

1.1 Partnerships

1.1.1 Purpose of the partnerships

The rationale behind/ What does the civil society sector bring? Example of MSF partnerships with civil society actors.

1.1.2 What makes a good partnership? Guiding principles

1.1.3 The partnering process

- Identifying, screening assessment,
- Who are the key people to consider (director, legal, other)
- Mapping of resources how they are dealt and whom are they provided from,
- How you collaborate, informal, formal agreements (MOU),
- Decision making process,
- Conflict resolution
- Exit from a partnership
- Activities handover to the partners (institutional and/or non-institutional ones),
- Reviewing the partnership: What has the partnerships achieved; capitalization; replicability

Partnerships and MSF Urban Spaces Approach

What is a good partnership?

A good partnership is one that achieves more than any single organisation could do. It is one where the mission of all partners is enhanced and where impact is either wider or deeper, or both. A partnership involves two or more organisations or groups and a good partnership is one where there is equality between the partners. Even if some organisations may be larger or more resourceful than others in the partnership, there is an agreed equality. In a good partnership, the partners treat each other with respect. A good partnership does not start with the question “What is in it for us?” but with the question “What is out there for our mission?”.

A good partnership can also embrace many different kinds of actors, in fact diversity is often a strength. What happens when activists join forces with medical staff and then artists join with a group of journalists and lawyers? That mix may not be easy to manage at first, but done well it can be a force for change. A good partnership is also one where roles are clear, and where different kinds of contributions are valued.

Guiding principles for partnerships

A partnership framework is principle based and pragmatic in nature, it does not use a one-size-fits-all approach. By developing good practices through partnerships, we empower people to claim their rights and holding to account the institutions meant to deliver on these rights. **A strategic relationship is one where a shared vision and values underpin its aim and outcome.** Strategic means a long-term commitment towards agreed common goals and

a relevant degree of joint work. A partnership is a strategic relationship between primary partners for the purpose of sustainable and positive change for the people we work for.

Good partnerships are based on **principles** from which ways of working and agreements can be based. Some basic principles are:

Shared Values

Partnerships between MSF and other organisations should be developed on the basis of a shared values and commitment to save lives and alleviate suffering. All partners must also have a commitment to women's rights and respect for diverse identities based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, faith, political affiliation, disability, HIV and AIDS status.

Mutual Benefit

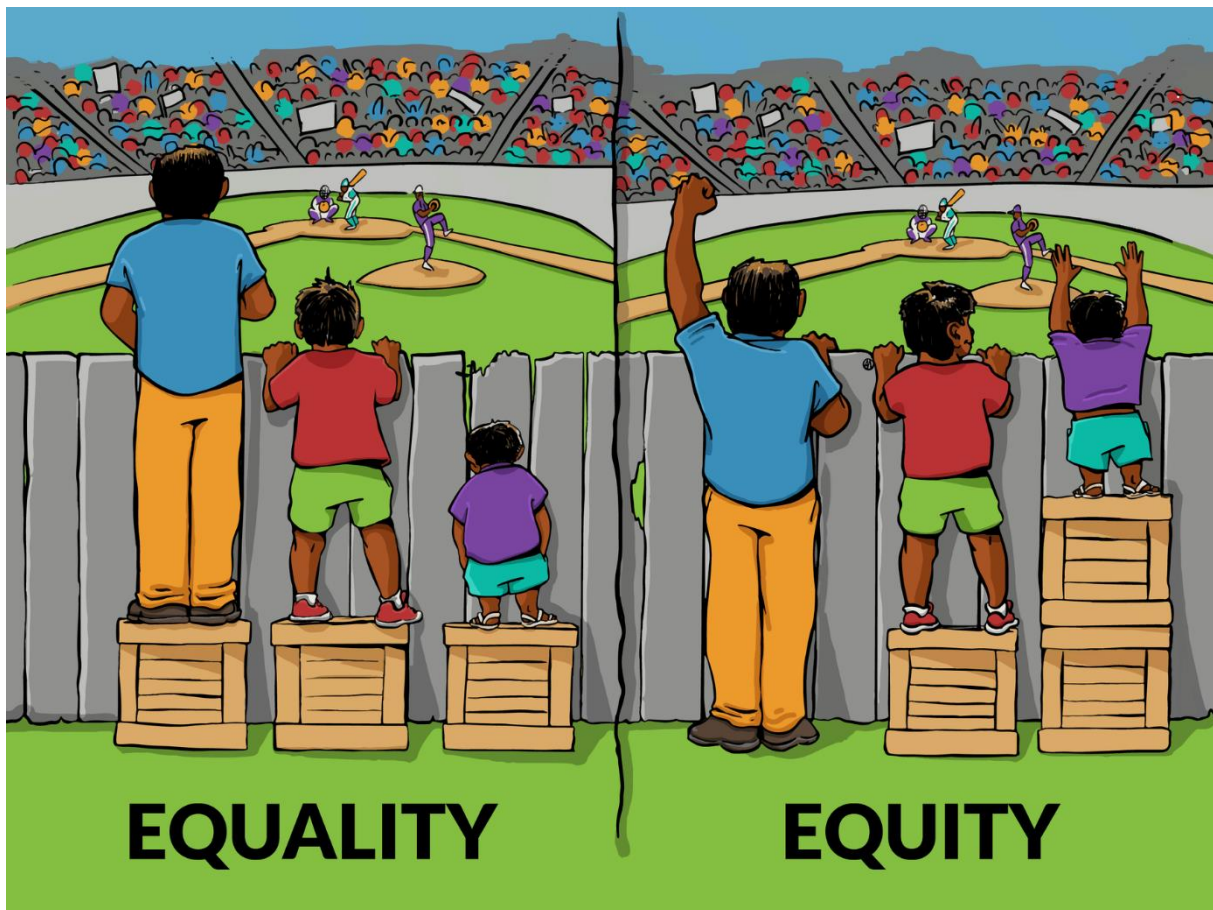
The partnership should add value to MSF's work and to the partner's work, and most importantly be beneficial for the people we work for. The diversity of MSF's partnerships is an asset if we complement each other's capacities, working together in joint strategies towards common goals. This recognition is fundamental for the success of the partnership. Mutual benefits should strengthen the impact of our work in an effective and sustainable way.

Mutual Accountability and Transparency

All partners must share a commitment to accountability and transparency, using resources and make decisions in an accountable and transparent way. When the partnership involves funding, MSF and its partners should respect the money received in trust and for which they hold joint responsibility. Dialogue and open sharing of relevant information increase the level of trust between partners. Trust is built over time and is different from being reliable. Reliability is important for many things but trust involves also trust in the intentions of the other part. Further, a partnership should not be built only on the trust in a 'person' but also in the organisation or in the function that the person is part of. The right kind of trust requires transparency and living up to the commitments made.

Equity and Mutual Respect

Equity is about fairness in the partnership, it demands partners to respect each other's institutional mandates and independence. Mutual respect and equity is important as MSF acknowledges that power imbalances may affect the partnership. MSF acknowledges that all contributions are equally vital to achieving the shared purpose. It is good to note that equity is not the same as equality. It implies an equal right to be on the same table and validation of those contributions that are not measurable simply in terms of status or resources contributed. It is likely some partners will require more support/resources for there to be equity in the partnership. A cartoon illustrates this quite simply:



Clarity on roles and responsibilities

MSF and its partners have an obligation to each other to carry out their tasks responsibly, based on a well-defined agreement of roles and responsibilities. They commit to activities only when they are in line with their mandate and when they have the resources to deliver on the commitments.

Learning and Innovation

MSF acknowledges the need for continuous learning and identifying innovative responses to an ever-changing context. MSF also recognises that learning frequently involves taking risks together and is committed to promoting innovation and identification of good practice to promote learning. Identifying and sharing learning into our work is a key element in MSF's approach to improving the quality of the partnership for the benefit of people we work for.

Agreeing responsibilities internally:

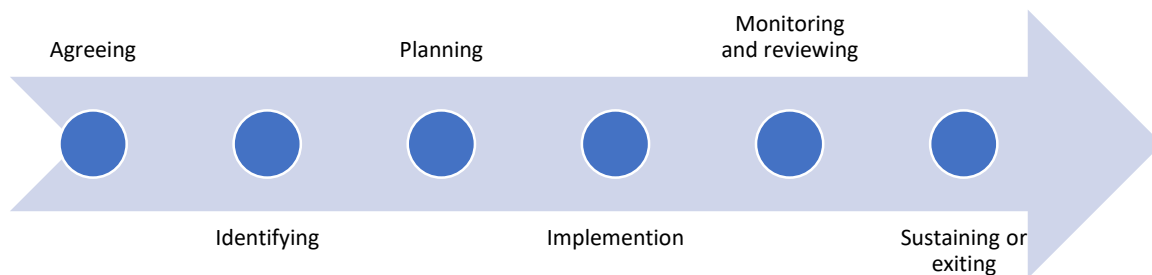
It is crucial for be clear on responsibilities internally in MSF before entering into a partnership with external partners. This includes agreeing who leads on what and who is responsible for sign off and ensuring that the right persons are consulted and informed. The tool below is intended to help plan and coordinate the projects and action plans in the MSF Urban Space project. A number of 'areas' are described along with an agreement on who is

Responsible, **A**ccountable, **C**onsulted and **I**nformed (RACI). The tool should be developed/completed by the relevant persons in the project location. The 'areas' and allocation of roles are examples, it is important to go through the project and the table below and adapt to the specific context.

Area	Responsible	Accountable	Consulted	Informed
Partner identification	Project lead	Director	Programme and staff and members	All other staff, board
Partner assessment	Project lead	Director	Key staff	Board
Member engagement	Project lead or member lead	Board chair or board focal person	Director, HR, members	Staff
Member capacity building	Project lead or member lead	Board chair or board focal person	Director, HR, members	Staff
MoU/Contract	Project lead	Director	Legal advisor	Board
Budget	Project lead	Director	Relevant director	Board
Evaluation	Project lead and partners	Project lead	Partners, director, M&E staff	Board and staff
Phase out decision	Project lead	Director	Partner and relevant staff	Board
Project reporting	Project lead	Global MSF Project lead	Director and members	Board and staff

1. Partnership processes

Each project, and each partnership, will be unique and need to find their own path adapting to the circumstances. There are however some general steps that should be considered in the process. Some of these may be obvious, others may seem overly bureaucratic, and it is important to consider these even if each step is not followed. In that way, the partnership process is intentional and not happenstance. There is also a sequence to the various steps, illustrated below:



- **Agreeing** on the need to identify strategic partner(s) for particular purpose and understanding the challenge, i.e. issue, project, programme, campaign or location.
- **Identifying:** Mapping and identification of potential partners in line with the purpose; i.e. issue, project, programme, campaign or location.
 - A mutual appraisal process including an assessment to better understand the partner. This will likely include meeting with key stakeholders, including staff, the board and the constituency. It is important that this process involves MSF and the partner, where both parties review one another to assess compatibility of working together. The information needs may not be the same on both sides but the step needs to involve both.
 - Selection of strategic partner(s) among those explored, which partner(s) best fits the purpose and objective.
 - Agreeing right level of formality of partnership by signing a partnership agreement or an MOU depending on the nature of relations.
- Joint **planning** of the project and individual activities, agreeing details of roles and deliverables along the needed timeline.
- **Implementation** of the project through partnership and ensure proper project management and communication channels are in place.
- **Monitoring and reviewing** of the relationship should be done by both MSF and its partners based on the commitments made in the MOU and/or agreements as well as the adherence to the values and principles. Light and inclusive annual reviews and partnership forums are good for maintaining a healthy relationship.
- A more or less formal evaluation of the partnership half-way through the commitment and at the end of the defined relationship timeframe will help to learn and assess potential for continuing the partnership.
- If necessary ending the partnership based on exit strategy, reviews and evaluation.

Key things to remember:

- If the steps in the partnership process are clear, agreed with other parties, and followed, then the partnership will be easier to manage.
- Explaining the steps to the strategic partners means they know what to expect from partnership and MSF.

Step 1: Need for partnership

While MSF often works independent of other organisations and has an approach to partnership which is very instrumental and specific, the Urban MSF Spaces Project explores the establishment of making better use of the Associative side of the organisations in the 'home cities' to better prepare and respond to a changing global landscape. The purpose is to better use the resources available within MSF and connect with external local partner for increased impact of people's lives, policy and advocacy. To be effective, there is a need for strategic partnerships that are mutually beneficial. Every partnership builds on idea that each partner brings something that either reinforces or complements the other partners and increases impact for all partners involved.

What partners can bring to the partnership:

- People
- Expertise, ideas and new perspectives and innovation
- **Access** to population groups or networks
- Material and products
- Resources
- Relationships
- Information (input)
- Information and communication (dissemination)
- Solidarity

Step 2: Partner Identification

Identification is the process of getting to know which potential partner is active and would add value in a particular location and on specific issues. MSF will proactively look for strategic partners as well as be open to being approached by new partners.

Purpose

To know existing organisations with shared values, principles and strategic programme areas of work that can be potential partners. To know which types of organisations do not exist in the location of strategic programme focus despite the need for strategic partnerships there. If there is a gap this may indicate that it is an area where a partnership could expand into if beneficial for impact.

Process

There are a number of different processes for this, there is no one single manner to find partners, and it may often be happenstance and by chance. Some more focused ways includes:

- Stakeholders analysis during strategic planning;
- Mapping when looking at issues to work on in the areas/location and with whom;
- Desk review of list of organisations in the location and strategic programme focus;
- Through direct contact during meeting and other events;
- Introduction by other organisations;
- Through formal and informal networks;
- Open advertisement in the media;
- Interacting with organisations already involved/responsible on working on an identified strategic focus.

Who and when

MSF staff and MSF members in the section can all be instrumental in finding partners. It can happen at any time and it is important that it fits within the overall strategic direction for the section in that period. If it represents a very good, but unplanned, opportunity, the case should be presented to the relevant decision makers [here we need to refer to something else in this manual

Expected output

- Established list and categories of potential strategic partners in the location and their strategic focus

Selecting partners

Purpose

To identify partners for further interactions and exploration, this could lead to more formal partnerships. The interaction should be at different levels from constituencies, to partner staff, to Board level. Particular attention should be given to the role of beneficiaries and specific population groups. Are they present? Are they represented? Is someone speaking on their behalf?

Process

- Identify what the benefits of a partnership would be: what is the complementarity and what is the impact?
- Read up using the information the potential partner makes available, or request the information
- Explore potential conflicts of interest early on
- Establish relationship through sharing information and conducting joint events.
- Jointly implement short term project/event (6-12 months) to understand each other better

- There may also be some value in organising special activities (workshops, site visits, exchanges) between several potential partner organisations to explore the idea of partnering more fully and collaboratively before any firm commitments are agreed
- Conduct mutual organisational assessments to understand level, capacity and commitment to each other
- Allocate some follow-up work to individuals to assess their capacity to actually turn a verbal commitment into action. In some instances there may be little or no choice about partners
- For funded projects, ensure that partner fulfils funders' minimum requirements and has the capacity to comply with those

Who and when

MSF staff are likely best placed to lead on the formalization of the partnership, with clear co-leadership from MSF members when applicable. For a good selection process, it is good practice to allow between 1-6 months depending on the context, and this should be done within 12 months of starting an initiative in the section city location.

Expected output

- Established relationships with potential partners in a location;
- Areas of focus for joint implementation of projects and plans for future projects;
- Short term or pilot projects should have been implemented;
- Some knowledge of each other's capacity to deliver and commitment based on the project(s) implemented and relationship established.

Assessing risks and rewards

Appraisal of partner

Purpose

A partnership appraisal is meant to confirm the mutually held values, principles and programming approach, and assess operational capacity and strategic fit.

The strategic partners must also be able to assess MSF before entering into any form of contractual relationship or alliance so that clarity of expectations of both MSF and the partners are clearly defined and understood.

Process

- Confirmation of partners to be appraised from the selected list. This includes formal communication to the primary partners and agreeing on the timeframe, appraisal date and process.

- Formation of small team comprising of right competency mix depending on the partnership (MSF member, Association coordinator, finance, advocacy, fundraising, head of mission etc).
- Actual appraisal process looking at the primary partner organisation as a whole capacity. See box below for possible assessment areas.

Organisation Assessment focus areas

1. General information about the potential partner.
2. Information on partner's strategic programme focus and current running programmes and projects.
3. Alignment with MSF strategy and programme areas of work or campaigns.
4. Actual and potential external relations with key stakeholders including other partners, donors, government and the private sector.
5. Relationship and ways of working with specific population groups.
6. Funding base - membership, institutional or otherwise.
7. Identity (mission and vision).
8. Governance arrangement and functioning
9. Existing policies, systems, procedures and process e.g. reporting, monitoring, Finance, HR etc.
10. Capacity level (staff and otherwise) programmatic, financial and institutional
11. Audit records - where applicable and possible.

Who and when?

A small multi-disciplinary team recommended as above at all levels. The process should take place within 18 months of start of process.

Expected outputs

- Appraisal report with an overall baseline against which the success of the partnership can be assessed, including the leadership and governance of the organisation if appropriate, its capabilities, expertise, strengths and gaps, areas of potential collaboration and synergy.
- An action plan for the follow up of the appraisal including clear milestones, timelines and allocating responsibility.
- Strategic partners should expect MSF to be held accountable of the principles and behaviours set out in the partnership policy.

PARTNERSHIP RISKS

Entering and managing a partnership always involve risks. There is a wide range of potential risks, from reputation to performance. It is important to acknowledge that risk is inherent in all activities, partnerships are not different. It is a normal condition of existence and often also create opportunities. To make the most out of the risks they must be understood, managed and reduced to acceptable levels.

Conceptual Framework

The outcome and impact of partnerships are influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors include relationships between internal stakeholders, management processes and expertise, and technical factors that impact the partnership. External factors include the political and legal system, socioeconomic context, geography and history, and the international economic environment. All of these factors are potential sources for risk.

Some frequent internal factors affecting partnerships

- Financial: cash flow, shortage of resources, exchange rates, weak financial management procedures.
- Governance: conflicting agendas of internal stakeholders and lack of transparency and accountability; issues with leadership and decision-making; poor information flows, lack of ownership.
- Operational: lack of managerial and technological capabilities; poor human resource management leading to low retention of key staff or decreased staff motivation and poor performance.
- Reputational: including deliberate wrongdoing (e.g. fraud, harassment).

Some external factors affecting partnerships

- Influence of other stakeholders such as governments, media, political ruling class, other civil society organizations.
- External forces such as inflation, unemployment.
- Political environment: crises and conflict, events in national and international politics that might impact the partnership activities, legality and viability.
- The cultural, socio-economic and technological environment, including communication and visibility.

Risk management

Risk management is an organized approach to identify and assess risk and for selecting, developing, and implementing options for the handling of risk, so as to ensure the continued success of the partnership activities and protect the partners.

Risk management includes:

- Being open to accepting an appropriate level of risk if that is what is necessary to achieve objectives (tolerance for certain risks). Agreeing risk levels.
- Identifying and assessing what can go wrong in delivering partnership objectives or, conversely, what opportunities for improvement or refinement exist in programme or project development.

- Designing, negotiating and implementing corrective measures to lower the likelihood of negative events or reduce the consequences when they occur.
- Being prepared for adjusting (when possible) or ending partnership activities when circumstances change beyond acceptable limits.

Risk management is about prioritizing risks and focusing efforts on the most important risks, otherwise we risk spreading our efforts too thinly and wasting resources on unnecessary risk management. Risk is defined by two characteristics: probability of occurrence (whether something will happen), and consequences of occurrence (how much of an impact it will have if it happens). This gives us a clear view of priorities:

- *Low impact/low probability*: can often be ignored,
- *Low impact/high probability*: if these things happen, you can cope with them and move on. However, you should try to reduce the likelihood that they occur.
- *High impact/low probability*: For these you should do what you can to reduce the impact they have if they do occur, and you should have **contingency plans** in place just in case they do. In humanitarian context, you need to pay close attention to these risks as they likely involve loss of human life.
- *High impact/high probability*: These are your top priorities, and are risks that you must pay close attention to and address.

Developing a response to each risk in a risk response plan should be part of the partnership management process.

Partnering Agreements

REVIEWING THE QUALITY OF THE WORK AND THE PARTNERSHIP

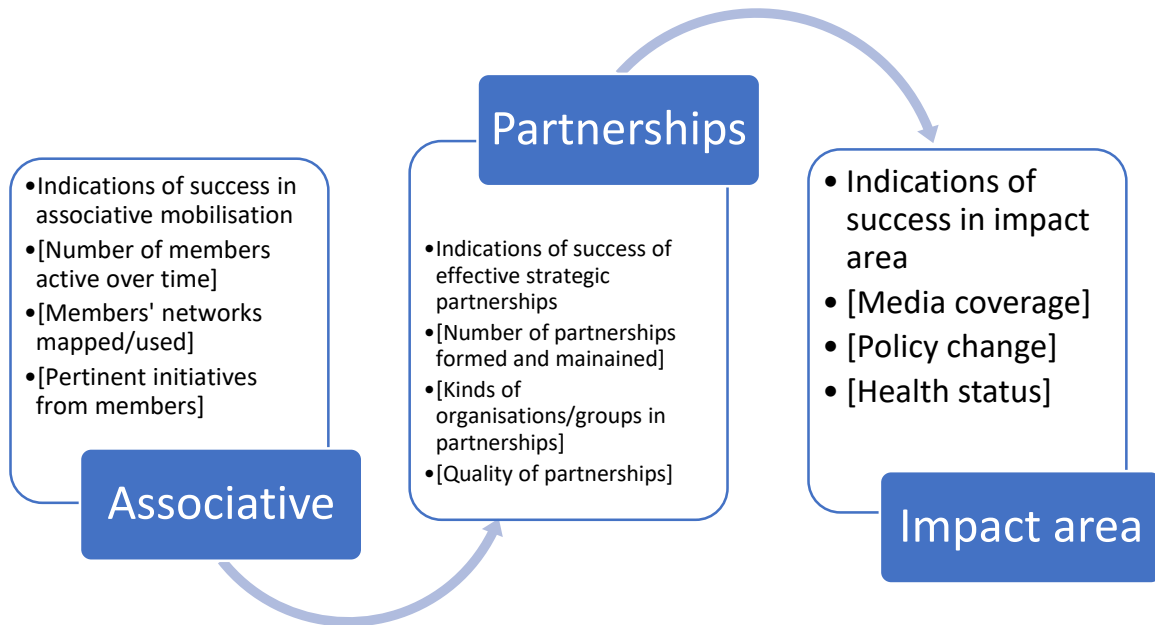
Reviewing the partnership gives MSF and partners a possibility to ensure both the quality of the relationship and the results expected from the partnership. It is a commitment to excellence. It is important to remain aware of potential changes in the partnership over time, as well as changes in either partner's context, with a view to adjusting and adapting accordingly.

MSF and its partners should review the partnership regularly, at least every year. Monitoring plans need to go beyond outputs, financial issues and the impact made, and track how the partnership has contributed to an improved situation. They should review successes, challenges and lessons learnt as well as identify areas requiring improvement in terms of mutual policies or practices of partnership. Informal spaces and trust are key in identifying and addressing any issues that otherwise remains unspoken and may negatively affect the quality of our partnership relationship.

Establishing a few indicators of success early on and then finding the means to measure and report on those is a good idea. For clarity, it can be useful to divide these into three separate areas to measure:

1. The impact on the issue
2. The quality and outputs of the partnership
3. The changes in the associative life of the section

The diagram below shows how they interact. The specific items to measure (and how to do it) needs to be established for each project and city. The indicators in the diagram are only indicative examples.



EXITING OR SUSTAINING A PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships last for variable periods of time, according to their specific objectives and the manner in which they develop and progress. It is important to recognise the responsibilities related to phasing out the collaboration with a partner. It should be part of a carefully considered approach to ensuring the sustainability of the partner's work, or at least minimal negative impact. The phasing out should be integrated into the programme or project design, with emphasis on building capacities.

A partnership can be terminated, by either party, in response to:

- A change in circumstances, (e.g. it is no longer needed).
- The fact it no longer complies with partnership principles.
- Serious under-performance in the partnership, captured in a partnership evaluation.
- Gross misconduct including sexual harassment and abuse, racial and other discrimination, mismanagement and financial irregularities.
- Where the image or perception of a partner poses high risk to MSF's reputation, security or credibility.