the process to put this challenge to the stakeholders involved, e.g. to an initial smaller coordinating group.

Basic **infrastructure of involvement** needs to be in place. Issues of meeting time, meeting place, transport, childcare, and handicapped accessibility, etc, need to considered. There will be some stakeholders that, for cultural, religious or other reasons, bring their own barriers. Special activities may be required if their input is to be included.

Principally, when decisions require **government** action, the appropriate policy and regulatory authorities should participate in an MSP. This may also allay concerns by governments and others that MSPs are intended to weaken or reduce the role of governments.

Voluntary participation is key. Stakeholders need to be informed sufficiently and early enough (prior informed consent) to make their decision, which includes the right to say "No" to any arrangements. Such information should include the role that the MSP group will play, expected time commitments and the amount of work, travel, and so on involved.

A crucial question is **which bodies to approach to represent stakeholder groups**. Criteria should include: legitimacy and accountability of stakeholder representatives within and towards their communities; equity within the represented stakeholder communities as regards their participation; democratic processes of election / appointment of representatives; expertise; commitment to the MSP approach. Critical discussions about the representativeness and legitimacy of stakeholder representatives have focused on NGOs; many of whom, particularly in NGO networks, have been developing mechanisms of self-governance to ensure democratic, transparent and truly participatory processes as a basis of their mandate. Certification schemes would be another option; yet the question of who should govern or control

certifying bodies remains unsolved. One should keep in mind, however, that these questions not only apply to NGOs but other sectors of civil society as well, such as the business community, trade unions, local authorities, women, and so on.

If substantial parts of a sector are distancing themselves from a process, it will lack **legitimacy**. In such cases, it might be better to reconsider the setting up of an MSP and/or to carefully work out what kind of legitimacy it can claim, and conduct it clearly within those limitations.

MSPs need to provide information about the **criteria** being employed in the process of identifying relevant stakeholder groups and their representatives to all participating and non-participating stakeholder groups as well as the general public.

Participants Identification

Stakeholder groups need to be transparent about their **procedures of selecting representatives** to the process, within and without the process itself. Stakeholder groups should also be transparent to others about their elections or appointment criteria, and about criteria being used to identify individuals with expertise on the respective issues at hand. The process of identifying individuals to represent groups is helped by regular election or appointment processes within stakeholder networks and associations – e.g. caucus co-ordinator elections among NGOs, appointments of representatives to particular processes by stakeholder groups such as industry, trade unions, and so forth. Other participants should be allowed to bring to the floor any problems they might have with criteria other stakeholders are using.

It is important to **balance the numbers** of participants from each stakeholder group, and, in some cases, with regard to which views they are likely to represent. Stakeholder groups should be required to meet certain **balance criteria within their delegations**, such as regional and gender balance.

Preferably, representatives of stakeholder groups should remain the same persons over the course of an MSP. If representatives have to be replaced, they need to be briefed and be introduced to the group.

Where government involvement is required, it should be as high-level as possible.

Facilitation / Organisational Back-Up

During the various phases of an MSP, there is need for certain structural / organisational / institutional **support, back-up or facilitation**. Responsibilities need to be clearly marked and be known to all participants, to avoid diffusion of responsibilities, ensure proper communication, and in general ensure a smooth running of the process.

However, **flexibility** of such a body is very important; it needs to be able to adapt as processes, their participants and their needs develop over time. Organisational arrangements need to be **part of the planning phase and agreed by participants**. Such arrangements are also closely related to the question of funding, as secretariat services tend to be costly.

MSPs should ideally be facilitated by people who are not stakeholders and have **no direct interest in the outcome of the process**. In some cases, that might be possible; in many cases, it won't be – simply because of the complex and wide-ranging nature of issues of sustainable development. To ensure that there is a trustworthy 'honest broker' in place, organisations charged with designing and facilitating an MSP need to be

- explicit about their interests or possible interests;
- of diverse composition themselves, i.e. made up of representatives of the various stakeholder groups; and
- acceptable to everybody involved.

At the international level, **United Nations bodies** may be appropriate sources of facilitation, particularly if processes require or benefit from involvement of intergovernmental organisations. Another option are **organisations which are multi-stakeholder bodies** themselves, governed by elected representatives of all Major Groups and other stakeholders.

Yet another option is to **found a facilitating body** for the sole purpose of facilitating the MSP in question. Advantages include: that the constitution of such a body can be tailor-made for the purposes of the MSP;

that staff will be taken on for the specific task; that fund-raising goes to the specific body and its purposes; that a new body may be perceived as more neutral and having no other accountability structure and responsibility than to the process itself. Disadvantages include the necessary investments in time and resources to found an organisation and achieve a legal status allowing it to receive funds of various kinds, and the formality a process can develop when it is being given a formal structure and organisational basis.

The choice is of course depending on a number of factors, the most important of which might be the time-scale and size of a process. For preparations of **one-off events**, an MSP-initiator - or, preferably, - a group of various stakeholders agreeing to design an MSP - may assign an appropriate organisation to facilitate the process, or might simply choose to organise the event themselves. Such a procedure needs careful consideration of possible consequences regarding legitimacy and credibility of the process. Problems can be addressed by ensuring maximum transparency about what is being done and why, and checking with other stakeholders that the procedure is being perceived as appropriate. Another strategy is for the facilitating organisation to explicitly take a back-seat role throughout the preparations and the event itself. For **processes of larger size and complexity** which take more than a one-off event and its preparations to be carried out, different requirements emerge.
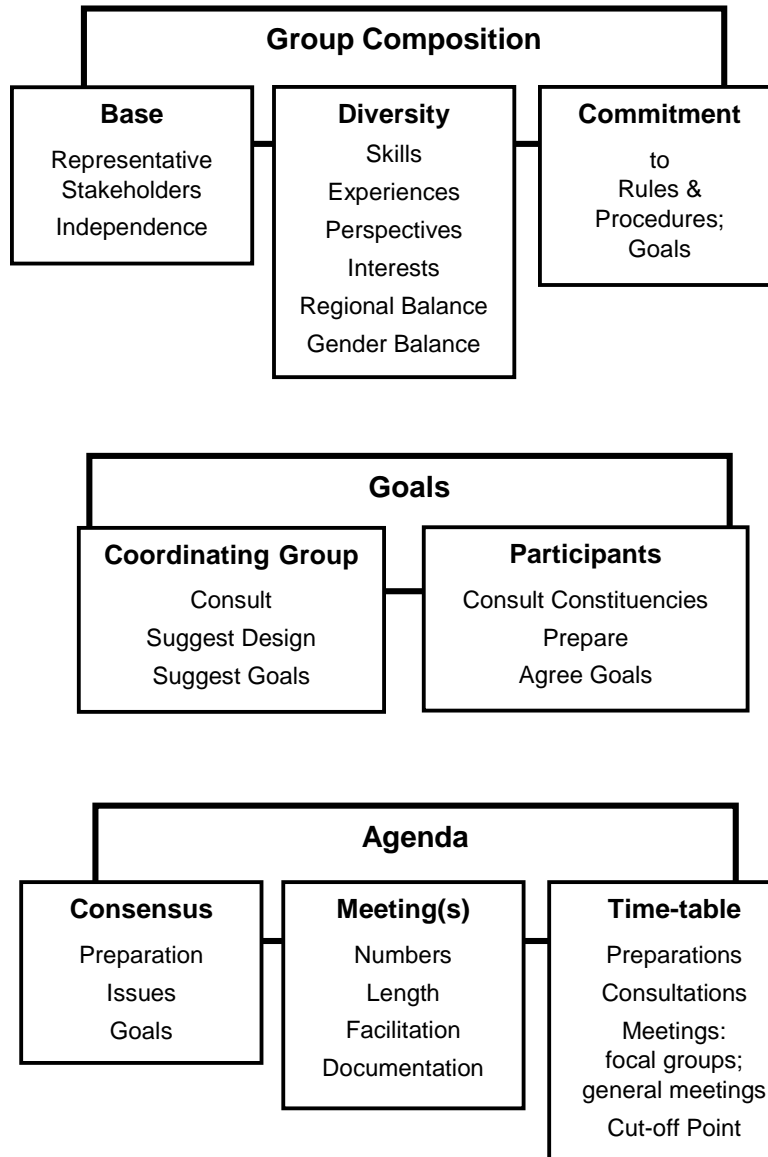

Funding

Sufficient resources are key to meaningful participation, consultations within constituencies, coordination, documentation, etc. A lack of resources will undermine the capacities, effectiveness, and possibly the entire potential of MSPs.

Fund raising targets and strategies beyond initial start-up funding need to be agreed by the group; roles and responsibilities need to be clearly assigned. Participants need to be fully informed about funding sources, budgets, etc. Keeping the process **independent** of individual funders is important; mixed funding sources are a way around that problem.

One suggestion is that the UN, governments and/or independent foundations set up a **trust fund** to support setting up of MSPs by providing financial resources and other assistance for stakeholder and public awareness and access to information. Of particular importance are resources for the participation and empowerment of groups who are disadvantaged in terms of resources (e.g. developing countries representatives and NGOs).

2. Framing

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                  Group Composition                    │
│  ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐  ┌─────────────┐ │
│  │     Base     │  │   Diversity  │  │ Commitment  │ │
│  │ Representative│  │    Skills    │  │     to      │ │
│  │  Stakeholders │  │  Experiences │  │  Rules &    │ │
│  │  Independence │  │ Perspectives │  │ Procedures; │ │
│  │               │  │   Interests  │  │   Goals     │ │
│  │               │  │Regional Balance│ │             │ │
│  │               │  │Gender Balance │ │             │ │
│  └──────────────┘  └──────────────┘  └─────────────┘ │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Group Composition

Base	**Diversity**	**Commitment**
Representative Stakeholders	Skills	to
Independence	Experiences	Rules & Procedures;
	Perspectives	Goals
	Interests	
	Regional Balance	
	Gender Balance	

Goals

Coordinating Group	**Participants**
Consult	Consult Constituencies
Suggest Design	Prepare
Suggest Goals	Agree Goals

Agenda

Consensus	**Meeting(s)**	**Time-table**
Preparation	Numbers	Preparations
Issues	Length	Consultations
Goals	Facilitation	Meetings: focal groups; general meetings
	Documentation	Cut-off Point

Group Composition

It is important to identify the relevant, **'high impact categories'** within each particular MSP – categories that will differ significantly and therefore need to be sufficiently represented and in balance. It is equally important to ensure some kind of symmetry of power. Aiming at an equal number of participants from each stakeholder group seems fair.

There is also a general need for **regional balance**. This applies to international processes in particular; ensuring equitable participation from developing countries and countries in transition is key. Similarly, there is a need for **gender balance**, including to ensure that participants who draw attention to gender issues are present.

An MSP should always include at least **two representatives of each stakeholder group**. People should not be expected to represent more than one stakeholder group.

There also needs to be sufficient diversity to make the largest possible number of resources available to the group. A mix of **experts and novices** is not harmful: indeed, it can be helpful.

Avoid **"groupthink"** (extreme loyalty & lack of divergence) by checking that a significant number of participants is not dependent on another member or grouping.

Problems may arise because people may participate in a process with no intent to **follow the rules** of discourse or to reach an agreement. Based on the rules of procedure and any communication ground rules agreed beforehand, this should be put to the whole group through the facilitator. The group then needs to deal with the issue in a problem-solving manner, applying agreed rules of discussion and decision-making.

Goals Setting

There is a **great variety** of goals of MSPs: a frank exchange of views; agreeing upon disagreements; exploring possible common ground; achieving (partial) consensus; making decisions; implementing decisions; monitoring and evaluating implementation; revisiting them. This also depends on the level at which the MSP is being undertaken – international ones, no matter if they are "dialogues" or another form MSPs, usually allow for smaller scales of concrete action (specific development projects and the like) than those at national or local levels.

Goals need to be achievable and understandable. MSPs raise expectation of participants, and failure or delay can cause frustration. Furthermore, goals perceived as unachievable or unrealistic from the outside and/or relevant (inter)governmental bodies may decrease the MSPs impact on official decision-making.

n many cases, the decision about the goals of an MSP is taken by the initiating body, through inviting stakeholders to take part in an MSP. Identifying the goals in a **common design process** is better. When a process involves an initial group designing the it, their suggestions of goals need to be reviewed by the MSP group.

The **first goal and issue** on the agenda of an MSP needs to be to clarify the various representations that stakeholders have of the issue(s) at hand. There is a need for a phase allowing people to assess various understandings and possible common ground to work on, and to reconsider how far they want their collaboration to go.

Time also needs to be allowed for stakeholders to consult anew with their constituencies when new proposals regarding MSP goals, e.g. concrete collaborations, are put forward
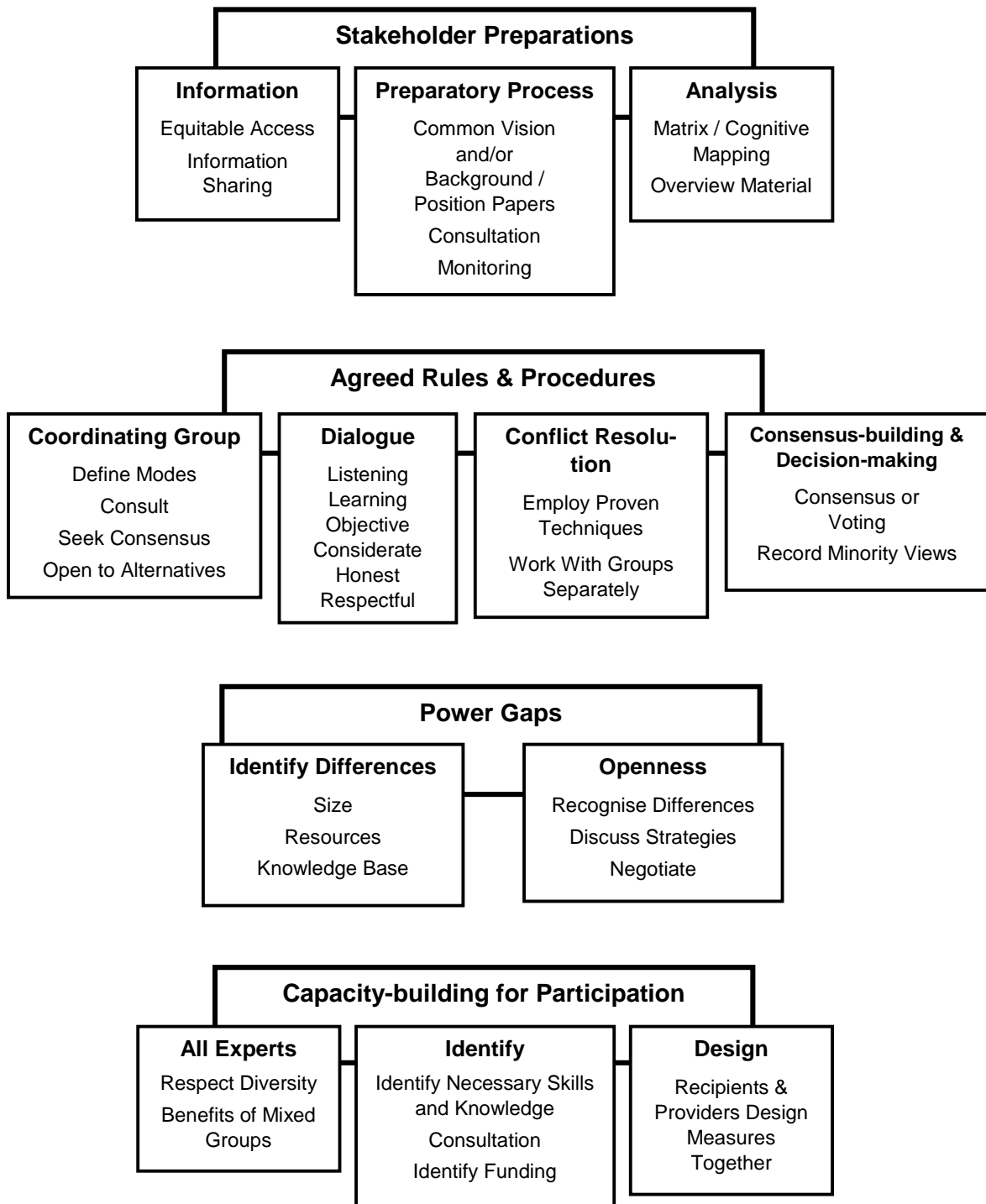
Agenda Setting

Setting a concrete agenda after agreeing issues and goals is a key MSP design issue. It also needs to be part of the communication process and be **agreed by all participants**. This applies to logistical issues (e.g. how much of an exploratory phase is needed, how much time they need to prepare, how many meetings one would need and what issues they should address in which order, how long meetings should be, how they should be facilitated, documented, etc.), as well as substantive issues (e.g. goals, key issues). The first substantive point on the agenda of an MSP needs to be to clarify the various representations that stakeholders hold of the issue(s) at hand (see above).

Setting the time-table

It is vital to **meet the requirements of all stakeholders** and their constituencies when designing a viable time-table for an MSP. Even a 'one-off' (single) event requires a preparatory phase; hence, all MSPs need a time-table. The best solution to such problems is to design the time-table through consultations and agree it among participants.

As with all processes, one-off events benefit from **careful preparations**. Pre-meetings to agree process and focuses, possibly held as telephone conferences, should be considered.

3. Inputs

Stakeholder Preparations

Information	**Preparatory Process**	**Analysis**
Equitable Access	Common Vision and/or Background / Position Papers	Matrix / Cognitive Mapping
Information Sharing	Consultation	Overview Material
	Monitoring	

Agreed Rules & Procedures

Coordinating Group	**Dialogue**	**Conflict Resolution**	**Consensus-building & Decision-making**
Define Modes	Listening	Employ Proven Techniques	Consensus or Voting
Consult	Learning		Record Minority Views
Seek Consensus	Objective	Work With Groups Separately	
Open to Alternatives	Considerate		
	Honest		
	Respectful		

Power Gaps

Identify Differences	**Openness**
Size	Recognise Differences
Resources	Discuss Strategies
Knowledge Base	Negotiate

Capacity-building for Participation

All Experts	**Identify**	**Design**
Respect Diversity	Identify Necessary Skills and Knowledge	Recipients & Providers Design Measures Together
Benefits of Mixed Groups	Consultation	
	Identify Funding	

Stakeholder Preparations

All stakeholder groups need to have equitable access to all information. Participants also need to agree upon a preparatory process, depending on issues, goals, scope, level, resources and so on. There are different options, which should be discussed, for example:

Experiences have shown that preparations in written format can be beneficial. Requiring all participating stakeholder groups to prepare **initial position papers** (fully referenced, including background information, etc.) can be a viable tool. Initial position papers should be done to an agreed, common format, and be made available well in advance of a meeting.

Preparations can also include an **analysis of initial position papers**. The MSP coordinating group and/or the facilitating body can be charged with analysing the preparatory material in a manner that facilitates discussion at the MSP meeting(s). One option is to put all positions into a matrix format for comparison. Another option is so-called "(cognitive) mapping" (see Chapter 9): It will be worth experimenting with such techniques in MSPs, particularly in phases preparatory to actual meetings.

Any overview material produced should be made available to all participants well in advance of a meeting where positions are to be discussed. In MSPs that are one-off events, **pre-meeting** communication is crucial before and after overview material is available.

Preparation of initial position papers can, however, run the risk of having MSP group members with fixed positions, creating a barrier towards finding common ground and agreement. Thus, the first step can also be to bring participants together to agree upon a **common vision** of what they are trying to achieve or what their community (country or world) would look like if they were successful in achieving their goals. Based on the vision, the MSP group members can come to agreement on their goals. This provides a common framework for working together – which will be especially useful once different positions become clear.

These options can of course be combined; for example, a first step of developing a common vision can be followed by preparing position papers by stakeholder groups. Such papers would then focus on outlining strategies to achieve the common vision.

An important question in this context is the representation of stakeholder groups by MSP participants. MSP participants may want to design a process where participants can speak for their constituencies, which will require **consultations within constituencies**. Horizontal communications within stakeholder groups is as important as communications between stakeholder groups. It might be useful to agree processes of acceptable consultation processes within constituencies and even mechanisms to monitor if and how that is being done. As a minimum requirement, participating stakeholder representatives need to make clear on whose behalf they are speaking and with what authority. Participating stakeholder groups need to be transparent about how they carry out the agreed preparatory process, e.g. how they consult within their constituencies. They may choose to conduct their preparations publicly, e.g. via open email list servers.

With regard to any consensus-building phases which include ideas and suggestions which have not been made available to all participants before the meeting, there needs to be a group decision on how to deal with the question of **consultation with constituencies**: Do people consult with their constituencies and reconvene? Over an ongoing process, e.g. when moving towards a decision, such mechanisms need to be clear so that representatives can speak for their constituencies when possible agreements are different from the initial position of their group.

Communication Ground Rules

Ground rules of communication for the purpose of dialogue and/or consensus-building need to be agreed within the group. Participants in an MSP must assume that no-one has all the answers. The purpose of an MSP is to try to assemble the collective wisdoms into a new vision of how to move ahead. One possibility to consider is for the preparatory team to develop a set of options on how to communicate and put it for the group for discussion and agreement. A **facilitator** or a number of facilitators should be agreed upon by the group. The following rules haven proven to be effective tools:

- During discussion, participants must make every effort to be as frank and candid as possible, while maintaining a respectful interest in the views of others. An atmosphere that cultivates **directness, openness, objectivity, and humility**, is important.
- Participants need to be **honest and trustworthy**.
- Participants should **refrain from personal attacks**.

- All participants and their contributions should **be treated equally**.

- To help understanding and clarify perceptions, participants and facilitators should be encouraged to restate one another's views in their own words (**"active listening"**).

- Participants should refrain from presuming motives of others and rather be encouraged to **ask direct questions**.

- Participants are asked to **address the group as a whole**, while showing concern for each point of view, rather than confronting and criticizing individuals.

- Participants must argue on a **logical basis**, giving their own opinion while seeking out common ground as well as differences.

- **Brain-storming** can be helpful: conducting a session of putting forward ideas and collecting them without judgments for later discussion can create a larger pool of ideas.

  When an idea it put forward, it becomes the property of the group.

- Participants should consider conducting a **learning exercise**, to draw out the success factors of other processes and agreements and use the outcomes to deepen the pool of ideas.

- All participants need to **be open to change** when embarking on a communication process as outlined above. A true dialogue cannot be entered into with the goal of "getting one's way".

- Allow space and time for **various modes of communication**, socio-emotional as well as strictly task-oriented.

- If participants feel that others are **not playing by agreed rules**, they need to put that to the group and the group needs to address the problem.

Power Gaps

In most MSPs, there are significant power gaps between stakeholders, due to differences regarding knowledge and information, nature and amount of resources, group size, etc. Stakeholder communication needs to be **equitable** in order to realize acceptable actions or outcomes without imposing the views or authority of one group over the other.

The most important point is to **be explicit about power gaps** and not shy away from discussing their implications. This opens the door for creatively dealing with the problem.

Communication and trust must be established before engaging in negotiations. It is essential to devote sufficient time engaging in appropriate modes of communication (see above) in order to develop mutual understanding. An important tool is to work on the basis of **agreed formal procedures** of communication (see above).

Providing sufficient resources for meaning participation by disadvantaged groups is a means of empowerment. Adequate funding for MSPs is therefore a crucial component of dealing with power gaps within MSPs.

Capacity-building For Participation

Ideally, MSP participants should be well-equipped to reflect their stakeholder groups' views and interests. There will, however, be areas where no one stakeholder group has sufficient background or knowledge, or where there is an **imbalance** in terms of access to information, knowledge and thus power.

Where participants lack knowledge and/or processes lack that balance, for example on cross-cutting issues such as global institutional architecture and process, trade policy, etc., then capacity-building measures for the group should be considered. It might also be valuable for MSP members to participate in trainings regarding communication, running effective meetings, team building, negotiation, and facilitation.

Designing capacity-building measures needs to be an interactive and equitable process of those receiving and those offering capacity-building. The group needs to openly address those questions and decide upon which capacities and skills are necessary, who should provide capacity building and, if necessary, where to seek the funds.

For the benefit of all parties planning to engage in MSPs, **information** about relevant agreements, policies and legislation needs to be shared widely. It also needs to be made available in appropriate format, such as in local languages and non-expert vocabulary.

The question of capacity-building preparing for a particular MSP also relates to access to information and knowledge in general. Enabling equitable access therefore needs to be part of any framework policies on participation and MSPs.
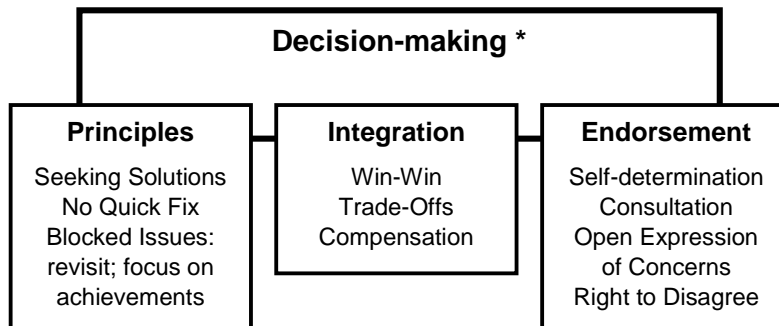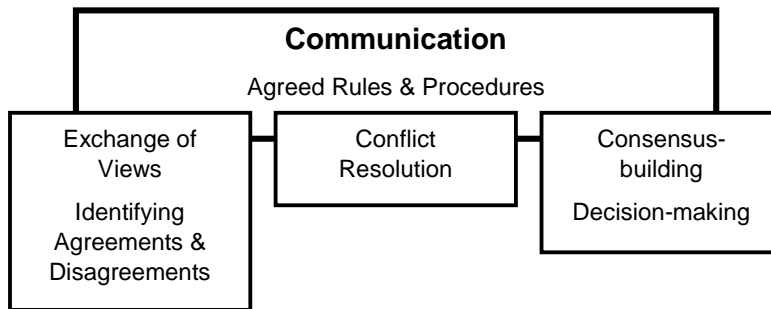
4. Dialogue / Meeting

Communication Channels	**Facilitation / Chairing**
Type Selected by: Level; Phase; Resources; Access	Group Acceptance; Outside / Process Experienced Facilitator; Commitment; Leadership; Agreed Role
Principles: Equity; Transparency; Inclusiveness; Group Agreement	Responsive; Flexible; Balancing; Inclusive; Neutral; Sensitive; Problem-solving; Meta-communication; etc

Communication

Agreed Rules & Procedures

Exchange of Views	Conflict Resolution	Consensus-building
Identifying Agreements & Disagreements		Decision-making

Decision-making *

Principles	**Integration**	**Endorsement**
Seeking Solutions No Quick Fix Blocked Issues: revisit; focus on achievements	Win-Win Trade-Offs Compensation	Self-determination Consultation Open Expression of Concerns Right to Disagree

Rapporteuring	**Closure**
Group Acceptance; Drafts for Review	Time frame; Goals; Criteria of Success / Failure

* Optional

Communication Channels

Communication in MSPs can use various channels of communication – face-to-face meetings, email, phone, fax, letters, interactive web-sites, etc. **Face-to-face** meetings help to build trust, allow for more informal contact ('in the corridors') and are best for the final stages of consensus-building. **Electronic communication** is not only cheap and quick but seems to focus people on the content of the message as it takes away other, more personal characteristics. Thus, electronic (written) communication can decrease the impact of stereotypes and benefit minorities. On the other hand, electronic statements can more be easily misconstrued as they lack body-language, inflections, and so on.

When considering electronic communication, the group needs to check if this is feasible for all participants. Some may work under tight constraints in terms of equipment, capacities and Internet access.

The choice of communication channels should therefore **be carefully considered** by the group, taking into account the respective stages of the process, numbers of participants, resources available to all participants, and not the least cultural preferences. Choices can include a mix of communication channels and need to be guided by the principles of inclusiveness, equity and transparency. Such choices should be made by the group, and can be suggested by an initial coordinating group.

Facilitating / Chairing

Facilitators need to **accepted by all participants**. They need to be able to take a neutral standpoint as regards the issues under consideration. Experience suggests that a facilitator's commitment and integrity, high standing, experience in the political process, and charisma can be as crucial as factor for an MSPs success as their formal facilitation abilities. Using outside professional facilitators and/or using several facilitators, e.g. representatives from different stakeholder groups, to co-chair meetings, are further options. The following are important guidelines to effective and successful facilitation of MSPs:

- Facilitators should have been **involved in the design process of the MSP** to ensure their full understanding of the process and their commitment to how the group decided to conduct the process.

- Facilitating needs to be **flexible** and responsive to different situations; hence facilitators need considerable diagnostic skill enabling them to correctly assess a given situation.

- Facilitators have an essential role to play to ensure equity in discussions. Chairing in a way that **capitalizes on diversity** needs to stress the benefits of diversity. The modes of communication and decision-making suggested here largely depend on a facilitator encouraging and guiding the group to put them into practice.

- Facilitators need to be **sensitive to the different cultural orientations** of participants and not impose a "way of doing things" based on their own culture.

- Facilitators should encourage people to speak freely and invite **all participants** to take the floor, including drawing out quieter participants. They need to keep track of everybody's contributions to draw out aspects of common ground when summarising what has been said at regular intervals.

- Facilitators should keep to **agreed time-tables** and speaking times, which need to be the same for everybody (with obvious exceptions for participants operating in another language and the like).

- Facilitators should help ensure that all participants **feel recognised** and part of the group.

- When exploring differences, facilitators should ask **problem-solving questions**, not judgmental ones – and encourage all participants to do so.

- When summarising, differences should be stated clearly, and **no pressure to conform** should be allowed.

- Facilitators need to be sensitive regarding issues on which participants will need to **consult with their constituencies**.

- The group needs to agree upon how to deal with possible **substantive contributions from the facilitator**. Alternating the role of the facilitator is an option.

- In some cases, it might be worth considering to work with **special facilitators** to be the link into particular stakeholder groups.

Using flip-charts, meta-plan or other **facilitation techniques** is recommended in order to transparently keep track of what is being said, enable summarising, and help decision-making. Other group work techniques are worth considering and experimenting with. These include scenario workshops, future labs, citizen juries (depending on the situation, the issue, the cultural context, and the group).

Rapporteuring

Rapporteurs (or persons responsible for reporting on the group's activities) need to be **assigned beforehand and agreed by the group**, as does the documentation process itself. Rapporteuring needs to be done in **the most neutral fashion possible**, reflecting the breadth and depth of discussions.

Decision-making

Participants need to agree in the beginning of the process on what decision-making process will be used. Consensus is the preferred method of decision-making because it will generate better solutions and commitment by all. Seeking consensus will urge participants to find an agreement that incorporates all viewpoints.

Phases of decision-making should not be entered too early. **Premature decision-making** leads to compromise without commitment and should be avoided through: avoiding to argue for favourite proposals but make innovative suggestions; feeling challenged to be creative and integrating; avoiding to agree just to avoid conflict; viewing differences as helpful. Problem identification should be increased while solution identification is delayed.

When decision is stalled, the **facilitator** can state points of agreement to build on. When no agreement can be reached on an issue, agree to revisit it at the next meeting.

The group should strive for **consensus**, as this fosters patience exploring possible common ground, but a **majority vote** should be introduced to bring about a conclusion and make the decision, if necessary. The group should make the decision about the appropriate time and procedure of voting. A decision can be reached when the respective majorities of the stakeholder groups represented are in favour of it. Minority viewpoints should be recorded in final decisions when consensus can not be achieved.

In MSPs, acceptable solutions are those which **integrate the needs and requirements of everybody**. Sometimes this will not be possible and trade-offs or compensations might be sought – if all parties agree.

The fundamental right to self-determination of communities needs to be respected. In cases where a potential agreement affects the future lives of a stakeholder group, they need to have **the right to say "No"** even if they are in the minority. They should, however, hear all arguments and actively participate in discussions before they make a decision.
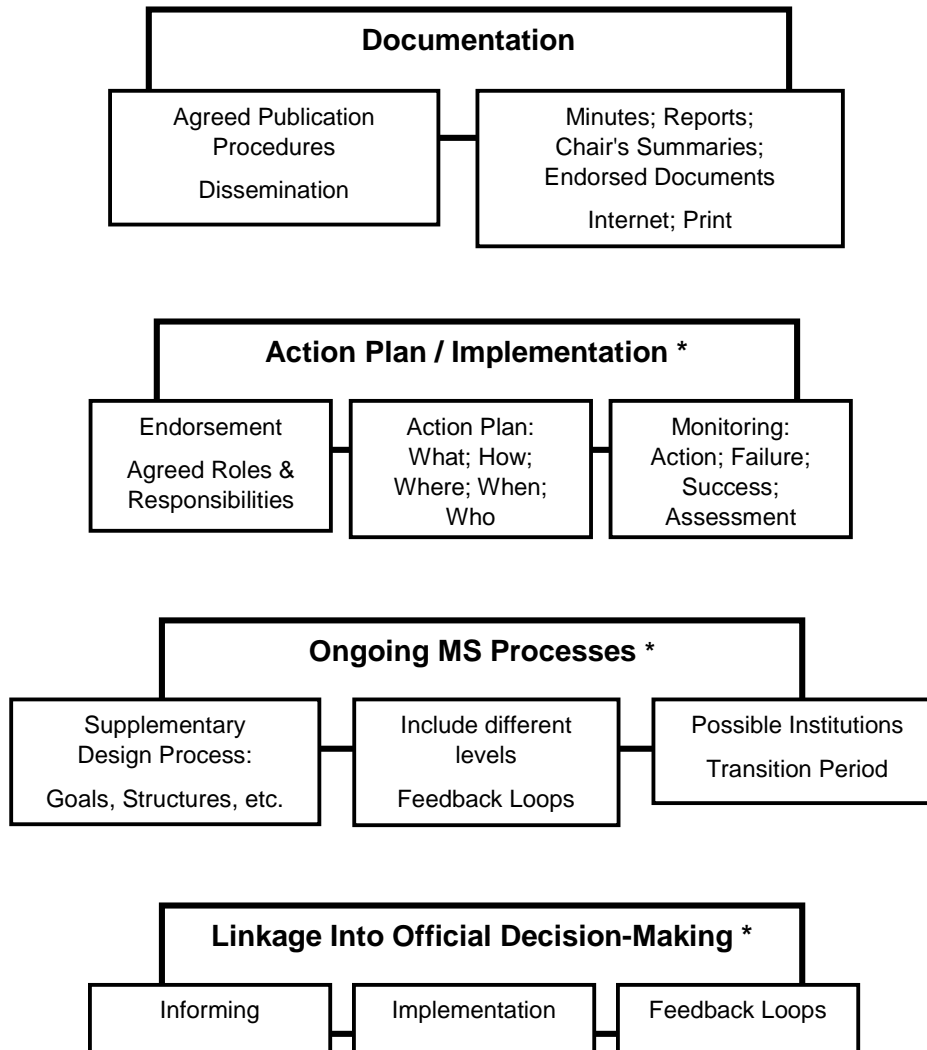
Again, based on the rules of procedure agreed beforehand, concerns that participants might raise with regard to the seriousness of other participants should be put to the group via the facilitator. The group then needs to deal with the issue in a problem-solving manner, applying agreed rules of discussion and decision-making.

Another question concerns possible secondary or tertiary consequences of policies, e.g. agreements within a local community which might affect adjacent communities. If possible, such potential consequences should be addressed, and the question of involving representatives of those such affected needs to be considered.

Closure

MSPs need to agree a time-frame and a clear goal. They need to agree cut-off points and **criteria of closure**,for failure and success alike.

5. Outputs

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                    Documentation                      │
├──────────────────────┬────────────────────────────────┤
│ Agreed Publication   │  Minutes; Reports;            │
│ Procedures           │  Chair's Summaries;           │
│                      │  Endorsed Documents           │
│ Dissemination        │                               │
│                      │  Internet; Print              │
└──────────────────────┴────────────────────────────────┘
```

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           Action Plan / Implementation *              │
├──────────────┬──────────────┬──────────────────────────┤
│ Endorsement  │ Action Plan: │  Monitoring:           │
│              │ What; How;   │  Action; Failure;      │
│ Agreed Roles &│ Where; When; │  Success;              │
│ Responsibilities│ Who        │  Assessment            │
└──────────────┴──────────────┴──────────────────────────┘
```

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Ongoing MS Processes *                   │
├──────────────┬──────────────┬──────────────────────────┤
│ Supplementary│ Include different│ Possible Institutions│
│ Design Process:│ levels       │                      │
│              │              │  Transition Period     │
│ Goals, Structures, etc.│ Feedback Loops│            │
└──────────────┴──────────────┴──────────────────────────┘
```

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│       Linkage Into Official Decision-Making *         │
├──────────────┬──────────────┬──────────────────────────┤
│ Informing    │ Implementation│  Feedback Loops       │
└──────────────┴──────────────┴──────────────────────────┘
```

* Optional

Documentation

It is always preferable to have **draft minutes and reports** put to the group for review before they are being published. This needs to be built into the timetable. If there is enough time, they can be sent out to participants, giving a clear deadline for comments. Absence of comment should count as agreement (i.e. "silence constitutes consent"). If there isn't enough time, drafts should be discussed with the group present directly after the meeting. Often a **facilitators or chairs summary**, rather than an endorsed document, is the best choice, as endorsements by stakeholders will require various procedures of constituency agreement. **Endorsements** will be a necessary component in decision-making and implementation processes, but are not required in dialogue processes.

All documentation should be forwarded to other stakeholder groups and made publicly available.

Action Plan / Implementation

In cases when consensus was achieved, everybody involved should support it and do their part in implementing it. In cases of agreements reached by majority vote, different option can be promoted: On the one hand, one can argue that once an agreement has been reached, both the majority favouring it and those originally opposed should **respect, support, and carry out the decision**. Such support ensures

decisions are not subverted and sabotaged and can be properly evaluated and changed if deficiencies become clear in the process of implementation. On the other hand, individuals should always have the right to speak out against a decision even if they participated in a process. Participating in an MSP should not mean that people give up their right to oppose a decision down the road that they do not agree with.

Any implementation needs to be based on **agreed roles and responsibilities**. It needs a clear plan outlining who is to do what and when, and with whom. An action plan needs to be agreed by the group. It needs to be developed by an assigned person, group, or body. The group should decide how to **monitor implementation** and how to **deal with non-compliance**. Participants also need to communicate process and outcomes to their constituencies.

Dialogue processes need to provide the space to possibly develop into advanced MSPs which include decision-making and implementation – if participants want to move from talking to joint action. However, participants need to agree on how to take the process forward, who should facilitate it, where the additional funds should come from and who should raise them, and so on. Principally, groups need in such cases to **engage in an MSP design process**.

Ongoing MSPs

If participants agree to carry on beyond the initially agreed cut-off point (see above: Closure), they need to engage again in a supplementary MSP design process, with new targets, structures and time-lines. Processes might decide to engage in activities at different levels and/or create feedback loops between local, national and international levels. For this purpose, some processes will need some kind of institutionalising. Transitions need to be carefully managed.

Linkage Into Official Decision-Making

MSPs are meant to **give voices, not votes** to stakeholders and the suggestions made here are aiming to make these voices to heard and used most effectively.

Most MSPs which are conducted around governmental or intergovernmental processes are, first and foremost, informing processes. **Decision-making bodies should make very clear** how the outcomes of stakeholder involvement is being used in decision-making; this information needs to be available well in advance of stakeholder involvement.
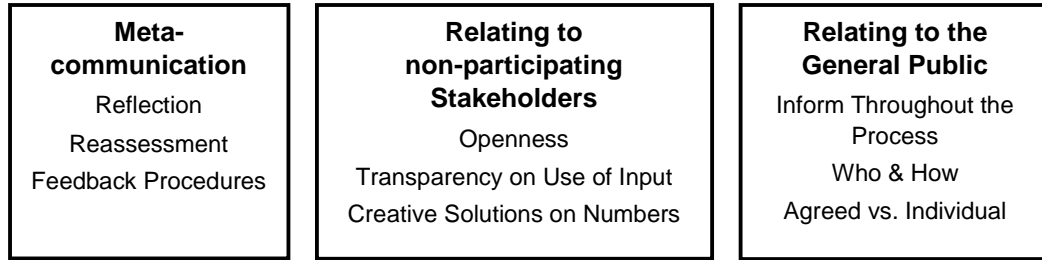
However, the often purely *informing* role of **stakeholder participation around (inter-)governmental bodies** should be expanded. Such an MSP should also benefit from immediately involving stakeholders them in the steps towards *implementation*. For example, stakeholders could be invited to study decisions and engage in action-oriented discussions on how to implement them. This could immediately generate concrete strategies and partnerships, e.g. for pilot projects and programmes. It would also involve stakeholders in the assessment of if and how what they suggest can be implemented.

Such a mechanism could be taken one step further by consulting a multi-stakeholder forum on *draft* (inter)governmental decisions and resolutions. This would provide feedback to governments as to the practicability and likelihood of implementation of policies. Such an approach implies some *stakeholder involvement in official decision-making* itself and will need political decisions to be taken by the relevant (inter)governmental bodies.

Such steps towards increased involvement of stakeholders would also, on the one hand, make clear to governments where stakeholders stand ready to implement if agreements are reached. On the other hand, they would enable stakeholders to develop a better understanding of political processes and what is politically possible at a given point.

Discussions on principles of stakeholder participation are timely and underway. (Inter)governmental bodies should experiment with different mechanisms, share experiences, and further develop them. The United Nations have a key role to play to develop appropriate mechanisms and make suggestions to its members. Agreeing advanced mechanisms of transparent, equitable, and legitimate stakeholder participation will ultimately strengthen (inter)governmental institutions – in terms of democratic governance as well as in terms of adequately addressing global challenges.

6. Throughout the Process

Meta-communication	Relating to non-participating Stakeholders	Relating to the General Public
Reflection Reassessment Feedback Procedures	Openness Transparency on Use of Input Creative Solutions on Numbers	Inform Throughout the Process Who & How Agreed vs. Individual

Mechanisms of meta-communication[4]

Through-out the multi-stakeholder process, provision needs to be made for allowing participants to **reflect on the process** in which they are participating and how they interact (meta-communication).

Even if issues, agenda, participants, modes of communication and decision-making, necessary structures, resources, capacity building, etc., have been agreed by participants in the beginning of the process, space needs to be provided for reflection on how the process is working. Appropriate mechanisms of meta-communication depend on the length, scope and level of the process, the size of the group involved, and the cultural context.

Meta-communication can be ensured by facilitators asking for reflections on the process in meetings or through feedback loops being conducted through a process secretariat. All participants need to be included in such **feedback exercises**, and they need to be transparent and agreed upon by the group. The group needs to then collectively address problems that might arise.

Relating to Non-participating Stakeholders

The process should be kept open for input from non-participating stakeholders (e.g. via a frequently updated website). Participating stakeholder groups should consider **calling for inputs** from non-participating groups (if they are willing to contribute), particularly in cases where the number of participating groups has been limited (e.g. NGOs to include contributions from women, Indigenous Peoples, youth). Smaller core groups plus larger 'sounding boards' around them are an option to consider. Such calls for input from people who are not directly participating need to provide clear information on how it will be considered and used.

Problems arising from non-participating stakeholder groups aiming to disrupt and hinder the multi-stakeholder process should be addressed within the group in order to develop a common strategy, if possible.

Relating to the General Public

Relating to the general public is very important. MSPs on sustainable development issues are new developments in decision-finding and governance, and touch upon issues of concern to everybody. Since they are, in some senses, self-appointing, it is crucial that they are **open and transparent to the wider public as to their objectives, structure and processes**. Accordingly, it will be important to release information throughout all stages of a process and not only present a finished product. Each MSP should clearly define whether, how and when it plans to seek public inputs and reactions throughout the process. Specialist processes should face up to the challenge of making the process and its issues **understandable to the general public**.

---

[4] Meta-communication: [from Greek 'meta' = higher] communication about communication: exchanging information, views, opinions about the way we communicate in a given situation and structure. An important tool in communication processes, particularly in groups of high diversity of language, culture and background.

Participants need to agree on who shall relate to the public and how. This also includes the choice of media, and the critical question of reliance on the Internet, keeping in mind the significant gaps in access between South and North, women and men, different ethnic groups, different income levels, etc.

All participants should be free to share information about the MSP with the public and present it from their perspective. To avoid public confusion, however, **communication from the process as a whole** should be agreed and coordinated. If possible, one should consider taking on people (and 'experts') outside the process to convey the message to the general media. This needs to be considered when fundraising for an MSP.

Contents of the Full Report

Acknowledgements

Part V Annexes