

Toolkit for organizing, facilitating and documenting multi-stakeholder platform meetings

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CGIAR is a global partnership that unites organizations engaged in research for a food-secure future. The CGIAR Research Program on Livestock provides research-based solutions to help smallholder farmers, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists transition to sustainable, resilient livelihoods and to productive enterprises that will help feed future generations. It aims to increase the productivity and profitability of livestock agri-food systems in sustainable ways, making meat, milk and eggs more available and affordable across the developing world. The Program brings together five core partners: the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) with a mandate on livestock; the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), which works on forages; the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), which works on small ruminants and dryland systems; the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) with expertise particularly in animal health and genetics and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) which connects research into development and innovation and scaling processes.


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Contents

Introduction	1
Planning and managing multi-stakeholder platforms	2
Before multi-stakeholder platform meetings	2
During multi-stakeholder platform meetings	3
After multi-stakeholder platform meetings	4
Participatory principles of MSP meetings	5
Sustainability challenges of multi-stakeholder platforms	6
Process monitoring and documentation of multi-stakeholder platform processes	8
Report checklist	8
Process note-taking techniques	9
Outcome indicators	9
Annexes	11
Annex 1. Multi-stakeholder platform meeting planner	11
Annex 2. Stakeholder identification and analysis checklist	13
Annex 3. Issue identification and analysis checklist	14
Further reading	15

Introduction

In Ethiopia, the CGIAR Research Program on Livestock (CRP Livestock), in partnership with research and development partners, has conducted action research and capacity development interventions to address livestock production and marketing challenges and to improve the livelihoods of rural communities.

Many factors such as knowledge gaps of community members, limited engagement capacity of partners, and undeveloped service provision system constrain livestock production and marketing in the intervention sites. To address knowledge gaps of community members and strengthen the response capacity of partners, collaborative and participatory learning processes such as community conversations (CCs) have been tested as a meaningful way of engagement and learning with community groups and local service providers (Annet et al. 2020).

However, since addressing some of the issues raised during community conversations is beyond the capacity of community groups and involves other stakeholders, other forms of intervention such as multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) are required to address strategic or institutional issues at different levels. With this purpose, the CRP Livestock program in Ethiopia has adopted MSPs as a multi-actor partnership engagement approach for analysing livestock production and marketing problems and identifying solutions to these challenges.

MSPs are facilitated meetings among groups of individuals or stakeholder representatives with different backgrounds, capacities, resource domains, and interests. These platforms bring together these players to analyse problems, identify opportunities and find ways to achieve their goals. MSPs come in different forms: learning alliances (Lundy 2004; Lundy, Gottret and Ashby 2005; Belt et al. 2011), coalitions (Biggs 1990), innovation networks (Spielman et al. 2010; Ayele et al. 2012), collaborative research platforms (Visser et al. 2012) and innovation platforms (Nederlof et al. 2011; Nederlof and Pyburn 2012).

The aim of the MSPs is to facilitate interaction and linkage among relevant stakeholders on specific livestock production and marketing issues in community groups. They are instrumental in discussions on institutional problems such as inputs and service delivery, disease surveillance, coordination of activities, market linkages and stakeholder interactions. The model used to set up of successful MSPs depends on the level and scale of interventions envisioned. MSPs can be established at different levels. The institutional (zonal and district level) MSPs aim to address strategic issues while the community level MSPs address implementation or operational issues.

This toolkit is meant to be used in supporting CRP Livestock partners and other users at the district and community level to establish and manage MSPs effectively. It is presented in a simple way that provides the basic structure and steps of setting up multi-stakeholder platform. Each of the steps in the toolkit requires localized planning in the community and among the targeted stakeholders.

Planning and managing multi-stakeholder platforms

A systematic engagement of stakeholders in MSPs requires good planning, facilitation, monitoring and coordination of interactions and activities. Key to successful functioning of MSPs is getting stakeholders with diverse interests and needs to work together on a common agenda that is of potential mutual benefit to them.

This toolkit provides a structure to plan and manage MSP processes. On purpose, the guide is kept generic to allow for context-specific adaptations. Each of the steps outlined below needs detailed planning and use of specific facilitation tools.

Before multi-stakeholder platform meetings

- Decide on focus and purpose of the MSP: what is the subject of the meeting or what it is about?
- Identify issues through light problem analysis using participatory tools. Consider issues and action points from previous community-level discussions (e.g. community conversations). This helps decide on the kind of stakeholders to be involved in the MSP meetings.
- Based on the results of the problem analysis, identify preliminary objectives and expected outcomes for the stakeholder meetings.
- Conduct initial brainstorming and analysis of key stakeholders: their goals, roles, needs, contributions, and importance and influence. Also conduct focus group discussions and key informant interviews with a few representative stakeholders from different stakeholder groups to gauge interest, power, define scope and identify relevant stakeholders to be invited to MSP meetings.
- Define convening format (e.g. brainstorming, presentations, small group conversations, plenary discussions, panel discussions, experience sharing etc.).
- Identify discussion issues/points and develop process agenda for facilitating the stakeholder meetings. Review, revise, and order the agenda items.
- Decide on venue and time: consider accessibility both for women and men community members
- Identify and invite men and women participants and confirm their attendance. Invite stakeholders who will contribute to the platform and who will be affected by the outcome.

Decide on focus and purpose



Identify issues through light problem analysis



Identify preliminary objectives and expected outcomes



Conduct initial brainstorming and analysis of key stakeholders



Define convening format



Develop process agenda



Identify facilitators and note takers

- Identify and invite community leaders or partners to open and close meetings. Develop information materials for government communication workers.
- Identify facilitators/moderators and process note takers and photographer
- Prepare process note-taking and report formats.
- Prepare registration sheets and participant packs (e.g. knowledge products such as posters, leaflets, stakeholder contacts, etc.)
- Confirm if everything is in order in advance using a process checklist.

During multi-stakeholder platform meetings

First/establishment meeting

- Come early and setup the venue in a way that enables interaction of participants.
- Register participants and distribute information materials.
- Get participants to introduce themselves and state their expectations for the meeting.
- Ask participants to sit with people they do not know or do not normally interact with.
- Review housekeeping information.
- Start and end the meeting on time.
- Discuss the purpose, objectives and expected outcomes of MSPs in general using visioning techniques.
- Define a vision of success: the desired outcomes, enabling factors and success indicators.
- Explore stakeholder interests and needs.
- Discuss potential benefits and contributions and clarify expectations.
- Agree on working modalities: coordination, leadership/management and communication.
- Document decisions and action points including the preliminary agenda, time and venue of the next meeting.
- Thank participants and close the meeting positively.

Regular/subsequent meetings

- Come early and setup the meeting place.
- Register participants.
- Review housekeeping information.
- Start and end the meeting on time.
- Review action items from the previous meeting.
- Review the meeting agenda and ask for additions to it at the beginning of the meeting.
- Discuss new issues. Ask questions and facilitate the meeting.
- Keep the discussion on target and make sure participants are heard and their needs are met.
- Clarify issues and identify underlying interests.
- Explore multiple perspectives and develop diverse options.
- Use the agenda to keep the meeting moving.
- Summarize and document agreements, decisions/recommendations and action points coming out of the process.
- Establish action items. Encourage MSP members to plan and implement activities as a platform or individually.

- Set the date and place of the next meeting and outline a preliminary agenda.
- Get feedback from a few men and women participants on what went well and what needs to be improved in the next meeting.
- Thank participants and close the meeting positively.

After multi-stakeholder platform meetings

Review, reflection and lessons learning.

- At the end of each stakeholder meeting, hold a facilitation team reflection and learning session to review and refine the process and summarize emerging themes, key decisions, and action points.
- Use the following reflection questions:
 - What were the key outputs of the MSP meeting?
 - What went really well?
 - What were the challenges encountered? Did we deal with these in the best way possible? If not, what could have been done differently?
 - Were participants equally engaged (men and women, different stakeholder groups)? What do we need to change for the next meeting?
 - Has there been evidence of change in attitudes and practices?
 - How do we consider the level of learning in the community, any evidence?
 - How can we follow up on this session in the next session?
- Document processes, lessons learned, and follow-up actions in a report.
- Follow-up on action items. Make follow-up discussions and provide implementation support with platform members who took responsibility to implement actions individually or as a platform.
- Document results of the platform and identify new discussion issues. The focus of MSPs may change over time, and new challenges and opportunities may demand continued engagement of stakeholders in collaborative learning and action processes.
- Begin to plan the next meeting.

Participatory principles of MSP meetings

Multi-stakeholder processes involve participatory approaches and methods. These follow basic principles, which include:

- Explore multiple perspectives from men and women.
- Respect local norms and understand cultural influences.
- Start and end meetings on time.
- Pay attention to non-verbal communication signals.
- Apply a variety of interactive facilitation methods and activities.
- Make sure that each participant is heard and contributes.
- Paraphrase and summarize to structure and keep the discussion in focus.
- Deep dive and explore views of men and women participants using probing questions.
- Make sure that the discussion point in a question is fully explored and that participants agree with the outcome before moving to the next discussions point.
- Make sure that participants listen to and respect one another during discussions.
- Remember that every idea counts and encourage participants to contribute.
- Ensure open, active and transparent participation of everyone in the meeting.
- Make sure that there is shared ownership of the decision-making processes and outcomes.

Sustainability challenges of multi-stakeholder platforms

While MSPs offer opportunities for social learning and collective action among stakeholder groups around common goals, their benefits can be constrained by many challenges.

Some of the challenges facing MSP processes include:

- Poor stakeholder engagement and commitment.
- Lack of trust and opaque communication.
- Underrepresentation of some stakeholders.
- Underrepresentation of women or passivity in meetings.
- Power imbalance and domination by some members/stakeholders.
- Poor coordination and management of meetings and processes.
- Weak social learning and joint action processes.
- Weak enabling environment and supporting institutions.
- Limited strength and partnering/negotiation skills of stakeholder representatives.

Addressing these challenges and maximizing the benefits from MSP processes requires strengthening platform coordination and leadership capacity through problem-solving training and mentoring support. The effectiveness and sustainability of MSP processes depend on the coordination and engagement capacity of stakeholders and the benefits individual participants believe they are realizing from participating in the platforms.

MSP activities must be driven by the needs of stakeholders. They can function effectively when actionable knowledge and information is shared, and collective learning and action is facilitated among participating stakeholders.

The size and composition of MSPs depend on the issues at hand. They may not bring all members together all the time. MSP meetings can be issue specific, only bringing together certain stakeholder groups to address common issues. For example, if marketing is an issue, market actors can come together to discuss, share information, and address marketing challenges.

MSP membership is flexible and purely voluntary. Depending on the issues at hand, different stakeholders can join or leave the MSP at any time. MSPs are not a formal structure, and they exist only as long as the issues at hand need to be addressed. They may continue to exist if new issues emerge with new or existing members. MSP processes are not expected to involve the same stakeholders all the time. Different stakeholders may join or leave MSPs at different times depending on the issues under discussion.

Resource organizations such as research or development programs can play a facilitating and supporting role in terms of providing capacity development, mentoring and documentation support to MSPs. But resource organizations should

not finance MSP meetings. The stakeholders must self-finance their own participation in MSP activities. Mandated institutions or other relevant stakeholders can take up a coordination and leadership role in MSPs. For example, at the community level, a cooperative can become implementing organizations responsible for coordinating MSP activities.

Process monitoring and documentation of multi-stakeholder platform processes

Report checklist

Introduction:

- Background
- Objectives
- Participant composition
- Date and venue

Approach and process:

- Representation and presence/interactivity of stakeholders (men and women).
- Opening and closing sessions.
- Activities and methods of engagement.
- Observation on reactions/body language of participants.
- How participants reacted to discussion issues (divergence, convergence and turning points).

Main points, agreements and actions:

- Key discussion issues addressed in stakeholder meetings.
- Themes that emerge from stakeholder meetings.
- What participants say and how they say it.
- Areas of tension and strong emotions during stakeholder meetings.
- Quotes from stakeholders in meetings.
- Decisions and action points that evolve out of stakeholder meetings.

Observations, reflections and lessons learned:

- Overall reflection and insights on the process.
- Feedback and comments from participants.
- Analysis and lessons learned.

Annex

- Participants list
- Action points.

Process note-taking techniques

- Capture the process, key issues discussed, insights made, agreements, action points and quotes from stakeholder meetings without your judgment.
- Do not try to write down everything. Summarize key words/phrases.
- Listen for statements that might be useful quotes later and write those down as best as you can including the gender/representation of the speaker.
- Listen for why participants are saying what they say. Think about what is going on beneath the surface. Body language can give important clues.
- Note what people say and how they say it. Watch for areas of tension and strong emotion.
- Listen when the facilitator(s) takes a moment to summarize the discussion.
- Look for turning points in the discussion, where participants were able to break through disagreements, find compromises and/or reach a new level (agreements and decisions).
- Compare what participants say at the beginning of the meeting with where they have arrived at the end.
- Actively take notes during the opening and closing sessions.
- Interact with participants during breaks and try to capture their impressions and feelings about the meeting.
- Review notes with the facilitator(s) immediately and organize the notes as soon as possible after the meeting.

Outcome indicators

Use the following generic indicator checklist to monitor and evaluate MSP processes and results. Adapt or add indicators based on specific conditions. Note that members of the MSP should be involved in the setting up and monitoring of outcome indicators.

Some of the indicators are qualitative and others are quantitative. Develop appropriate data collection and analysis tools to measure your indicators.

- Power dynamics, inclusiveness, and representation of stakeholders – stakeholder group diversity, gender disaggregation per stakeholder group.
- Stakeholder participation, commitment and accountability.
- Meeting attendance and active engagement in discussions and negotiation of actions.
- Trust, collaboration and communication among stakeholders.
- Information sharing, social learning and influencing – process, quality, impact.
- Process and quality of consensus building on actions and strategies.
- Empowerment of stakeholder groups.
- Changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices of platform members.
- New business opportunities for stakeholders.
- Engagement and partnering capacity of stakeholder groups.
- Social and collaborative learning and collective action.
- Quality of stakeholder interaction, relationship, engagement and facilitation process.
- Relevance and practicability of decisions and action points.
- Gender inclusiveness of representation and collaborative process.
- Innovative service provision models.

- Achievement of platform goals and objectives.
- Quality of coordination, facilitation and organization of platform meetings.

Annexes

Annex I. Multi-stakeholder platform meeting planner

Meeting title: What is the meeting about? What is its focus and content?

Venue and time: Date and duration of the meeting

Meeting purpose: What is the meeting going to achieve? What are the specific objectives and expected outcomes of the meeting?

Meeting format and activities: What form will the meeting take and what will be done to achieve its purpose or objectives?

- Discussion – brainstorming, structured.
- Presentation – informing, sharing, feedback, validation.
- Knowledge sharing – informing, influencing, scaling, co-learning
- Storytelling – inspiring, relating, networking.
- Demonstration – influencing, demand generation, scaling.
- Monitoring – progress review and update.

Knowledge exchange tools: What active methods and tools will be used to facilitate knowledge exchange during MSP meetings?

The following knowledge sharing tools can be used to facilitate MSP meetings. Depending on your choice of methods, plan in detail why and how you will be using the tools.

- Buzz session
- Brainstorming
- Storytelling
- Fishbowl
- Panel discussion
- Role play
- Focus group
- Interview
- knowledge fair
- Poster session
- Action planning
- After-action review

Materials and supplies: What materials or equipment will be needed?

Facilitator: Who will facilitate the meeting? Specify selection criteria and facilitator profile (qualification and facilitation experience).

Participants: Who will participate in the meeting and why? What will be their contribution? How will they benefit from the meeting?

Meeting agenda: What topics will be discussed in the meeting? Who is responsible for each topic and how long will each topic take? What is expected from each discussion topic?

Decisions: What action points will be agreed on at the end of the meeting? Who will be responsible for each action point, and how long will it take to implement the action? What is expected to change from the action?

Meeting follow-up: What follow-up and monitoring tasks will be done after the meeting? Who will be responsible for this, and how and when will it be done?

Meeting review: Has the meeting achieved its objectives? What have been the challenges and successes? What lessons have been learned, and how will they be used?

Annex 2. Stakeholder identification and analysis checklist

Use the following questions to identify relevant stakeholders and design appropriate stakeholder engagement strategies.

- Who are the stakeholders?
- Why are they stakeholders?
- How are they affected and to what degree?
- What are their interests or concerns?
- What is their power or influence?
- What is their role or contribution?
- What are their needs and goals?
- What are their capacities and strengths?
- What is their resource domain?

Annex 3. Issue identification and analysis checklist

Use the following questions to determine the focus of multi-stakeholder platform meetings and identify relevant stakeholders to be invited to MSP activities.

- What is the issue?
- Why is it an issue?
- How is it identified?
- Who is directly or indirectly affected by the issue? Who is most affected by it? How are they affected?
- Why should we address this issue? What would happen if this issue was not addressed?
- How could this issue be addressed? What is needed to address this issue?
- How do we know if the issue is successfully addressed?
- Who should be involved in addressing and monitoring this issue?

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