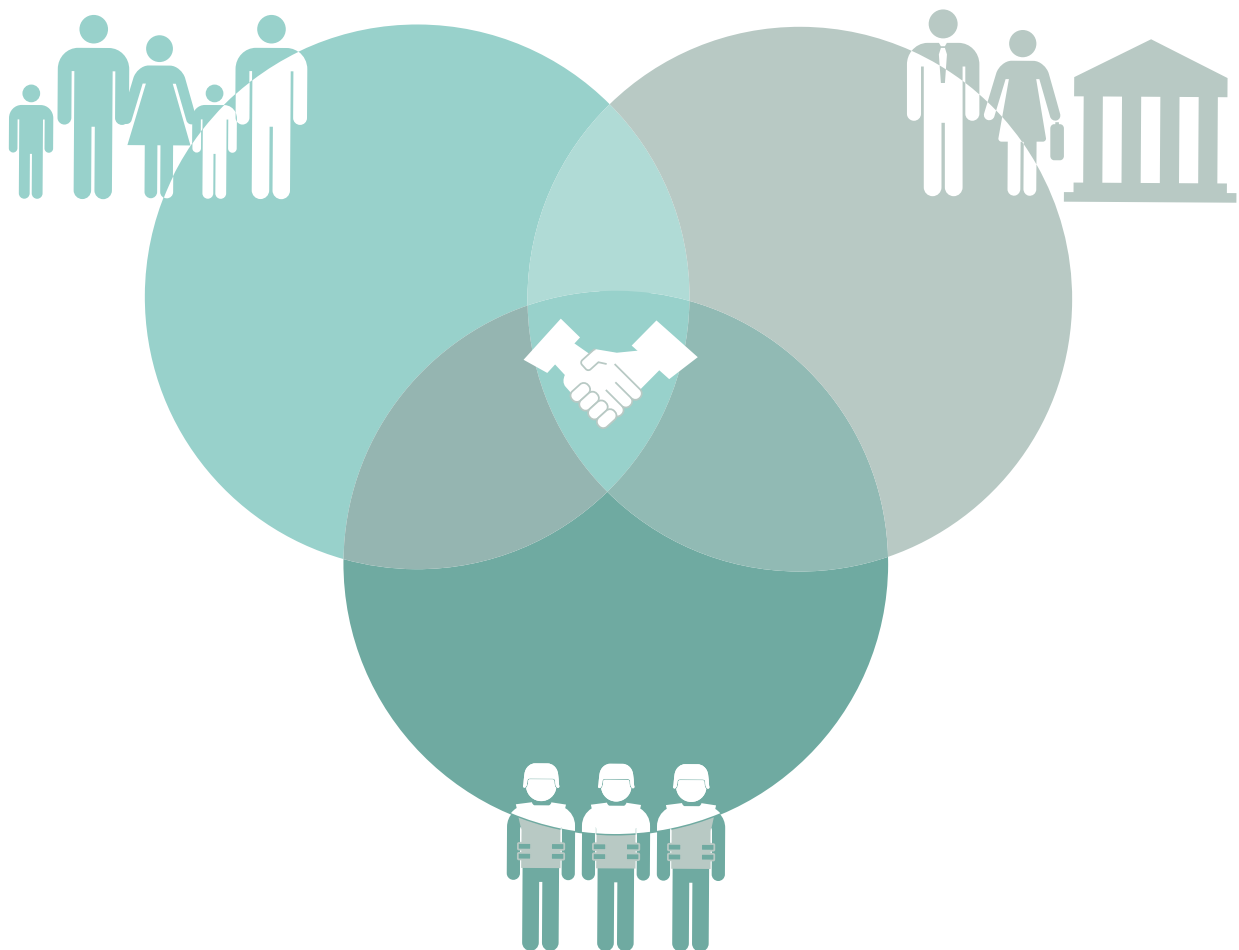# 2 About Multi-Stakeholder Processes

"The idea behind multi-stakeholder processes is that actors with different positions, mandates and backgrounds can go further working together than in isolation."

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2.1 Background and Definitions

Since the late 1990s and the many global summits of that decade, multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs) have increasingly become an important strategy for addressing complex problems. MSPs have been proposed to bridge the governance gap of international organisations, to manage humanitarian or disaster relief, or to make information and communication technologies more accessible around the world, to name but a few examples. In the context of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, the multi-stakeholder approach is often deemed necessary to ensure broad ownership and coherence of peacebuilding processes.

The approach has sometimes been criticised as not being applicable in countries that do not have the conditions for democratic dialogue.[6] Another critique is that MSPs are often donor-driven rather than locally owned.[7] However, this need not be the case, especially as MSPs carried out in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding have mainly emerged from dialogue and mediation practice.[8] This line of work acknowledges that all cultural traditions have provisions for dialogue that are giving rise to locally-owned and effective MSPs—though often they are not labelled or known as such.

Pacific case study
Section 8.3

> [In Fiji], *the fear is not just among civilians or civil society, but there is also a lot of fear amidst state officials, because they are also working within a certain framework that is a result of the* [military] *coup. (...) The dialogue process is about being able to communicate that we are collectively trying to prevent the resurgence of violence.*
>
> *Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls*

2.1.1 What is a multi-stakeholder process?

The case studies and practitioners' deliberations (Section 8) did not point to one particular definition, but brought out similarities in how they described multi-stakeholder processes. They emphasised that MSPs bring together diverse representatives of key sectors within a society, that they can be public or private, and that they depend on participants sharing a common objective. The processes were seen to be relevant to public issues, crises or anticipated crises, and could have multiple objectives. Hence, in defining these MSPs, we acknowledge that there are many variations of these components:

- **Multi:** Involving more than two types of groups or entities—for example civil society, state actors (such as government, local authority, ministries), international organisations (UN, regional organisations), the media, the business sector, the security sector (military, police), or academia. Since each of these categories can be diverse in themselves, MSPs could also apply to different sub-groups within these categories.

See Section 6
on different
stakeholder groups

- **Stakeholder:** Anyone who has a stake or interest in a specific issue is a stakeholder— those who are affected by a particular problem (e.g. conflict), and those who can affect it.[9] It can be a challenge to narrow down the groups to involve. This manual looks at the options for selecting the right stakeholders for the process, and provides guidance on key considerations for some of those stakeholder groups

- **Processes:** MSPs can range from open-ended, fluid forums or platforms to structured partnerships with written charters, agreed decision-making and sometimes even an agreed action plan and secretariat. They can be spaces for dialogue, debate or negotiation, or most

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6   Nicolas Faysse, 'Troubles on the Way: An Analysis of the Challenges Faced by Multi-Stakeholder Platforms', *Natural Resources Forum*, 30 (2006), 219–29; Julia Roloff, 'A Life Cycle Model of Multi-Stakeholder Networks', *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 17 (2008), 311–25.
7   'Multipart'.
8   Lawrence E. Susskind, Sarah McKearnen and Jennifer Thomas-Lamar, *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement* (Sage, 1999).
9   Francesca Bonino and Claudia Croci, *Evaluating Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in Post-Conflict Settings – Practitioner Guidance on the Use of OECD/DAC Criteria through a Human Security/Peacebuilding Lens* (MultiPart, 2010), p. 7; Roloff.

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likely a combination or evolution of these. In their most productive form, they can reach a point of joint analysis, planning and action. In this manual, we refer to the full spectrum of MSPs as engagement processes, where a particular set of groups interact around joint objectives and rules of engagement, whether formalised or not.

For the purposes of this manual, we define MSPs as processes that convene three or more stakeholder groups, which together seek solutions and develop strategies around specific conflict prevention objectives. Recognising that the involvement of more than two groups is complex and has implications for how the process should be designed,[10] this manual builds on techniques and lessons learned from dialogue and mediation as a means to enhance MSPs. In this sense, MSPs are themselves a type of negotiation process between the different stakeholders.

2.1.2 Purpose

Ultimately, the most defining aspect of any MSP is its purpose, whereby the stakeholders seek to address an issue or issues that they hold in common.

MSPs can range from an open-ended, continual process to something more time-bound and specific. They can have a specific **function** or a combination of functions, for example: advocacy and mobilising political will, joint analysis and dissemination of information, dialogue among various participants, mobilising and pooling resources, and joint action.

An MSP is fundamentally different from a conflict resolution, dispute settlement or reconciliation process in which the participants are trying to sort out significant differences, grievances, broken trust, or even violent abuses. While participants in MSPs may experience some of those dynamics, they must at a minimum be able to unite behind a common purpose regarding the prevention of violent conflict.

Thus, a sharp distinction is often drawn between **dialogue** processes that are aimed at enhancing communication, opening discussion, building bridges and increasing awareness and understanding, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, processes aimed ultimately at **joint planning and action**, which require more intense engagement, agreement on longer term objectives, and means to ensure follow up and implementation. Both are multi-stakeholder processes, and the latter may begin with dialogue efforts and purposes that are more limited and only move towards action planning at a later stage.

Example 1

Types of purpose from GPPAC case studies

- To develop an early warning and early response system in Kyrgyzstan.
- To halt the crisis and prevent further violence caused by the contestation of the 2008 election results in Kenya.
- To develop a Pacific regional action plan on Women, Peace and Security for implementation in 2014.
- To develop a conflict prevention agenda for Central America.
- To bring about a peaceful transition to democracy in Fiji.

The purpose also defines the **geographic scope**, which can be international, regional, national and/or local. In some cases, these distinctions are blurred when participants play a role at different levels and in different arenas. The conflict dynamics in a specific location can be affected by events that play out at regional or global levels and require a wider scope of analysis and action.

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10   *Convening: Organizing Multiparty Stakeholder Negotiations* (CDR Associates, 1998).

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2.2 Why (Not) a Multi-Stakeholder Process?

Views on MSPs range from the idealistic to the sceptical. Whether the potential of MSPs for conflict prevention proves true in practice often depends on a number of assumptions and pre-conditions. These assumptions should be checked in relation to the context dynamics and the specific groups and individuals involved.

See further discussion on considerations for/against initiation of an MSP in Section 4.

BOX 1 VIEWS AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT MSPS	
Supporting	**Questioning**
• Conflicts (between participants) are mainly the result of miscommunication; an open, well-facilitated dialogue can address this. • People with different outlooks and goals can work together effectively if they are motivated to find common ground and they are given the credible opportunity and the tools to do so. • Power relations can be addressed by building capacity, synergy and trust. • MSPs can lead to more widely accepted decisions and strategies. • In conflict situations, engagement is a necessity. • MSPs can enhance local ownership and the perceived legitimacy of a given process.	• MSPs are fundamentally a space to express power relations. • Power dynamics cannot be sidelined; an equal playing field is not possible. • Vulnerable groups stand too much to lose and can be used for tokenism/rubber stamping; they could lose legitimacy within their own constituency. • Powerful actors use the approach to divide and rule. • MSPs can be very time consuming for little evidence of results. • MSPs raise expectations that cannot be met. • Alternative ways, such as solidarity networks, movements or focused bilateral dialogues, can be more effective.

Adapted from source **Wim Hiemstra, Herman Brouwer and Simone van Vugt,** *Power Dynamics in Multi-Stakeholder Processes: A Balancing Act* (PSO, 2012), p. 10

Latin America case study
Section 8.4

Stakeholders need to recognise the added value of each other's involvement, and be able to take advantage of each other's capacities. This could lead to avoiding competition and focusing efforts towards achieving a common goal; and to reducing asymmetries in power within the partnership, as each stakeholder is recognised for the resources and know-how for which they are most valued.

Andrés Serbin

It is useful to test this range of assumptions at different stages of an MSP, while not losing sight of the actual **deliverables and results** of the process. Against all the investment required for a functioning MSP, it is ultimately important to ask how or whether it will contribute to the prevention or reduction of violence and towards greater human security. For example, MSPs can lead to:

• Shared and mutually agreed conflict analyses.
• The implementation of collaborative action plans.
• Concrete policy goals and commitments.
• Institutionalised structures for communication, engagement and dialogue for peace.
• Partnerships between state and non-state actors in conflict early warning and early response.
• Increased capacities to work together or at least in a coordinated manner within a conflict context.

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Example 2

Results from the Mesa de Seguridad in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico

The Mesa de Seguridad (Security Roundtable) initiative emerged because of three different factors. The first one was the security crisis itself, which prompted the participation of different stakeholders: universities, NGOs, and business groups in Ciudad Juárez, which had experienced extreme levels of violence for several years. Second, several civil society efforts were already in place when the violence escalated, like the Citizen Observatory for Security and the Juarenses for Peace Group, which were both groups of citizens that met regularly to discuss the security situation in the town. Finally, the third factor has to do with [then-President] Calderón's idea to invite civil society to participate in an initiative called Todos somos Juárez (We are all Juárez) to address the seven most urgent issues of the city, including insecurity and violence.

The Mesa de Seguridad is the committee that was created within the Todos somos Juárez initiative to discuss issues regarding insecurity and violence and to identify solutions in a collaborative way. Citizens and representatives from the three levels of government participated in Mesa de Seguridad. It was a true multi-stakeholder dialogue. The basic assumption was that civil society and government acting together could better identify the priority areas, generate and implement concrete proposals, and follow-up and evaluate the results of those proposals.

This committee was so effective in generating trust and carrying out different strategies that it is still in place, even though the Todos somos Juárez initiative officially ended in 2012. Today, the Mesa de Seguridad has several subcommittees that address access to justice, immediate response to threats, violent theft, human rights, and performance indicators. All three levels of government continue to participate in the Mesa de Seguridad.

Source **S. Aguilera, N. Babinet and Gómez Chow**, 'Decreasing Violence in Mexico through Citizen Participation', in Empowerment and Protection – Stories of Human Security, ed. by Kristin Wall, Jenny Aulin, and Gabriella Vogelaar (The Hague: The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, 2014), pp. 64–66.

2.3 Opportunities and Benefits

The idea, or **theory of change**, behind multi-stakeholder processes is that actors with different positions, mandates and backgrounds can go further working together than in isolation. MSPs allow for a **systems approach** to conflict, where the different actors and their initiatives are looked at as part of a bigger whole.[11] It can enable preventive action at different levels, with various sectors and sections of society playing a role, as illustrated in John Paul Lederach's famous peace pyramid.
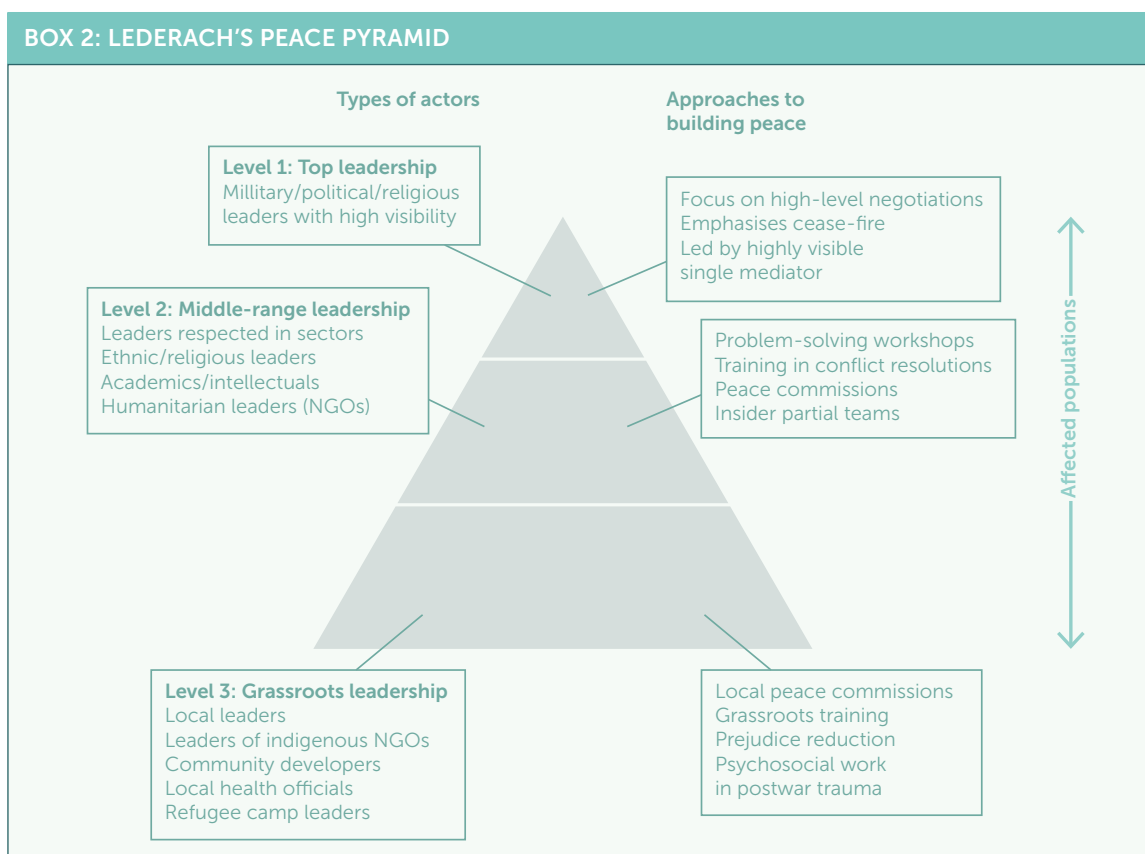
For more on a systems approach see *Reflecting on Peace Practice*, (CDA, 2013); **Robert Ricigliano**, *Making Peace Last: A Toolbox for Sustainable Peacebuilding* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012); **David Peter Stroh**, *Systems Thinking For Social Change*, (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2015); **Diana Chigas and Peter Woodrow**, *Designing Strategic Initiatives to Impact Conflict Systems* (CDA, 2016).

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11   **Lisa Schirch**, *Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning: Toward a Participatory Approach to Human Security*, First Edition (Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press, 2013).

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See the Kenya case study in Section 8.5 for a real-life example illustrating this triangle.

BOX 2: LEDERACH'S PEACE PYRAMID

Types of actors

Approaches to building peace

Level 1: Top leadership
Millitary/political/religious leaders with high visibility

Focus on high-level negotiations
Emphasises cease-fire
Led by highly visible single mediator

Level 2: Middle-range leadership
Leaders respected in sectors
Ethnic/religious leaders
Academics/intellectuals
Humanitarian leaders (NGOs)

Problem-solving workshops
Training in conflict resolutions
Peace commissions
Insider partial teams

Affected populations

Level 3: Grassroots leadership
Local leaders
Leaders of indigenous NGOs
Community developers
Local health officials
Refugee camp leaders

Local peace commissions
Grassroots training
Prejudice reduction
Psychosocial work in postwar trauma

Source **John Paul Lederach**, 'Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies', United States Institute of Peace Press, 4 (1997), p. 39.

Kyrgyzstan case study Section 8.2.

We […] have the understanding that conflict prevention and peacebuilding cannot happen in an ad-hoc way. This is such a complicated field that without joint efforts we will never be successful.

Raya Kadyrova

In a systems approach, several **types of change** are part of the same picture, from individual transformation, to group dynamics and societal/structural change. Depending on the scope of the process, MSPs can potentially affect the perspectives of the individual participants, the dynamics among the different participants, as well as achieving a multiplier effect among their respective constituencies in wider society.

Successful multi-stakeholder processes can bring a number of benefits:

- The involvement of more actors provides a broader range of expertise and perspectives. This means problems can be **analysed better**, based on several different viewpoints.
- Such analyses can lead to a more **comprehensive strategy** to address complex conflict situations.
- MSPs provide the opportunity for greater understanding of different stakeholders' capacities, roles and limitations thus contributing to **better coordination** of interventions.
- MSPs can help organisations **pool and share resources**, including skills, funding, staff time, and logistical or administrative resources.
- The involvement of multiple stakeholders can be conducive to public outreach and awareness raising at different levels simultaneously, increasing the reach from grassroots to policy mobilisation. In this way, they have potential for a **multiplier effect** when the key messages of the process are communicated to the participants' respective constituencies.

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- MSPs can contribute to building **trust** among diverse stakeholders, and enable relationships that can outlast the process itself.
- They can provide a platform for much needed **capacity building** among practitioners at different levels.
- Sharing skills and knowledge can enable participants to see problems in a new way, which is also conducive to **innovation**.

[MSPs to prevent election violence in Kenya included] technical teams, comprised of people from the media, the private sector, peace and human rights organisations, manufacturers association, who added value to the analysis and helped find solutions. If there was a need to broker peace, you had people who had the right information regarding the issues and actors, and therefore knew the right channels to use and who should be approached.*

Florence Mpaayei

When the process is participatory and inclusive it can contribute to **political will** and **ownership** of conflict prevention strategies that involve different actors. MSPs provide the space to inform and define issues and non-violent responses to conflict. Broad ownership of the process is key to the **sustainability** of conflict prevention strategies.

2.4 Risks

As noted in the Latin American case study, "To build a multi-stakeholder approach takes lots of energy, lots of time and resources invested, and sometimes the results are not what you are expecting and not of the level of what should be done in terms of conflict prevention" (Section 8.4). This section gives a brief overview of the possible risks involved in an MSP, which will be further addressed throughout this manual.

MSPs rely heavily on a champion or initiator. When much depends on this initiator, especially when they are an outsider, the process might have **limited sustainability and ownership**. The challenge of ensuring that the process is not donor-led, dominated, or perceived to be dominated by one actor or group, goes beyond the meeting room and directly affects the results. A related risk is an important group or individual deliberately refusing to participate, which can undermine the credibility of the process as a whole.

Closely related to the capacity for engagement and inclusivity is the challenge of resources. The amount of **resources** required—including time, communication channels and funding for implementing action plans—is often hugely underestimated. Limited funding can mean that the process does not live up to expectations, making future engagement more difficult. The financial muscle also contributes to the view that MSPs are not a level playing field. Unequal access to funding, or where the funding comes from, can influence the process. This sense of inequality can be a determining factor when it comes to stakeholders staying involved in the process.

Depending on the financial strength of the organisations and the scope of operation, some actors may proceed with implementation while others struggle to obtain resources to enable them to carry out the actions they committed to.

Working Group member

Hidden agendas of participants can disrupt the process and affect its outcomes. Different expectations, when not clarified at the start, can lead to **disappointments** or **inefficiency**. In a worst-case scenario, it could **worsen the situation** rather than improve it, and increase

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competition among different groups. Power dynamics can also result in worsening the position of vulnerable groups, for example when their inclusion is more a result of **tokenism** that is used to justify a policy or to further the interests of a ruling group, rather than transforming relationships with policymakers.

> *One risk scenario is when stakeholders physically take part, but for reasons of either personal or organisational interest they don't actually participate, or they actively undermine the process to further their own interests.*
>
> *Training participant*

Getting the different parties to truly listen to each other is a much bigger challenge than bringing them together to talk. This increases the risk of an MSP becoming a **talking shop** with few tangible results. By negotiating so many viewpoints and interests, a consensus-oriented discussion could reduce the problem and strategy to the **lowest common denominator**, and therefore not go as far as it could if tackled by more like-minded and focused groups. There is also a **reputational risk** if the process does not yield results, the right results, or results that are not immediate enough, which could lead to participants losing face or legitimacy among their own constituencies.

Kyrgyzstan case study
Section 8.2.

> *After the bloodshed in June 2010, a bilateral donor financed a national multi-stakeholder process focused on the need for Kyrgyz and Uzbeks to live together. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful. There were about 30 people—the leaders of leading political parties, representatives from among the Uzbeks, from the Kyrgyz and other ethnicities. We met several times and nothing happened. Despite the [donor] and all the experts, we could not agree on goals and objectives, on why we needed to meet together, what we should discuss, and what to expect from all our meetings.*
>
> *Raya Kadyrova*

BOX 3: COMMON PITFALLS AND RISKS

- Stakeholders feel ignored or abused.
- The discussion becomes repetitive.
- Internal support for discussion dwindles.
- Confidential information is abused.
- Consensus fails to be reached.
- Dialogue is not strategic or proactive, which leads to new conflicts.
- Issues are not addressed appropriately, leading to repeated confrontation.

Source **Rob van Tulder**, From Platform to Partnership (The Partnerships Resource Centre, 27 January 2011), p. 21.

Finally, the **legal or political context** could also limit the space to set up an MSP or for implementing its action plans. In politically sensitive contexts, the process could endanger the participants if confidentiality agreements are not adhered to. If civil society is repressed or subject to legal restrictions, or if the state is hostile to non-aligned actors, there is a risk that the only possible composition of the group is a biased one.

The subsequent parts of this manual will further relate to these risks, and propose ways to mitigate or address them through analysis, process design and process implementation.

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2.5 Alternatives

See how local civil society worked through advocacy alliances in the Pacific case study, Section 8.3

In some situations, an alternative approach might be more productive than a multi-stakeholder process. In other cases, a more careful phasing of the process might be necessary. For instance, where direct engagement with official authorities is unproductive or contentious, civil society might choose to build **advocacy alliances** with like-minded groups to lobby on the sidelines rather than seeking direct collaboration with state actors. .

In situations where there are opposing sides and sensitive political dynamics, it can be more appropriate to facilitate a low-key, **bilateral dialogue first**, and then open up the process to a multi-stakeholder arena once a degree of trust has been built and there is a common agenda.

Latin America case study Section 8.4

A more successful initiative [than previous multi-stakeholder attempts] *was TACE, the academic dialogue workshops between Cuba and the United States, where the process was restricted to two specific sectors: former diplomats and academics. No governments were involved until we started promoting the recommendations. So you have two groups of goodwill that you coordinate and work with to influence the governments.*

Andrés Serbin

A trusted institution considered relatively impartial in the given context could take up the function of facilitating **basic information exchange** and to **liaise** between different stakeholder groups, without necessarily developing a direct process of cooperation. This can allow for spontaneous collaboration between different groups to emerge as and when there is a need.

Example 3

The Civil Society Dialogue Network at the European Union

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is an example of a successful liaison initiative for multiple stakeholders. Through the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), the CSDN runs a continuous forum for dialogue between CSOs and EU policymakers. CSO representatives from conflict regions, their Brussels-based partners and EU representatives gather in Brussels to discuss policy issues of concern to the EU. There they can speak as equals in small dialogue sessions. This approach allows the CSO representatives to speak freely, as they are away from their home country and because it is not a formal engagement with the EU. Rather than having to pitch for funding for their cause, they are invited to speak as experts on a particular topic. This format also helps EU representatives identify whom to speak to regarding their policy issues. In this way, the CSDN facilitates an exchange of information between stakeholders, which can at times result in collaboration between different groups when the need arises.

Source *Regional Organizations and Peacebuilding – The Role of Civil Society*, Policy Brief (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2014), pp. 16–17.