

2 How to: design for context

Getting clear on geography, power, and governance

So you’ve mapped existing and past experiences with MSPs in your landscape, and decided that you want to implement one.

Now it’s time to home in on context – the resources, actors, governance arrangements, power structures and relationships, and conflicts that exist within, or affect, the landscape in question. Trying to address land and/or resource-related challenges by putting in place new ways of doing things, without taking into account existing ones, can hinder MSPs’ ability to reach their goals (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020b). If you have not done so already, at this point we highly recommend hiring a social scientist, perhaps a gender expert, or someone experienced in addressing complex sociopolitical challenges. Our proposal for ‘designing for engagement’ includes a series of contextual issues that may affect your MSP and that you may want to keep in mind as you design, implement, and monitor it (Larson and Sarmiento Barletti, 2020; Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020a).

Here are some ways to design an MSP with context in mind.



Define the geographic scope. This could be landscape or ecosystem-based (particularly if the focus is on a specific resource challenge), or it might align with administrative or jurisdictional boundaries. If you’re using landscape boundaries, make sure all the relevant government authorities are involved (Ratner et al., 2022).



Map ‘who’s who’ within the landscape, and how they relate to each other in terms of their interests, connections to the issues you want to address, capacities

to be able to participate in whatever it is you want to put together, power structures and relations, conflicts over resources, etc. This analysis will allow you to identify the obstacles to inclusion and equity and to use this as the basis for discussions with key actor groups, especially the groups you are targeting for inclusion, to design strategies for change. This mapping will also be important to identify who should host the MSP and the pros and cons of working through existing platforms.



Pay attention to ‘translation’. Many projects approach the landscape with great ideas, a commitment to equity, and to bottom-up participation. But at every

layer of interaction, both among the people working on the project and those engaged with it, everyone has their own interpretation of the concepts you promote, and their own ideas of how things like participation and inclusion should work (Sanders et al., 2017; see also Colfer et al., 2022). Don’t assume everyone is on the same page. Translation always happens. If you want your commitment to inclusion and equity to carry through, you’ll need to get key actors on board with your vision, from the project organizers to the field technicians, and among influential government, NGOs and grassroots

leaders. This “top-to-bottom” translation needs to be combined with the “bottom-up” engagement that is part of your inclusion strategy. We have included some resources below that you may want to consider to facilitate these processes.



Link to other platforms and multiple scales to maximize impact.

By making these kinds of connections, you can build momentum across the larger landscape, make greater policy impact, and more effectively promote change. Connecting with other MSPs at the same scale allows for mutual learning across similar groups, while multiscale approaches can help with targeted planning and producing a range of impacts based on the potential of each arena (Hewlett et al., 2020).



Be aware of ‘governance gaps’ – and the potential of MSPs to fill them.

Often, actors in a landscape – including different governance offices – lack effective space for coordination to address land use and other resource governance challenges. This may have different impacts on your MSP, as filling gaps can support coordination and improved governance (Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti, 2021). However, if there really is a lack of similar spaces in your landscape of intervention, your MSP may be taken over by other issues (Rodriguez and Sarmiento Barletti, 2020). Where would your MSP fit?

Case study in Chemba, Tanzania: successful design-for-context

Chemba is a district in central Tanzania that was experiencing land-use conflicts among pastoralists, crop farmers, settlers, and conservation organizations. A local NGO, the Tanzania Natural Resource Forum (TNRF), convened an MSP to attempt to resolve these conflicts, improve community participation and engagement, and strategically addressing power imbalances between local and higher-level authorities.

This landscape-level MSP successfully cut across divisions between government sectors and different actors in land governance. It supported coordination among responsible land governance and administration institutions and the establishment of new village-level land councils, which helped to make decentralization in land and resource governance more genuine and meaningful. As one village leader said, it “is a bridge that connects villagers at the grassroots level with high decision makers. It helps the village authority to understand their responsibilities on land issues better.”

The work is now being scaled up: after another successful MSP with similar objectives in nearby Iringa District, MSPs are being established in additional districts to address land-use conflicts across the country (Ratner et al., 2022).

Case study in Karnataka, India: when context isn't considered carefully enough

In the early 1990s, a group of NGOs, communities, and government institutions collaborated to create a forest planning and management MSP in Karnataka, India. The project built upon national legal and policy frameworks and emphasized creating Village Forest Committees to co-manage forests with the Forest Department.

But this MSP did not achieve its hoped-for outcome of more equitable forest management. Before the program's establishment there were no official activity zones in the forest landscape, and the allocation of specific areas for certain activities was controlled by village councils and traditional institutions. Under the new system created through the MSP, the Village Committees and Forest Department decided what areas were demarcated for specific activities. The new restrictions they applied ignored informal institutions and relationships, which had often allowed marginalized groups access to certain forest resources. As such, the process undermined their ability to maintain their livelihoods.

Overall, the MSP failed to address inequalities among local people, or to change the opinion of some Forest Department officials that local people lack capacity to manage their own forests (Martin and Lemon, 2001).

References

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Further tools

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FAO – Stakeholder mapping. Available online at: <https://www.fao.org/capacity-development/resources/practical-tools/capacity-assessment/stakeholder-mapping-tool/en/>

Stakeholders in Change. Available online at: http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/stakeholder_change/stakeholder_change.htm

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MORE INFORMATION

CIFOR-ICRAF's research on MSPs

<https://www.cifor-icraf.org/research/topic/multi-stakeholder-platforms/>

More tools for inclusive MSPs

<https://www.cifor.org/toolboxes/tools-for-managing-landscapes-inclusively/>

Get in touch

Anne M. Larson – a.larson@cifor-icraf.org & Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti – j.sarmiento@cifor-icraf.org

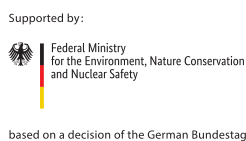
CIFOR-ICRAF'S TOOLS FOR INCLUSIVE MSPs

How are we doing?

<https://www.cifor.org/knowledge/publication/7796/>

Getting it right

<https://www.cifor.org/knowledge/publication/7973/>



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