

Multi-Stakeholder-Platforms for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture

Promoting stakeholder collaboration through an integrative approach for the sustainable development of the fisheries and aquaculture sector

RELEVANCE

Aquatic products, especially fish, play a vital role in meeting the world's food and nutrition needs, highlighting the importance of the fisheries and aquaculture sector in terms of food security. Especially the aquaculture sub-sector is expanding significantly, emphasising its economic importance on a local and global scale.

However, the sectors are facing a wide range of challenges including overfishing and harm to aquatic ecosystems, practices that are neither sustainable nor regulated, the occurrence of diseases, post-harvest losses along the value chain, inadequate policies, lack of data and knowledge, as well as climate change impacts. These challenges not only pose a threat to food and nutrition security but also to the numerous communities and individuals whose livelihoods depend on fish. In addition, many challenges are also linked to other sectors and fields such as water, agriculture, and environmental protection. The complexity is further emphasised through the different actors involved. Especially since the majority of fish-value-chain actors in developing countries (e.g. fishers, vendors) operate informally.

To address the issues confronted and to foster sustainable management, a holistic and integrative approach is needed. A holistic approach considers economic, environmental, and social aspects connected to fish, as well as interlinkages to other fields and sectors. An integrated approach is bringing together different stakeholders, perspectives, or expertise to work together towards a common goal or objective.

The Global Programme "Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture" is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The aim of the programme is an increase of fish supply from sustainable and resource-friendly fisheries and aquaculture to boost a healthy and diverse nutrition in Cambodia, India, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Uganda and Zambia. Sustainable production and processing techniques are promoted along the value chain in order to create jobs and income, with a special focus on youths and women. Local organisations are strengthened in their capacities to carry on programme interventions on a long-term basis. And policy advice is contributing to favourable framework conditions for a sustainable development of the fisheries and aquaculture sector in the implementing countries.



In this context, Multi-Stakeholder-Platforms (MSPs) have become a vital instrument that bring together actors from different sectors, including public, private, non-for-profit organisations, research institutes and the academia (e.g. universities). MSPs aim to address joint challenges by implementing concrete measures and achieving measurable results while drawing upon the expertise, experiences, and perspectives of their diverse members. As such, MSPs can be very useful in the context of fisheries and aquaculture.

Approaches such as MSPs, that encourage sustainable use and management of resources through the collaboration of stakeholders and actors are strongly promoted by global agendas like the [Agenda 2030](#) (especially SDG 14 and 15, which foster the sustainable use of marine and terrestrial resources, and SDG 17 that promotes multi-stakeholder partnerships), [FAO Guidelines \(FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication\)](#) or the Blue Economy Strategy.

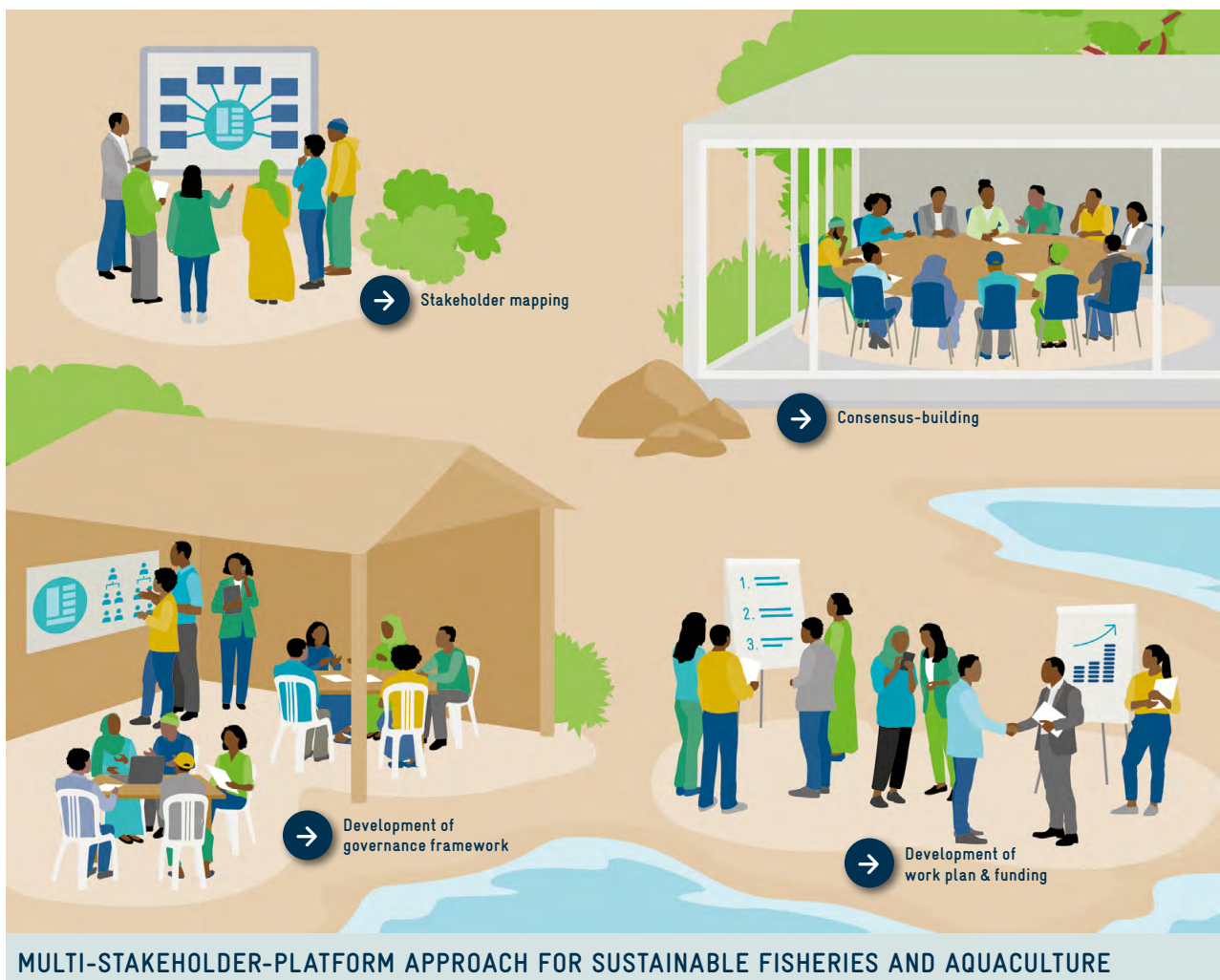
APPROACH

During the formation and establishment of MSPs, a number of steps have to be taken to ensure the platform involves the whole diversity of stakeholders, operates effectively, and works towards a joint mission and vision on a sustainable, long-term basis.

➔ Stakeholder mapping

To ensure comprehensive representation, stakeholder groups and actors that are directly and indirectly connected to fisheries and aquaculture have to be mapped. This can be done through workshops where key stakeholders, in the case of aquaculture, e.g. the responsible ministry and fish farmer associations, jointly identify other relevant stakeholders. Due to different constellation in each country, stakeholder types can vary. In the case of fisheries and aquaculture, general key stakeholder groups and actors that are involved are:

- Public sector: ministries and departments responsible for fisheries and aquaculture and, potentially, other governmental bodies that are connected to the sector, e.g. dealing with forestry, water, or agriculture;
- Private sector: various actors including small scale fishers and fish farmers, large scale operators and companies, as well as actors along the value chain, operating in e.g. feed and gear production, fish processing, transportation, or marketing;



- Agriculture farmers having impact on water quality and use;
- Other users of water bodies related to aquaculture and fisheries;
- Civil society organisations and the media;
- Cooperating partners: international and national development agencies, international organisations (e.g. FAO, World Bank, WorldFish, WWF, etc.), and development banks;
- Academia and research: universities and research institutions;
- Traditional leaders, indigenous communities, and community members; and
- Conservation groups: agencies working in environmental protection and conservation.

→ Consensus-building

After the stakeholders have been mapped, they are brought together to find common grounds and build consensus. During engagement meetings, which can be facilitated by a moderator of a neutral third party, the stakeholders cooperatively identify and discuss joint challenges, define shared objectives, and formulate a common vision that should align with national and global agendas. These collective discussions ensure the inclusion of the different perspectives in the strategic and content-related orientation of the MSP. The creation of a shared vision and joint goals help to align efforts, create ownership, and maintain momentum amongst the members.

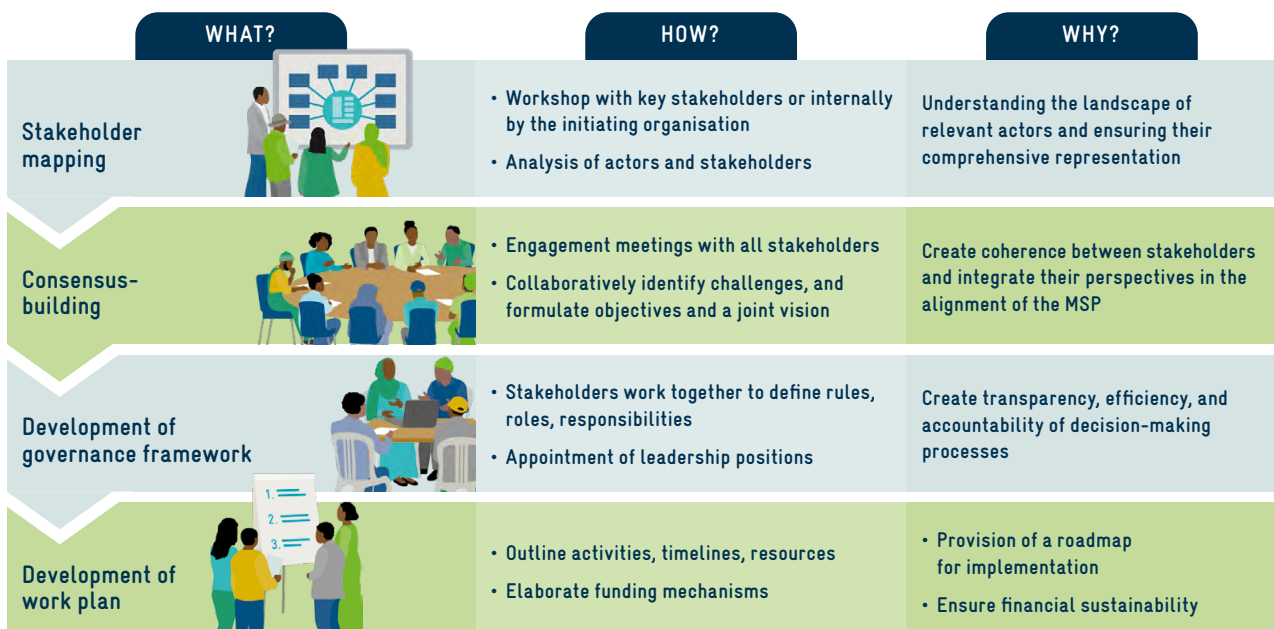
→ Development of governance framework

Another crucial step in the formation is the development of a governance framework that builds the core of the MSP. It defines the rules of operation, roles, and responsibilities of participating stakeholders. This also includes the appointment of leadership positions within the MSP steering- and implementation structure. The stakeholders should work together to draft governance documents that outline these aspects, in order to ensure wide acceptance for these documents. The governance framework ensures that the MSP operates efficiently and that decision-making processes are clear and transparent with mechanisms for dispute resolution and conflict management in place.

→ Development of work plan & funding

Once roles and responsibilities are allocated, a work plan can be developed, defining concrete steps needed to achieve the MSP’s objectives. The work plan is typically developed collaboratively with input from all stakeholders to ensure that activities are aligned with the platform’s goals and objectives. Clear activities, timelines, and resources should be outlined in the plan. In this step the crucial aspect of funding is addressed as well. Necessary funds and ways to obtain them are elaborated to ensure the smooth implementation of the activities and the overall operation of the MSP. There are several ways how financial resources can be secured, such as through contributions of MSP members, grants and donations, or funding through the government.

STEPS TO ESTABLISH A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM



Management and organisational structure of MSPs

The organisational structure of the MSP can vary according to the agreed governance framework, but a common set-up includes a governance body and several working groups. The governance body usually comprises a chair and co-chairs, and a limited amount of members which should represent the stakeholder groups engaged in the MSP. The positions can be appointed from within the membership of the MSP and should be rotated from time to time.

The task of the governance body is the general steering and successful operation of the MSP, and it accounts for its strategic evolution. It also oversees the working groups, reviews strategic plans, and ensures the engagement of stakeholders. Moreover, it is responsible for the continuous collaboration between the platform and the government, especially in terms of policy formulation. The governance body should meet regularly, e.g. twice per year.

Another important position closely linked to the governance body is the secretariat. Responsibilities and tasks of the secretariat can be supporting the governance body in its mandate, facilitating meetings and workshops of the MSP, the communication within the platform, and the development of a sustainability plan.

The working groups work on specific topics that are of importance for the MSP, which could be fingerling production, fish trade, or fisheries management and conservation. Membership in the groups is usually voluntary, but members should preferably have a certain expertise regarding the specific topics they work on. The respective groups report to the governance body, give recommendations, contribute to formulating policies, and assist with

technical matters. They should also meet on a regular basis (depending on the urgency of the topic and desired results it could be between three to six times per year).

Other organisational components in MSPs can be established, e.g. general assemblies, or a specific voting system for decision-making. The exact structures, roles, tasks, and processes are stated in the governance framework. In any case, the principals of participatory governance, inclusivity, and equity of the different stakeholders as well as transparency should always be incorporated to respect the integrative and transparent nature of MSPs.

Clear and effective communication is another vital aspect for the successful functioning of the MSP. Internal communication among stakeholders – usually facilitated through the secretariat – ensures that everyone is well informed and engaged. External communication and outreach efforts help to convey objectives, outcomes, and benefits of the MSP to the broader community, potential partners and funders.

Lessons learnt

The successful implementation and longevity of the MSP relies on several key factors: Establishing a system that maintains transparency and trust among stakeholders is a fundamental prerequisite and the basis of effective collaboration. Transparency can be achieved through open communication and honest sharing of information among the stakeholders. Open communication together with holding stakeholders accountable for their commitments as anchored in the governance framework helps to build trust.

Flexibility is another critical factor MSPs should endeavour in order to adapt to evolving sectoral priorities as well as to stakeholder dynamics. Therefore, the platform should be capable and open to react to changes and new information and accordingly revise its strategy and work plan or include emerging stakeholders. This can be achieved through regular evaluations and adjustments – also regarding the general MSP performance – which contributes to the achievement of its mission.

As MSPs have the long-term purpose of sectoral improvement, members need to recognize that meaningful change may take time and requires sustained efforts. Developing and communicating a clear joint vision helps to keep stakeholders committed to the set goals over the long haul. In addition, creating ownership through the allocation of responsibilities keeps stakeholders engaged and should be considered as an essential aspect in terms of sustainability.



Fishing community members of Lake Bangweulu, Zambia, present to various stakeholders in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

In terms of communication, the development and sharing of a clear strategy to all new members helps to facilitate communication inside and outside the MSP.

Another important aspect is the promotion and coordination of research and data collection through the MSP with the goal of ensuring evidence-based decision-making and strategies, and to remain the MSP effective in its mission. One example is a feasibility study on authorizing catch and release during the fish ban, aimed at establishing a peak period for tourism. Catch and release is a key activity in tourism, and this study seeks to harmonize evidence-based legislation between tourism and fisheries.

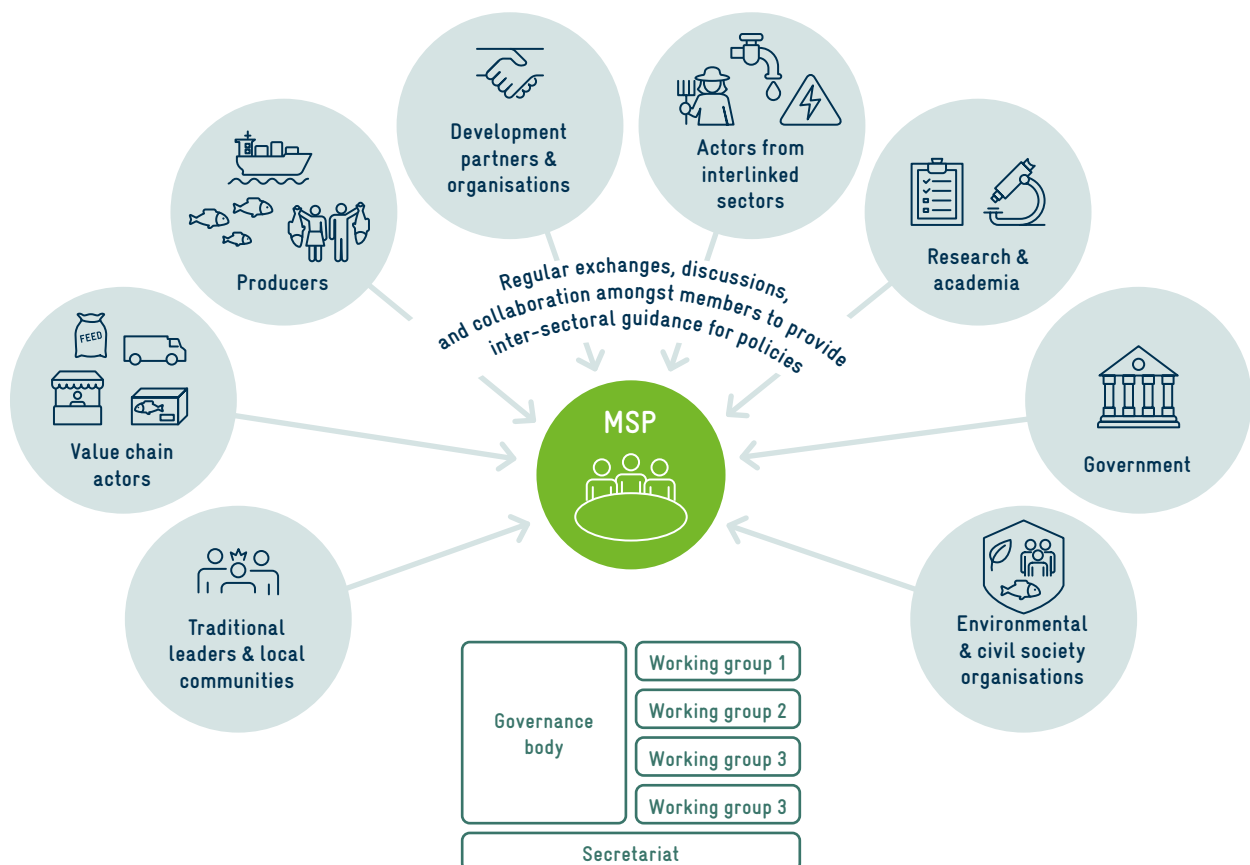
Identifying sustainable funding sources or mechanisms is essential for the long-term viability of MSP, because without adequate financial support, the platform will struggle to maintain its activities. Considering this aspect already in the planning and formation phase of the MSP avoids problems later, especially when the platform is initiated with the financial support of donors that have only limited time and resources for the facilitation.

Avoiding risks

For the successful establishment and management of MSPs, it is also important to consider potential internal risks that exist. One of them being the dominance of powerful stakeholders which marginalizes the voices of smaller or less influential groups. This highlights the importance to implement mechanisms that ensure power balance, especially when developing the governance framework. The rotation of leadership positions and equal say for all members regardless of their size or lobbying power are two possible ways of addressing this.

Another potential risk is the occurrence of conflicting interests due to the wide array of stakeholders engaged. This can slow down consensus building and the joint decision-making. Striking a balance between inclusivity and efficiency is a continual challenge.

MEMBERS AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF MSP



IMPACT

Foster collaboration among the diverse actors within the fisheries and aquaculture sector and beyond

The formation of a Multi-Stakeholder-Platform engages all the various stakeholders under a set framework. Due to its permanent nature, and since the focus is not only on one specific topic but on the sustainable development of the entire fisheries and aquaculture sector and beyond, MSPs contribute to long-term collaboration of stakeholder groups. At the same time, it provides an inclusive environment where all stakeholders, regardless of their influence or lobbying power, have a platform to voice their perspectives, contributing to more comprehensive and balanced decision-making processes.

Promote sustainable fisheries and aquaculture management practices and policies through an integrated approach

As they engage governmental bodies as essential members, MSPs have significant influence on national policies and strategies. Different perspectives and experiences of the diverse stakeholders are incorporated in the shaping of policies, making it an integrative approach. As a result, the policies are more holistic and democratic. Furthermore, the MSP's strong focus on sustainability is reflected in the policies.

CASE STUDY

Zambia has 15 million hectares of water in the form of rivers, lakes, and swamps, which provide the basis for extensive freshwater fisheries. Furthermore, there is great potential for aquaculture operations, and as a result, the sub-sector has been expanding rapidly. In October 2022, the *Forum for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture* (ZFSFA) was launched with the mission to provide guidance for the sustainable development of the fisheries and aquaculture



Launch of the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy in Zambia.

sector through an integrative approach. The MSP engages actors from diverse stakeholder groups involved in fisheries and aquaculture in Zambia. The main focus of the Forum was to support the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock and to formulate relevant legislations, strategies, and policies in the fisheries and aquaculture sector which will foster its sustainable development at national and provincial level. One main achievement was the by the ZFSFA submitted input to the 2024 national budget through the Ministry of Finance and the proposed removal of Value Added Tax (VAT) on input for aquaculture production. As per the proposition, the Ministry of Finance waived the taxes for fish farming input such as fish feed ingredients for the year 2024. The Forum also contributed to the development and review of the fisheries and aquaculture policy, which was launched in 2023 as the national fisheries and aquaculture policy by the Zambian Government.

Recently, the ZFSFA was one of the main sponsors of the African Aquaculture Conference 2023 held in Lusaka, Zambia, which brought together researchers, practitioners, decision makers, and other stakeholders from all over Africa and beyond to discuss all aspects of aquaculture in Africa under the theme “Resilient value chains in the blue economy”.



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