

PFD REVIEW: The role of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs)

One of the global dynamics that has characterized the last decades is the consolidation of more complex forms of interaction and organization: partnerships, platforms, alliances and networks are becoming a natural part of the “wiring” of the world today, following an increasing number of intertwined interests, joint agendas and shared goals. The world of international cooperation for development is no exception to that trend. Since the Fourth High Level Forum (HLF) in Busan, concepts such as *inclusive partnerships* have grown strong, in particular to address common challenges and coordinate solutions to promote development goals. A new global agenda of equals (where shared responsibility is encouraged) and the current imbalance between goals and means demands a sense of co-responsibility, wider dialogue and more productive forms of joint work. That is reflected in the global agendas (e.g. 2030 Agenda) and the strategies of major donors, such as the new European Consensus on Development, which considers Partnerships one of its five main axes of work.

This paper looks specifically at one form of joint work: multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) and the work of the Policy Forum on Development on this issue. The PFD addresses this theme in its very existence (it is a multi-stakeholder space to discuss EU development policy); as well as through a number of activities, including panel sessions, working groups, a joint paper and a survey. All of these are slowly contributing to a better understanding of both the potential and limitations of MSPs, and how they can be better applied to support the attainment of development goals.

MSPs, an area of PFD work

MSPs are increasingly used in development cooperation and, as such, merit closer scrutiny. The PFD, due to its nature, composition and mandate, is an ideal forum to promote this debate, taking advantage of its remarkable pool of collective know-how, across geography and practice. Since 2016, the PFD began to dedicate more attention to MSPs and it was a main theme of the Global PFD in 2017. There, a number of shared views were collected as a first step into the "practitioners' guide" to MSPs in development cooperation. Some of those views included:

1. MSPs are becoming **part and parcel of the way the development community interacts** and a natural tool to **reinforce the principle of inclusiveness**, furthering the role of a larger number of development partners, with a good understanding of development challenges and solutions.
2. The implementation of the SDGs requires **different actors and sectors to work together in an integrated manner**, combining financial resources, knowledge and expertise. Because of that, MSPs, involving governments, civil society organisations (CSOs), local authorities (LAs) and other stakeholders, are in high demand.
3. While MSPs are **natural facilitators for promoting change** at different levels and in different areas, we are still learning their impacts and limitations. Increased knowledge about the factors that allow successful alliances to promote the implementation of the SDGs should become part of our collective know-how.
4. There is a natural connection between the existence of MSPs and their **capacity to encourage an enabling environment**, particularly in those places where dialogue with the national government is difficult. In this regard, **EU delegations** are in a unique position to promote opportunities for civil society and enhance dialogue with governments.
5. **Fragile states** demand a debate of their own. **Building the capacity of CSOs, LAs and other local actors in fragile states** is a key element to building a sustainable future in those countries. In fragile settings, MSPs can be useful in supporting the **New Deal**, which provides a roadmap for peace and state building, and in leading these countries out of fragility.

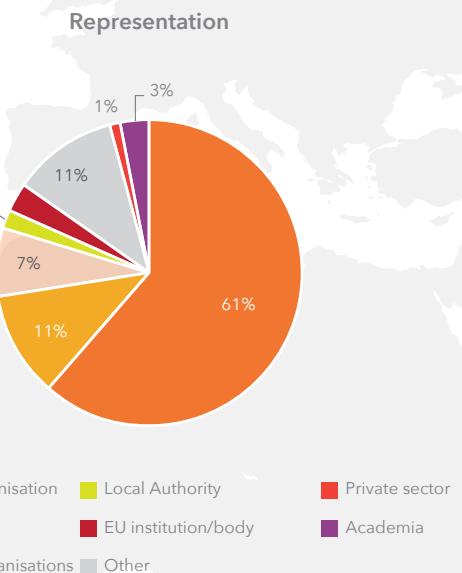
Panel discussions were complemented by working groups, where approximately 100 participants, representing all PFD regions and constituencies, and other development practitioners (divided by language EN, FR, ES) shared their own experiences on this theme. The following were the most recurrent answers, echoing key messages from past PFD events:

What key factors determine the strength and success of MSPs?	What do we need to do differently so that MSPs best support implementation of the 2030 Agenda?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The promotion of a culture of dialogue among different actors, based on principles such as legitimacy and representability. • The creation of a space that is built on respect and trust as basis for honest debate. • The recognition of the role of different actors, building on their specific strengths and their capacity to identify and share their added value. • A gradually better organized and articulate civil society, with increased experience in participatory processes. • The development of common objectives, products and results. • The consolidation of increased transparency and mutual accountability among multiple actors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guarantee a diversity of actors in order to overcome the power imbalances that can delay SDG implementation. • Advance in the localisation of the SDGs. • Take advantage of the added value of actions of different actors and how they can, in turn, promote new partnership opportunities. • Establish more permanent engagement with EU Delegations (e.g. promoting the PFD at national or sub-regional level) • Strengthen decentralized cooperation, ensuring the participation of multiple actors. • Participate more in institutionalized mechanisms to implement the SDGs at regional level.

This exercise was nicely reinforced by collective work of the PFD Task Team, which elaborated a Position Paper about the increasing importance of Inclusive Multi-Stakeholder Approaches to accomplish development goals.

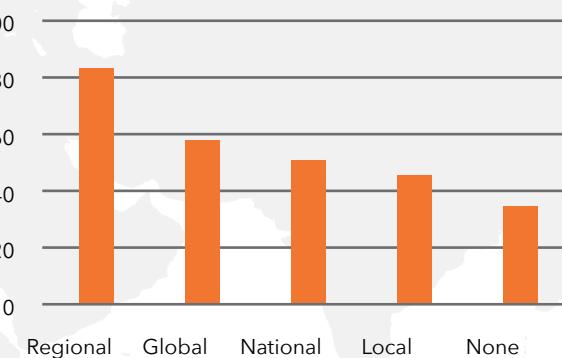
Why are MSPs increasingly relevant?

How present and useful are MSPs in practice? This question was the entry point for the PFD's participation in the 2017 European Development Days (EDDs). The PFD developed a short, animated survey to understand more about the use and impact of MSPs by identifying who participates, where, for what purpose and with what impact. Here we overview the main findings of the first 191 responses to the survey.¹



The first part of the survey targeted the composition and reach of MSPs. As shown in the graphs below, 61% of respondents come from CSOs. The rest represent a broad range of organizations, from the private sector to international organisations. Respondents participate in partnerships at several and multiple levels, but most MSPs in the survey are regional, followed by global and national levels. The largest number of responses have come from the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

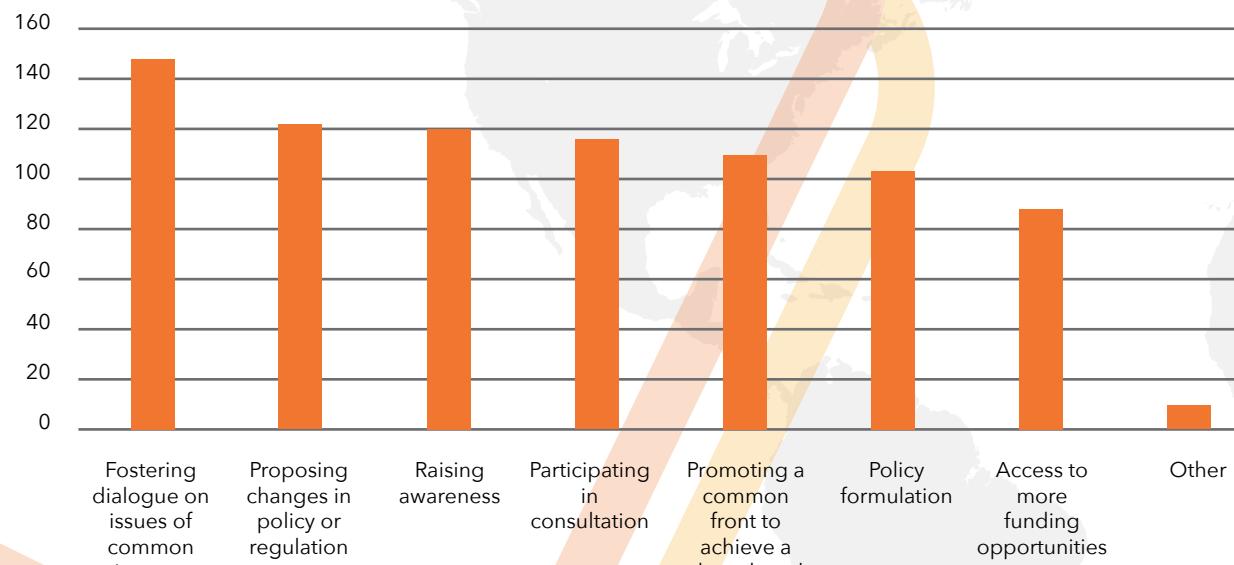
Do you participate in any MSPs and at which level?



Beyond the composition and geography of MSPs, the second part of the survey asked about the objectives of MSPs and their level of impact. Most of the MSPs reflected in the survey have been in existence for more than 3 years, and, more importantly, more than 95% of them work to advance the 2030 Agenda/SDGs.

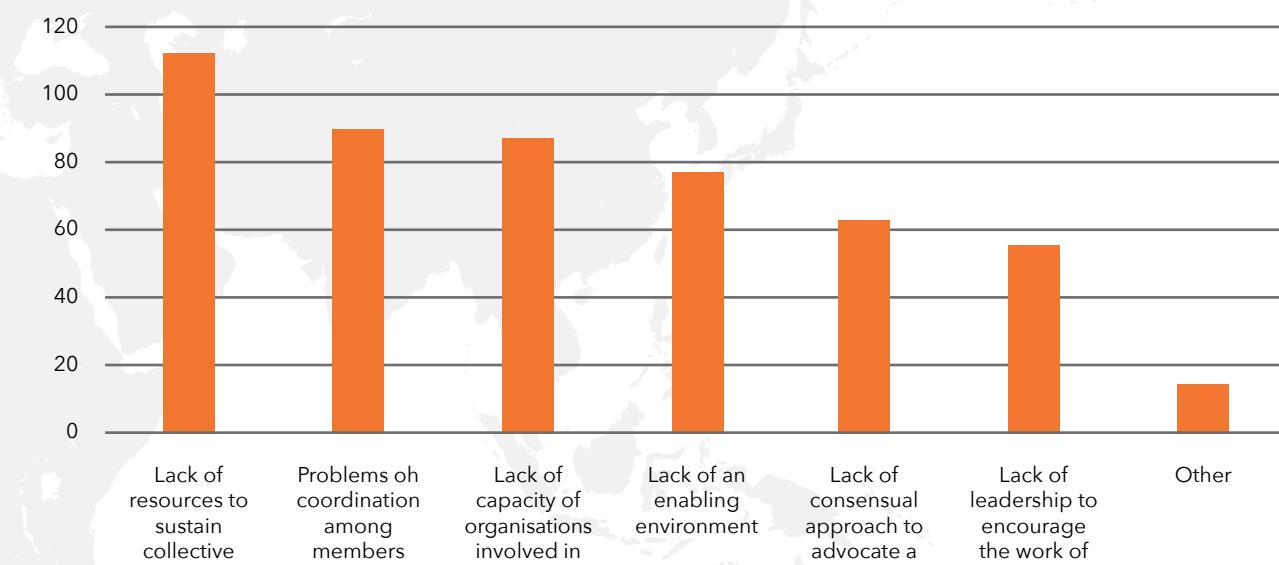
¹The full survey can be accessed at: www.policyforumdevelopment.eu/msp. Updated data will be made available on <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/policy-forum-development>

How is this platform or partnership useful ?



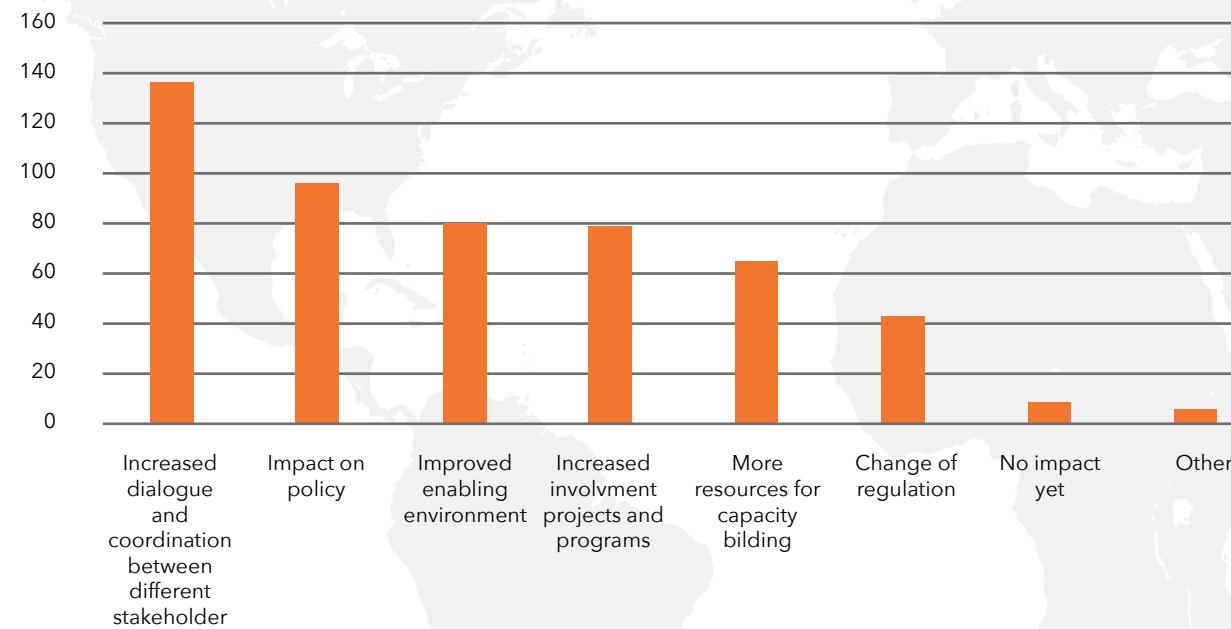
One of the interesting aspects of the survey is linked to three interrelated questions: the use of MSPs, the challenges they face and their level of impact. The answers to the first question confirm the changing face of the development landscape which, beyond implementation, is increasingly focused on advocacy, capacity to defend common objectives, change policies, etc. 148 of the respondents said their MSPs is useful for fostering dialogue on issues of common interest, followed by raising awareness and encouraging changes on policy. On the lower end, 89 said their MSPs is useful to access funding opportunities.

What are the main challenges that your MSP faces?



In regards to the actual impact of MSPs, the main one observed thus far is increased dialogue and coordination (137), followed by impact on policy (96). The importance of increased dialogue seems to be very close to the nature of MSPs, which too often take the form of platforms of dialogue rather than more goal-oriented partnerships.

What has the impact of your MPS been so far ?



The second question targeted the challenges. The answers received imply that further efforts are needed to "professionalize" MSPs. While part of the rationale of developing MSPs is to overcome challenges (also related to resources, capacity or impact/reach) and, as a result, improve the efficiency of collective actions, the most common challenge faced is the lack of resources to sustain collective efforts (112), followed by problems of coordination among members (90). The lack of capacity, consensual approach and leadership shows that necessary skills, capacities and strategies may have not yet been fully integrated.

Food for thought

Although the PFD activities undertaken during 2016 and 2017 shed some light over the role of MSPs, much is still needed to have a better understanding of how they work in practice. In this regard, the PFD aims to continually identify successful initiatives (see below). Based on the work to date, answers to the following questions would improve both our knowledge and use of MSPs:

- Do we understand the differences between different configurations of multi-actor cooperation, particularly partnerships and multi-stakeholder partnerships ?
- Are MSPs an avenue to reduce fragmentation in development cooperation, mostly by avoiding overlaps in complementary or similar organisations, particularly donors ?
- Is there a clear correlation between inclusive and effective MSPs ?
- How do MSPs coordinate (both external and internally) to strengthen a dialogue that promotes development goals ?
- Can MSPs sustain different forms of cooperation and collective action over time ?
- How are MSPs organized (and resourced) to increase the impact of their activities ?
- What kind of skills, capacities and resources encourage successful cases of MSPs ?

Examples of best practices from the Global PFD 2017

- 1 **Municipalities, working directly with CSOs** in South America, have led to the **co-management of cities** where local and national goals are implemented through **decentralisation** and **enhanced local development**. This type of initiative highlights the shift from a **whole-government approach to a whole-of-society approach**, for which EU support is a key factor for change.
- 2 The **private sector is** increasingly using multi-stakeholder partnerships as well. For instance, the African Employers Task Force on Employment and Employability developed a '**Blue print for Africa**' with the **involvement of businesses, trade unions and governments**, which resulted in **10 key recommendations for African employers** to avoid brain-drain and the loss of lives of young people in the Mediterranean who are seeking a better future. This reference framework is now adapted and used in different countries. The EU is now participating in funding the implementation of these 10 recommendations through the *Job for Africa Foundation*.
- 3 The **Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation** provides an excellent example of a multi-stakeholder platform to advance the effectiveness of development efforts by all actors and contribute to the delivery of enduring collective solutions. Late last year, the platform undertook a consultation that concluded in Nairobi (Kenya) at the **Global Partnership's second high level meeting** with a document that brings together consensual outputs in terms of how development actors can work better together to implement the 2030 Agenda.



Policy Forum on Development

