4 Deciding for a Multi-Stakeholder Approach
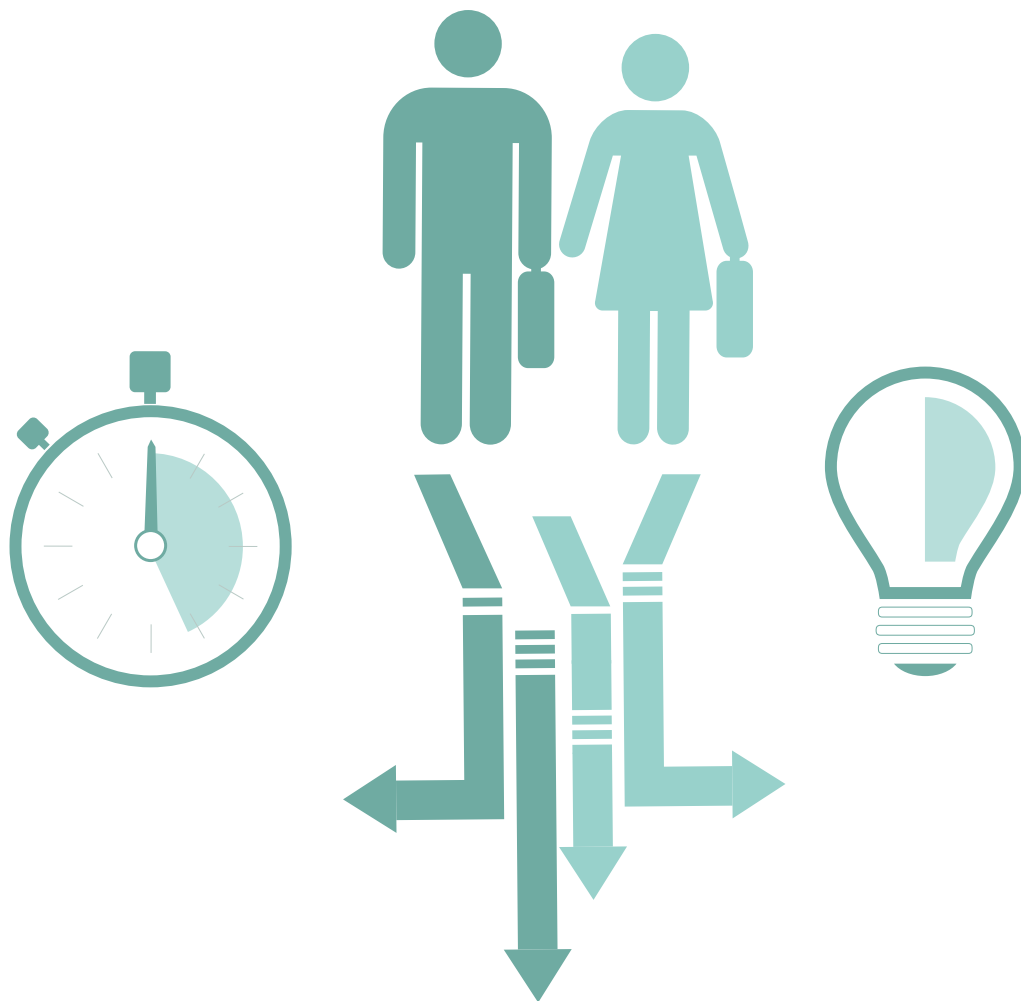
"Be aware that situations where all the right conditions line up are a rare luxury in conflict contexts"

4. Deciding for
a Multi–
Stakeholder
Approach

4.1   Leadership
4.2   Timing
4.3   Resources and Competencies
4.4   Go or No–Go?

Introduction

Consider and be aware of the full range of potential benefits, risks and possible alternatives of MSPs—as outlined in Section 3—when deciding to invest in such a process. Not only do the pros and cons have to be weighed up, but also the available and required organisational **costs and competencies**. A number of **conditions** can play a part in deciding whether or not to opt for an MSP. The initiators should explore these conditions in the first phases of the process in consultation with partners and potential participants as described in Sections 5.3 and 5.4.

BOX 12: WHAT ARE SUITABLE CONDITIONS FOR A VIABLE MSP?	
✓ Enabling	**⊘ Non-conducive**
• There is momentum and incentive for all (potential) parties. • The necessary resources and competencies are available to support the process. • The potential participants, at least to some extent: » accept or acknowledge their interdependencies; » are willing and able to communicate and learn from each other; » are willing to actively tackle the problems at hand, and there is a sense of urgency; » are individually committed to investing time and effort into the process over time.	• Potential participants are opposed to the extent that all the energy of the process will go into bridging the differences, necessitating bilateral dialogue & mediation processes. • The process is proposed, designed and led by an external donor who has a particular agenda (lack of ownership). • The lack of time to design and prepare the process before setting it in motion increases the risks of unsustainable or harmful results. • There is a lack of internal or external support for the process in the organising or participating organisations/parties.

Adapted from sources **Faysse**, p. 222; **Bernard S. Mayer and others**, Constructive Engagement Resource Guide: Practical Advice for Dialogue among Workers, Communities and Regulators (US Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics, NSCEP, 1999), p. 8; **Tulder**, p. 17

Bear in mind that in conflict contexts, situations in which all the right conditions line up are a rare luxury. It can therefore be more useful to be clear on your own position, and what the **parameters** and non–negotiables are for your organisation. Another important consideration from a conflict prevention perspective is how to gradually work towards improving and enabling the conditions and stakeholders to a point where an MSP does become viable for both initiators and participants.

4.1 Leadership

The initiation and continuation of an MSP is often directly related to the leadership question, deriving from political will and embodied in a **process champion**. Leadership can evolve during the course of a process; for example, it can be initiated by an outsider, but—if handled correctly—can be claimed and continued by the process participants. On another level, the participants also need to champion the process within their respective organisations and constituencies.

There are different **types of leadership** to look out for, and it can come from different sources at different times. There is the official convener, under whose auspices the MSP occurs (see Section 3.1.1), but there is also the leader of the core group of organisers that may be more active behind the scenes in keeping the process on track and maintaining focus on the purpose. At the stage of joint action, different participants may take the lead on specific parts of the action plan. These leadership roles fulfil different functions, which may have an external (visibility, constituency building) or internal (organisational, institutional) focus.

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4.2 Timing

When an MSP is initiated plays a huge role in its preparation and overall course. Some argue that times of crisis can be conducive to initiating an MSP, as these create cohesion and a **sense of urgency** among diverse stakeholders, which helps to hold the process together. However, the challenge of seeking to end a crisis or preventing it from worsening is that such urgent situations do not tend to allow for thorough process design and analysis. More importantly, conflict prevention efforts seek to get collaborations off the ground precisely to prevent such crises.

It is therefore useful to initiate an MSP at the analysis stage in order to build the foundation for standing capacities before the situation reaches crisis point. Stakeholders that work together on thorough conflict analyses can focus on **anticipating** events where crisis, tensions or escalation of violence might be expected.

Kenya case study
Section 8.5

Overlooking scenario building of possible outcomes, and not putting the necessary measures in place is another critical mistake that can happen. It is important to reflect on options of intervention and not leaving things to chance. It is contemplating questions such as: what if there is a re-run [of elections]? How do you keep the country united? Because that would be a very, very emotive period, there would be a lot of tension in the country

Florence Mpaayei

Momentum can also be created, as long as there is an issue of significant interest to the actors concerned. This could include a policy momentum or new appointments in key agencies that are to be involved. Finding common interest and like-mindedness are key defining aspects and good starting points, though this requires a lot of work to keep up as the process progresses.

4.3 Resources and Competencies

The resources devoted to the process should **match the expectations**.[31] This is a crucial consideration, since an under-resourced process could have the opposite effect: a lack of proper analysis and process design, poorly facilitated meetings, insufficient communications or sloppy logistics can lead to fall-outs, unmet expectations and a lack of transparency and legitimacy. Resourcing goes beyond the funding question, and relates to capacities and skills required by both organisers and participants in different phases of the process.

Necessary **resources** include the funding for meeting costs and logistics, administration and communication before and in between meetings, and for feedback to constituencies. Experienced facilitation and mediation professionals may be needed to steer the meetings, as well as the overall multi-stakeholder process (see Section 3.1.1). Also, think about costs in terms of time required, both for organisers and for participants. For instance, in addition to attending meetings, participants also need to be able to invest time in preparing, following up and reporting back on these meetings. Look ahead and ensure that there are resources not only to develop action plans, but also to implement them.

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31   **Bernard S. Mayer and others**, *Constructive Engagement Resource Guide: Practical Advice for Dialogue among Workers, Communities and Regulators* (US Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics, NSCEP, 1999), p. 80.

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The problem is that you can have a beautiful plan, but if you don't have the financial resources, there is no way of doing anything. People are frustrated and feel they were involved in something that was not sustainable, that they invested a lot of time and energy in something that was not going to happen.

Andrés Serbin

The relevant **competencies** for organisers include facilitation and communication skills, dialogue and mediation knowledge, and political know-how. Process design, planning, management and capacity building competencies are also essential for a meaningful process. For participants, relevant competencies include representation, speaking and negotiation skills. Perhaps even more important are the abilities to listen, to work with diversity and a problem-solving approach. In addition, technical knowledge about specific issues might be necessary. Where these competencies are not covered, resources can be allocated and plans included to develop them.

The variety of competencies involved in convening and sustaining an MSP is another reason why an individual organisation should not seek to be the only organiser and driving force of such a process.[32] Working together as a team through a core **group of champions** from different organisations (see Section 5.1) gives a solid base for an effective and sustainable process.

4.4 Go or No-Go?

In deciding to initiate or join an MSP, bear in mind the opportunities, timing, resources, competencies and support structures available for the task ahead. When doing so, consider whether alternative strategies might be equally or more effective in achieving the conflict prevention objectives. The decision often relates to several different levels of considerations:
- The **individual** level: skills, interpersonal dynamics, trustworthiness.
- The **organisational** level: cost-benefit, risks, organisational identity and vision, constituency, mandate, internal support.
- The **civil society** level: what are other CSOs doing, does the MSP complement outsider strategies.
- The **MSP** level: power dynamics, preparation and design, opportunities and risks.[33]

For the initiators, the decision to fully launch an MSP should be taken only after preliminary consultation, self-assessment and conflict analysis as described in Section 5.
It should be taken with the following steps in mind:
- Assessing whether the MSP is appropriate at this time and with the tentative set of participants identified.
- Determining the right purpose, conveners, participants and process steps.
- Weighing up the opportunities, competencies, and resources available.

You must accept that there will never be the perfect situation or context for an MSP. That is the reason you are considering an intervention in the first place. But your analysis and understanding of the situation is very important to ensure you are taking the right approach and not making the situation worse. You might have to work through a very gradual process towards an MSP.

Training participant

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32   *Towards New Social Contracts: Using Dialogue Processes to Promote Social Change* (CIVICUS, May 2015), p. 17.
33   **van Huijstee**.

See the self-assessment template in section 7.1.

BOX 13A: KEY QUESTIONS FOR AN INFORMED GO/NO-GO DECISION FOR INITIATORS.

- Is a multi-stakeholder approach necessary, or would other approaches such as advocacy and lobbying strategies, be less risky and equally (or possibly more) effective?

- Are there good reasons to believe actors of substantial influence will join in a collective approach?

- What factors could make the process unmanageable and ultimately unproductive, and could they be mitigated?

- Is sufficient funding available to sustain the process? How is the funding source viewed (biased, neutral, with/without an agenda)? Will the resources still be available once the process has taken off (for example to implement planned joint activities)? If not, are there fundraising capacities or connections within the group?

- Will the participants still be available to commit if they move jobs, or does the organisation/ agency they represent sufficiently support the process to commit a replacement?

- How might the MSP cause unintended negative consequences, especially with respect to conflict dynamics? How might these effects be prevented or minimised?

BOX 13B: KEY QUESTIONS FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

- How might the multi-stakeholder process meet your organisational interests and goals?

- Does the process have institutional support from your organisation?

- What will be your exit strategy—when will your organisation consider the MSP to have fulfilled its objectives and when will it be seen to be underperforming or failing and what does it mean for your participation?

- Does the process encompass the personal needs of the individuals directly involved, taking into account personal capacities, skill development, support and encouragement?

- What are the benefits of joining, as compared to an alternative outsider strategy?

Sources Preventive Action Working Group discussions, adapting from (amongst others): **Convening: Organizing Multiparty Stakeholder Negotiations** (CDR Associates, 1998); **van Huijstee; Bernard S. Mayar and others,** p.23.