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Multi-stakeholder Initiatives: Lessons from agriculture

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List of abbreviations

ACSAA	Africa Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance
CGAP	Consultative Group to Assist the Poor
CYFI	Child and Youth Finance International
GACSA	Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture
ISF	Initiative for Smallholder Finance
MSI	Multi-stakeholder initiative
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development

Preface

There is now broad consensus that it will be impossible to achieve more inclusive and sustainable growth without scaling the practice and effectiveness of multi-stakeholder initiatives among companies, governments and civil society organizations. The United Nations 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, for example, is one of several recent global agreements that emphasize the need for: "multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources".

Such partnerships will be particularly important in tackling global challenges like climate change, food security and job creation. As we have noted in previous research, these challenges are complex and systemic. They have arisen over periods of years from the actions and interactions of diverse yet interconnected and interdependent stakeholders. There is increasing recognition that they cannot be addressed in a top-down, controlled and linear fashion. New models of behaviour and cooperation are needed that enable solutions to emerge as many different individuals and organizations interact with each other—both formally through established structures and informally through networks—to experiment, learn, adapt and then scale or replicate what works.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) offer one of the most promising mechanisms to achieve this type of dynamic yet systematic interaction. Not surprisingly, they are quickly becoming a popular form of collective action. Yet, they are by no means a panacea. MSIs are often difficult to set up and maintain, with high transactions costs and a variety of operational, governance and accountability challenges. In addition, they are not always the right solution for the problem.

Whilst the existing literature is trying to tackle this highly relevant but complex issue, we find that there is still a limited understanding of exactly how MSIs emerge and what functional forms they should take. In order to make them more effective and to determine whether an MSI is appropriate in the first place, we need clearer guidance on when to launch one and what it will do.

This paper advances our understanding of these questions by drawing on an in-depth analysis of twelve MSIs across the agriculture, financial inclusion and youth employment space. These MSIs offer a valuable range of experiences and models. Some of them have evolved over several decades and others are less than a year old. Several have been incubated or hosted by public sector entities, others by private foundations and companies. Yet, analysis offers some common lessons and insights. Based on these, the paper provides a structured framework to better understand the key characteristics of the context that gives rise to MSIs, as well as the types of core functions they serve as a tool for social change. The authors suggest a new language for framing these two critical stages in the evolution of MSIs, with the aim of helping to guide individuals or organizations that are looking to launch or shape such initiatives.

Applying this framework in a structured way to an issue like the climate impact on smallholder farmers in Africa, as the authors have done in a related paper, leads to the conclusion that there are already a number of forms of collective action, including existing MSIs, whose focus and mandate could be expanded to address ongoing climate risk gaps. They offer high potential in areas such as agricultural planning, crop management and soil health, and financial and market chain resilience. In the sister paper, the authors call for a new MSI to improve the way that young farmers and agribusinesses can contribute to more resilient futures for themselves, their families and their countries. This paper suggests how to take such action.

More broadly, the paper provides people who are interested in MSIs as tools for social change with frameworks and questions that can help them decide whether an MSI is an appropriate tool for addressing a particular issue, and if so, how to position its launch and select its functional form.

It has been a pleasure to work with the authors and their colleagues from Dalberg Research and TechnoServe, who have provided a valuable combination of analytical rigor grounded in solid practitioner experience. Our thanks also to the Mastercard Foundation for its commitment to support research and dialogue on new models of partnership, and to the MSIs and other colleagues who have provided us with useful feedback and insights. We hope this paper and its sister paper will make a useful contribution to the on-going debate and experimentation on how to make MSIs an effective tool for driving more inclusive and sustainable growth.

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Introduction

Multi-stakeholder Initiatives – When, Why, How

Multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) are vital in today's world. Indeed, these type of initiatives "may well be the best hope of identifying and supporting lasting solutions [to complex large-scale problems]", according to the World Bank's conference report entitled 'Increasing the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder initiatives through active collaboration'.[1] The past decade has seen a proliferation of MSIs and other forms of collective action, from diffuse systems of wide networks to tight public-private partnerships, aiming to tackle tough global problems like climate change, natural hazards, pandemic influenza, international drug trafficking, nuclear energy, and weapons. While MSIs are not the right tool for every problem, they provide a breadth and diversity of participation around shared system-level issues, as well as structured formats and governance structures to underpin concrete action towards change.

The increasing popularity of MSIs has given rise to greater analysis of the MSI as a tool and corresponding guidance on design and implementation. MSIs can be difficult and messy and some very useful guidance is available, particularly on topics like governance structures and effective implementation, as well as useful frameworks on types of MSIs. Those interested in further guidance on MSIs can look to the World Bank,[1] the Global Development Incubator[2] and many other organizations and experts.[3]

Despite this trend toward expanded analysis, very little was found on this report's initial question: "When are conditions right to launch an MSI in the first place?" Existing guidance also falls short on the issue of when an MSI is the right tool for the job.

Furthermore, what functional form an MSI can take was less clear than initially anticipated, which led to a related follow-on question for this study, which is: "If launching an MSI, what functional form should the MSI take?" The literature provides some good functional lists, but no consolidated framework for the functional roles MSIs can effectively play or what would help define and select the right role for an MSI. Clear definitional guidelines of the functional roles MSIs can take are needed, building on previous studies to further and more clearly elucidate *how* MSIs deliver their vision.

About this Study

This study used an evidence-based approach to address two related questions: "When are conditions right to launch an MSI?" and, "If launching an MSI, what function should the MSI serve?" The study was limited to one area of focus: climate change impacts on the future of smallholder farming in Africa and how multi-stakeholder collaboration, specifically MSIs, addressing at least some aspects of this issue were formed and designed.

While the scope is limited, this paper aims to use climate change and smallholder farming as a starting point to draw more general insights into the MSI format as a tool for complex, large-scale issues. Despite its limitations, this is the first example of a launch analysis on MSIs and a deeper analysis on MSI functional types, and therefore gives a broader understanding of this tool.

This study took a grounded theory approach; that is, the analysis was based on identifying emerging patterns in data, allowing for the generation of theories to explain those patterns, unlike a hypothesis based approach, for example, which seeks evidence to confirm an existing hypothesis. A broad list of characteristics was examined both to describe the stakeholder landscape just prior to the launch of an MSI and the functional characteristics chosen at launch. These characteristics included the level of issue awareness among relevant diverse stakeholder groups prior to the MSI launch, aims and objectives of the MSI, governance structure characteristics, and types of targets for impact/change. (See Table 1.)

Twelve existing MSIs (that most closely fit the definition of an MSI[4]), in the area of agriculture and climate change with a

focus on Africa were then analyzed to identify and draw out which characteristics were instrumental in assessing how the launch context defines the launch story of an MSI, and what elements would define the subsequent related functional design decisions. The 12 MSIs used for the case analysis are listed in Table 2. The analysis was based on desk research and key expert interviews with representatives from each MSI. The remainder of this report presents the results and deeper insights that emerged from this analysis.

- This study is one of two papers on this subject sponsored by the MasterCard Foundation, as described below.
- This paper looks at building a stronger understanding of the MSI tool, particularly in terms of the launch context and selected functional design by developing an evidence-based analytical framework and identifying a typological understanding of the MSI launch story and its functional form at launch.

The related paper looks at the issue of climate risks for smallholder farmers in Africa, where gaps exist in addressing these risks, and how MSIs in particular could better mitigate the risks through building greater resilience.

Note that the defining characteristics identified in the present paper were used for the analytical framework to assess the needs for MSI type collaborations in the related paper.

Table 1 **Characteristics assessed for each of the MSI case-examples**

FOCUS AREA	CHARACTERISTICS ASSESSED
1 **Launch Stories:** Characteristics prior to inception of the MSI	• Issue/challenge type at launch • Stakeholder awareness of the issue • Stakeholder alignment of incentives for collaboration around solutions • Degree of natural ownership to solve the issue • Who benefits from the issue being resolved • Source of triggers to take action • Hosting agent for the secretariat
2 **Functional typology:** Descriptors of the MSI's function from aims to structures	• Issue the MSI aims to address (if different from launch) • Theory of change • Scope • Driving agent • Core activities of the MSI • Governance structure • Organizational structures • Membership structure and requirements • Membership profiles • Funding structure

Table 2 **MSIs included in the study**

FOCUS	MSI NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	LEVEL
CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND AGRICULTURE	AFRICA CSA Alliance	**African Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance (ACSAA)** is a collaboration between international non-governmental organizations, research institutions, and governments, with the aim of scaling up climate smart agriculture (CSA) practices to improve food and livelihood security of smallholder farmers. ACSAA was launched in 2014 and is hosted by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Its key role is knowledge dissemination and facilitating the establishment of national CSA chapters.	Regional
	GACSA GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE	**Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture (GACSA)** is a voluntary alliance of partners aiming to scale up climate smart agricultural practices to address the challenges facing food security and agriculture under a changing climate. GACSA was launched in 2014 and is currently hosted by the FAO. Its main activities are driven by three action groups (knowledge, investment and enabling environment) which primarily put out guidance and knowledge.	Global
FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND AGRICULTURE	CGAP	**The Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP)** is a global partnership of 34 leading donor and funding organizations that seek to improve the lives of poor people by spurring innovations and advancing knowledge and solutions that promote financial inclusion. CGAP was established in 1995 and is housed at the World Bank. Its main activities are practical research and active engagement with financial service providers, policy makers, and funders to enable approaches at scale.	Global
	SMALLHOLDER FINANCE	**Initiative for Smallholder Finance (ISF)** is a multi-donor and investor platform for the development of financial services for the smallholder farmer market. The ISF was launched in 2013 and is housed at the Global Development Incubator. Its main activities include catalyzing specific transactions with partners, conducting targeted research and facilitating partnerships.	Global
	WFP World Food Programme wfp.org	The **Patient Procurement Platform (PPP)** is a pre-competitive consortium of public and private sector actors that aims to create efficient value chains to enhance farmer incomes. It is a holistic market-led initiative, that pulls together partners across the value chain, and focuses primarily on providing farmers with access to knowledge and access to credit. Whilst piloting of the model started in 2015, the PPP was officially launched in January 2016 and is driven by the United Nations World Food Programme.	National
YOUTH	Child&Youth Finance International	**Child and Youth Finance International (CYFI)** is an international network of government representatives, financial services providers, non-governmental organizations, private sector companies, academics, and educators who are committed to advancing the financial capabilities of children and youth. CYFI was established in April 2012 and is facilitated by its own organizational unit in Amsterdam, Netherlands. It focuses on raising awareness, convening stakeholders to share knowledge and collaborate, and coordinating research and intervention/solution design.	Global
	S4YE SOLUTIONS FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT	**Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE)** is a global coalition of public and private sector stakeholders working on youth employment that aims to mobilize efforts to engage 150 million youth in productive work by 2030. The S4YE was launched in October 2014 and is housed at the World Bank. The core activities of the S4YE include linking actors together, managing knowledge and generating lessons, and, in specific regions, leveraging resources for youth employment interventions at scale.	Global
	international youth foundation	**Via: Pathway to Work** (also known as VIA) is a five-year multi-stakeholder program that aims to improve economic opportunities for underserved youth in Tanzania and Mozambique by driving sustainable changes in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and entrepreneurship systems. VIA is led by the International Youth Foundation, in partnership with The MasterCard Foundation, and will be implemented in 2016.	National

Table 2 **MSIs included in the study** continued

FOCUS	MSI NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	LEVEL
GENERAL AGRICULTURE	CocoaAction	**CocoaAction** is a voluntary industry-led initiative that brings together the world's leading cocoa and chocolate companies to address regional priority issues hindering the sustainability of cocoa production. CocoaAction develops partnerships between governments, cocoa farmers, and the cocoa industry to boost productivity and strengthen community development in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Launched in May 2014, CocoaAction is the flagship initiative of the World Cocoa Foundation and is both housed in and governed by the World Cocoa Foundation.	Regional
	GROWAFRICA	**Grow Africa** is an African-owned multi-stakeholder platform that aims to increase inclusive and responsible investment in African agriculture by eliciting private sector investment in agriculture, and accelerating the execution and impact of investment commitments. The Grow Africa Partnership was founded jointly by the African Union, NEPAD and the World Economic Forum in 2011. As of 2016, Grow Africa is being hosted by NEPAD.	Regional
	World Cocoa Foundation	**The World Cocoa Foundation** is an international membership organization with 110 members (including the world's leading cocoa companies) that promotes sustainability in the cocoa sector by providing cocoa farmers with the support they need to grow more quality cocoa and strengthen their communities. World Cocoa Foundation was founded in 2000 and is facilitated by its own organizational unit in Washington, D.C.	Global
	YieldWise The Rockefeller Foundation	**YieldWise** is an initiative led by the Rockefeller Foundation which aims to demonstrate how the world can halve food loss by 2030 by integrating action from multiple stakeholders in the value chain and using cutting edge technology. Launched in 2016, the initiative will initially focus on fruits, vegetables, and staple crops in Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania.	National

1 SMALLHOLDER AGRICULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Smallholder agriculture is the most vulnerable link in global agricultural value chains when it comes to climate change. Climate change increases the likelihood of extreme weather events, which have devastating impacts on yields and affect traditional weather conditions, thus changing growing seasons, crop suitability, and even crops themselves (e.g., nutrition content). All of these risks threaten recent gains in productivity achieved by many smallholders and agribusiness partners, as well as threatens the prospects for future improvements. Four elements need to be addressed to improve the resilience of smallholder farming to climate change:

1) agricultural planning;
2) crop management and soil health;
3) financial and market chain resilience; and
4) next generation farming.

Although efforts are already underway, much more needs to be done. The broad range of stakeholders needed to take collective action on this issue offers scope for both existing and new MSIs to play an important role.

Part I Launch Story Typologies

When and why does an MSI get launched? A better understanding and articulation of the key prerequisite elements to launching an MSI can help stakeholder groups, in any context, to think about the potential need and relevance of an MSI.

The present study assessed whether existing characteristic launch stories for MSIs and contextual characteristics defined these key elements. Previous analyses of MSIs, such as a recent study by the Global Development Incubator, highlighted the need for both pragmatic launch requirements, such as funding and leadership, and contextual factors, such as an existing sense of urgency to act or a 'burning platform' (i.e., a critical mass of stakeholder interest) and some catalyzing event. While these characteristics are often in place when an MSI is launched, the present study has uncovered cases where not all of these factors were necessarily required. Thus, the present study has done a more nuanced analysis to try to better understand and articulate the complement of contextual factors that can lead to the launch of an MSI.

The findings of this study show that among the many and often interrelated contextual characteristics around a particular issue, only four define *when* an MSI is launched, and these can be present in three different configurations. The three distinct launch stories identified for MSIs are: 1) natural progression; 2) catalyst; and 3) call to action. (See Table 3.).

The four defining characteristics of when an MSI is launched are:

- Level of awareness and perceived importance of the issue
- The breadth of existing/natural ownership of the issue
- Level of momentum and alignment around collective action
- Presence of a trigger or catalyst.

Table 3 **Launch story typologies**

DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC	Natural Progression	Catalyst	Call to Action
Awareness and Importance The level of awareness and sense of importance of the issue across the full set of relevant stakeholder groups impacted by the issue. (High/Medium/Low)	High	Medium	Varies
Ownership/Leadership The breadth of obvious/natural or existing ownership/ responsibility to solve the issue, usually reflected in the number of organizations already actively engaged in addressing the issue in some way. (Broad/Mixed/Narrow)	Broad	Broad	Narrow
Momentum and Alignment The level of momentum or interest in and alignment across the full set of relevant stakeholder groups around the need for and willingness to contribute to multi-stakeholder collaboration to address the issue and advance solutions. (High/Medium/Low)	High	Medium	Low
Trigger/Catalyst What ultimately catalyzed the launch of the MSI. This almost always involves a leader, an entity, or a person who takes initial action, but the trigger is often something that enables the leader to drive the launch. (Critical Mass, Call to Action, Issue/Systems Leader).	Critical Mass	Event or Policy Shift	Issue/ Systems Leader

These characteristics are not a clean set of distinct factors in every case, but are often strongly related to one another. For example, if awareness of an issue is high and ownership is broad, it is not surprising that the trigger for an MSI would come from a critical mass of stakeholder interest (natural progression). However, in another scenario (catalyst), the characteristics are not related in the same way. Moderate awareness of the issue's importance and moderate level of momentum towards collective action may not have led to an MSI without some kind of external or event-type catalyst. By identifying and understanding these four characteristics and the patterns that lead to the launch of an MSI, MSI launch story typologies can be better understood and assessed.

CASE STUDY

1 THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE

Over the course of about four years, discussions between leading scientists, practitioners, donors, and governments around climate smart agriculture at the annual Conference on Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change and the United Nations Climate Summit were given increasing importance. A growing and shared sense emerged that knowledge and guidance that would benefit all was sorely missing, and that a joint initiative to address the problem was needed. Thus, the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture (GACSA) was officially launched at the United Nations Climate Summit in September 2014 with 46 members and core funding from the governments of the Netherlands and Italy.

NATURAL PROGRESSION – Generated from existing momentum around emergent issues, trends/opportunities, and collaborations

MSIs that fall into this category typically start when there are many stakeholders with a vested interest in the issue across different stakeholder groups, and at the same time no one obvious owner responsible for addressing the issue. Ownership is seen as shared and cross-cutting because no one stakeholder has sufficient incentive to invest alone since costs can be high and solutions will benefit all. In this scenario, the level of awareness, sense of importance, alignment, and momentum around collaboration are all high across most affected stakeholders. In practice, the sense of urgency to act may be felt more strongly among a core group of stakeholders who may already be taking action in the form of special interest groups, and it is often one or more from this group of organizations and individuals who volunteer to step-up to coordinate and drive the initiative in the first instance.

This launch story was called 'natural progression' because the launch of such MSIs seems a natural next step given the existing level of momentum around the issue, the way the issue is perceived and its level of importance across the many different stakeholder groups. These may even be spin-offs of other initiatives. Among the case examples, five MSIs were launched in a natural progression pattern, namely the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture, the Africa Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance, the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, Solutions for Youth Employment and the Initiative for Smallholder Finance.

CATALYST – Mobilized by a strong impetus to act, such as an event or new policy shift

MSIs that fall into this category typically start when a particular catalyst, such as bad press or a new policy or political shift, pushes stakeholders to respond. This catalyst may help push the issue over the tipping point in terms of how its importance is perceived, or it may give rise to a new perspective on an issue. In general, some stakeholders will already be highly interested, but at a discussion rather than action level due to the natural barriers of a lack of cross-cutting momentum. Such a catalyst needs to be sufficient to provide a strong impetus to act, in order to help those already interested to move to action and bring others around the table.

This launch story was called 'catalyst' because the launch of such MSIs responds to external pressure from an invested audience when the existing levels of awareness and importance and momentum and alignment are not high enough across the board to have led to an MSI through natural progression. Among the case examples, the World Cocoa Foundation and Grow Africa were launched in a catalyst pattern.

CASE STUDY

2 GROW AFRICA

Grow Africa was launched in 2011 in response to a call from high-level African leaders to increase investment in African agriculture. A core group of governments, companies, and development partners had recognized the potential of aligning private-sector investment with national plans for agricultural development and sought to elicit commitment from senior leaders in the public and private sector. Convened in partnership with the African Union and NEPAD, the World Economic Forum took initial ownership of the initiative based on its previous efforts and strong existing relationship with the private sector. Initially, seven African countries joined and efforts accelerated in January 2012 when the African Union asked Grow Africa to help generate company commitments for the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, a G8[5] initiative.

CALL TO ACTION – Mobilized and galvanized by a systems leader

MSIs that fall into this category typically start when a highly motivated and knowledgeable organization recognizes an under-attended issue or on-going gaps and pushes the issue forward by taking (initial) ownership over driving and coordinating collective action. While awareness and importance across stakeholder groups can be high or low in this case, the level of momentum and alignment behind taking coordinated action is typically low, and so an issue or systems leader must drive the MSI forward since other stakeholders are not ready. It is common, however, for the MSI to unleash a shared sense of momentum and commitment to collaborative action once it is up and running.

This launch story was called 'Call to Action' because it emerges out of the effort, or 'call,' from a strong initiating agent. Among the case examples, five MSIs were launched in a call to action pattern, namely YieldWise, the Patient Procurement Platform, CocoaAction, Child and Youth Finance International and Via: Pathway to Work.

CASE STUDY

3 YIELDWISE

YieldWise was launched in 2016 by the Rockefeller Foundation which recognized that food loss was an under-attended issue critical to global food security. YieldWise aims to build solutions by bridging gaps between stakeholder groups within the value chain ecosystem of different commodities in given regions. Furthermore, the program aims to use these solutions as demonstration projects for broader knowledge sharing and awareness building on the topic of food loss in agricultural value chains in Africa. The solutions are all multi-stakeholder initiatives, and Rockefeller plays the role of systems integrator, drawing in leading stakeholders and helping different stakeholder groups see the value of collaboration in ways that other actors in the same value chain are less able to do. Each demonstration project involves a level of re-engineering of the value chains of a particular commodity, specifically at the production end.

Launch Story Typologies Summary

MSIs can clearly emerge under varying conditions. The creation of an MSI depends precisely on the pattern of stakeholder perspectives (awareness, perceived importance), the level of alignment around the need for collaboration, and the existing ownership of, or responsibility for, the issue, as well as the presence of certain triggers in some cases. Beyond these contextual considerations, it will still take good leadership from one or a number of driving agents or system leaders working together and appropriate funding commitments to make a launch happen. What the launch typologies describe is the context in which such leaders can act as driving agents to get traction.

This analysis further suggests that if the contextual conditions do not match one of these typology patterns, then the potential for launching an MSI is low and an MSI is unlikely to be the right solution at that moment in time. Other forms of partnership or direct action may be more appropriate tools.

When there is a high level of awareness, perceived importance and alignment around the need for collaboration, as well as shared ownership of the issue, then the critical mass alone under the right leadership and with the right funding is sufficient to catalyze the launch of a successful MSI. When awareness, perceived importance and alignment are variable—high in some relevant groups and low in others, and moderate overall—and the issue still impacts the broad stakeholder community, then typically some kind of catalyst is needed to break through the barriers to an MSI collaboration. Finally, when momentum around the need for collective action is low across stakeholders and there is a natural owner of an issue that needs multi-stakeholder collaboration, then that natural owner must be very determined and tenacious to successfully call to action a critical mass of diverse stakeholders to get an MSI moving.

Part II Functional Types

In the process of launching an MSI, its aims, governance structures, and operational model need to be designed and defined. These are all elements of the MSI's function in terms of what it aims to accomplish and how.

Existing literature presents a number of roles or aims an MSI can fulfil, such as increasing awareness or strengthening industry practice, as well as some useful tests for whether an MSI's governance is functioning effectively and in line with the collaborative and representative principles that MSIs are designed to deliver. Some examples are shown in Table 4 and provide an illustration of useful frameworks and guideposts around function. However, little evidence on the assessment of functional typologies (i.e., operational functions or models) was found in the literature.

The functional typologies, which for the purposes of this report refer to the operational function or model of an MSI, can help stakeholders identify the core function of an MSI. This can be particularly useful at launch, when the nuances of the issue and the partnerships are still not established, as well as to plan how the MSI may need to evolve.

This study assessed the existence of characteristic functional typologies and what defines them. The findings show that among the many descriptive characteristics of an MSI's function, only three define its operational function, and these can be present in three patterns or functional types. Table 5 illustrates the defining characteristics and the typical patterns they present.

The defining characteristics are somewhat related to one another; for example, if the aims are around learning and sharing, a decentralized structure might be expected. Nonetheless, by identifying and understanding these three characteristics MSI functional typologies can be understood, and therefore more explicitly used, in the design stages of an MSI.

The three defining characteristics can be described as follows:

- Approach, or how the MSI will approach its aims
- Structure including how stakeholders are engaged and the MSIs operational mechanisms
- Theory of change to achieving impact at scale.

Approach

The approach describes the core function of the MSI, and the analysis looked at the approach of each case at its launch and in terms of its primary function.

Note, however, that this is not as simple as it may seem. An MSI may have several specific aims each with its own approach, and indeed building knowledge/learning is consistent across all (see section 'Insights, Recommendations and Conclusions' of this report). Some aims can also be achieved through using different approaches. For example, if one aim is political influence, this could be achieved by convening stakeholders to build deeper knowledge of the issue based on a broad experience set to then present a stronger case for policy change. This could also be achieved by developing clear point or systems-wide solutions and then using these to demonstrate the kind of policy responses required. As such, political influence is not sufficient to describe the core approach.

Structure

The structure can be centralized or decentralized. Decentralized typically involves convening and networking, such as through large annual conferences, global networks, or membership, while centralized structures are usually defined by a strong secretariat driving the generation of solutions.

Theory of change

This can be through creating a much greater volume of stakeholders who are better informed and equipped to address the issue and raising the level of practice, understanding, and influence. Change can also be achieved by unblocking critical gaps, whether they be specific technical barriers or broad systems-level alignment, to unleash the ecosystem to function better. A key part of the theory of change, in both cases, although more explicitly in the second, is the dissemination of knowledge and demonstration of success.

Table 4 **Sample of different MSI functional types described in the literature**

SOURCE	TYPES OF FUNCTIONS (AIMS/STRUCTURES)
What Makes MSIs Work?[6]	• Increasing awareness of specific challenges • Strengthening industry practice • Building a common framework for transparency • Advocating with a collective voice • Catalyzing new funding
How can you tell whether a MSI is a total waste of time?[7]	• Participation • Collective decision-making • Technical problem solving
How can you tell whether a MSI is a total waste of time?	• Representative • Deliberative • Collaborative

Table 5 **Functional typologies**

DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC	Convening and Sharing	Point Solutions Driver	Systems Integrator
*Approach** How the MSI will approach its aims, whether through building knowledge for learning and sharing or by identifying gaps and creating and/or driving solutions.	Learn/Share	Identify/Drive Solutions	Identify/Drive Solutions
Structure The structure refers to how stakeholders are involved and what distinctive mechanisms the MSI may have.	Decentralized	Centralized	Centralized
*Theory of Change*** The theory of change refers to how the MSI envisions achieving impact at scale.	Volume of better practice	Unblocking critical gaps	Aligning actors/ incentives

* All typically involve knowledge generation, convergence, or some level of research.
** All theories of change typically involve dissemination and/or demonstration. (See next section for details.)

CONVENING AND SHARING

MSIs that fall into this functional type are characterized by a focus on convening stakeholders and knowledge sharing. These MSIs typically offer a space for stakeholders across sectors to come together to connect, network, learn, and share knowledge and experience. MSIs may also lead to direct knowledge development through curating information, identifying knowledge gaps, researching key issues, and disseminating knowledge among members or participants.

An MSI of this type often has a decentralized structure, with working groups that lead on themes or activities, a secretariat that predominantly coordinates/convenes and disseminates information, and large fora, such as annual meetings and conferences. Within this functional type, some MSIs are more focused on convening and let knowledge building happen through networking and sharing and working groups, while others are more focused specifically on active knowledge capture, generation and dissemination driven by the secretariat.

This functional typology was called 'convening and sharing' because it is primarily focused on connecting stakeholders for the purpose of sharing knowledge and learning to ultimately drive better practice, better policies, and/or better investments. Among the case examples, six MSIs are convening and sharing types, namely the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture, the Africa Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance, the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, Solutions for Youth Employment, Child and Youth Finance International and Grow Africa.

POINT SOLUTIONS DRIVER

MSIs that fall into this functional type are characterized by using a systems level lens to identify gaps and opportunities and drive specific point-based solutions through multi-stakeholder partnerships. In this functional type, innovative action, possibly including new technologies, programs, or behaviors, are pursued by key stakeholders to unblock barriers and often to also demonstrate that solutions to specific challenges are possible. Demonstration projects can then serve to crowd in others. An MSI of this type often has a centralized structure, with a strong and knowledgeable secretariat and support from an advisory group or committee, which can mobilize initiatives.

This group was called 'point solutions driver' as it describes the core functionality. Among the case studies, three are point solutions drivers, namely the World Cocoa Foundation, CocoaAction, and the Initiative for Smallholder Finance.

CASE STUDY

4 AFRICA CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE ALLIANCE

Launched by NEPAD in 2014, the Africa Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance (ACSAA) aims to "rapidly scale-up the adoption of climate-smart agriculture practices to improve food and livelihood security" by establishing a collaborative platform for knowledge sharing, and the identification, design, and implementation of the most efficient and effective climate-smart agriculture programs. As part of its mandate, ACSAA facilitates, through workshops, the creation of national CSA chapters, to actively broker national level partnerships and support member-led implementation of interventions. ACSAA is formed of 14 partners, including international non-governmental organizations, regional African political institutions, and technical agencies, and its national chapters are comprised of leading representatives from various sectors.

CASE STUDY

5 THE INITIATIVE FOR SMALLHOLDER FINANCE

Established in 2013, the Initiative for Smallholder Finance (ISF) seeks to address the gap between smallholder finance supply and demand by facilitating the development of innovative solutions through partnerships and directing interested stakeholders toward concrete investment opportunities. For example, ISF is working with the United Nations World Food Programme, Rabobank, and the International Finance Corporation to design a shared risk fund for the Patient Procurement Platform. The intention is that a large obstacle to private sector investment in smallholder farming will be unblocked, potentially catalyzing additional investment. ISF's core activity hinges on the driving expertise of the facilitation unit, which identifies gaps and opportunities and conducts targeted research and/or catalyzes specific transactions.

SYSTEMS INTEGRATOR

This functional type is characterized by taking a systems level view, specifically at misalignment among the ecosystem of players and helping to unblock those barriers. Much like solutions drivers, systems integrators are looking to bridge gaps to unblock progress. But a systems integrator has more of an intermediary role, helping to identify the barriers to different stakeholders across a whole ecosystem, and close those gaps by bridging misalignment between the different stakeholder groups so that the ecosystem can function. As such, these MSIs also have centralized structures as well as a strong and knowledgeable secretariat.

This group was called 'systems integrators' as it describes the core functionality of the MSI. Among the case studies, both the Patient Procurement Platform and YieldWise are examples of systems integrator MSIs.

CASE STUDY

6 PATIENT PROCUREMENT PLATFORM

Officially launched in January 2016, the United Nations World Food Programme's Patient Procurement Platform (PPP) seeks to address the lack of coordinated action between stakeholders in the maize value chain and, ultimately, to improve the incomes of smallholder farmers. Through establishing a pre-competitive platform, the PPP aims to align incentives across stakeholders and demonstrate the impact and scalability of their long-term buyer contracts model. The platform's core activities are led by the World Food Programme, which mobilizes commitment from in-country value chain actors, convenes and manages partners, and identifies and develops specific financing solutions.

Functional Types Summary

In practice, of course, MSIs and their functional roles are complex and sometimes multi-dimensional, and are neither fixed nor mutually exclusive. Indeed, MSIs often learn and evolve their functional type over time. As knowledge and understanding of the issues grow deeper, a convening and sharing MSI, for example, may expand its mandate to act to address specific point-based solutions that can unblock barriers. More often, MSIs make this kind of change from convener to point solutions driver, rather than the other way around, but it would not be inappropriate to make that shift either. Ultimately, stakeholders engaged in driving point solutions may realize they cannot be successful in sustaining change unless the entire system changes and they evolve their MSI into a systems integrator.

There are some limitations to the functional typology terminology introduced here. For example, a convening and sharing MSI, which typically convenes stakeholders or creates stakeholder networks for meetings and exchange, may also support working groups looking at particular issues. Working groups may advance knowledge through convening and sharing, or could focus on developing a solution to a specific gap. Hybrid approaches are possible, and indeed evolution of approach is probable, but at the outset one central approach is what we have observed.

Most importantly, the labeling of an MSI as one functional type or another, or indeed a combination, is far less important than recognizing the power of the terminology introduced in this paper. Such terminology helps create a common language and provides a framework for decision-making and alignment. These typologies are particularly useful both at the launch phase of an MSI, to help stakeholder groups have a shared understanding around the approach the MSI will take and to think ahead about an MSI's functional evolution.

Insights, Recommendations and Conclusion

Insights

It is hoped that this study has filled a gap in the current understanding of the MSI as a tool. It has put forward the clear contextual conditions required to launch an MSI. Furthermore, the study suggests that if these conditions are not in place, an MSI is unlikely to be the right answer at that point in time. While this study looked at the question in the abstract, an additional consideration when exploring the potential for a new MSI should be the current landscape or map of other existing activities and presence of existing MSIs already active around a particular issue, including the extent to which existing MSIs can be strengthened or evolved to deepen issue engagement or take on additional issues, or whether new and complementary MSIs are required.

This study has also identified a set of functional typologies that define the kinds of core roles MSIs can fill, regardless of the various aims of the MSI within its working groups. No link was found between the launch story typology and the functional type, except in the case of the *systems integrator*. The systems integrator emerges from a catalyst or call to action but not from natural progression as observed to date.

While this report has generalized about how to assess the appropriateness of an MSI around a given issue, the level of awareness, importance, and alignment around an issue will also depend on the clarity and specificity of the issue itself. Take YieldWise as an example. The issue of food loss in agricultural value chains is specific, tangible, and its universe is relatively easy to grasp for a given commodity and region. The attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders can readily be assessed, and mobilizing people does not require long explanations of the area of focus or envisioned shared benefits of unblocking the issue. Yet, in the case of YieldWise, a lack of understanding between stakeholders on the actual losses along their agricultural supply chains, and more importantly the potential gains of addressing these losses, meant there was not a natural owner within the system actors. So, until the Rockefeller Foundation drew system players' attention to the issue and played a very proactive role in building alignment, collective action was not forthcoming.

The focus area of the present set of studies—climate impact on smallholder farmers in Africa—is too broad an area to assess to easily build a sense of momentum around it and expect diverse stakeholders to readily get on board. The analysis of that issue has, therefore, been broken down into four sub-issues: 1) agricultural planning; 2) crop management and soil health; 3) financial and market chain resilience; and 4) next generation farmers. Further, that study looks for themes within those areas where gaps remain and blockages to resilience for smallholders as the domains in which MSIs can be helpful. Please refer to the partner report, *The role of multi-stakeholder initiatives in promoting the resilience of smallholder agriculture to climate change in Africa*, for more details.

Multi-stakeholder Initiatives are learning mechanisms

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that this study observed a consistent theme around the role of MSIs as learning mechanisms. Regardless of functional typology, all the MSI examples assessed for this study had a core activity around knowledge development. Knowledge development with *convening and sharing* MSIs is at least through the sharing exchanges that raise the level of knowledge across the board, and can also involve working groups with specific topics for exploration and even direct execution or commissioning of research by the secretariat. For both *solutions driver* and *systems integrator* MSIs, there is an imperative to understand the blockages at an ecosystem level which requires study to deepen the understanding around gaps and misalignments. Indeed, some of these MSIs evolve after an organization or group of collaborating organizations conduct studies and analyses that uncover the key barriers and highlight the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Part of the learning journey also drives the evolution of the MSI, mentioned earlier in this report under the functional typologies section. As an extension to the functional typologies discussion, this study also observed that MSIs not only evolve in terms of their functions, but can give rise to other MSIs or other types of partnerships, especially when the initial MSI is quite broad and collective action is needed in a particular focal area. Such action engines may emerge from working groups that were part of the umbrella MSI, or may be more formally launched as spin-off MSIs when there is a need for a distinct set of actors and functions to be established. Often such a need becomes clear as knowledge and understanding of the issue grows deeper and more nuanced. Further, such action engines can act as vital feedback mechanisms through which specific approaches can be tested, evaluated, documented, and shared. A good example of this is World Cocoa Foundation and CocoaAction described in Case Study 7, below.

CASE STUDY

7 WORLD COCOA FOUNDATION and CocoaAction

The World Cocoa Foundation's early experiences of leading the Cocoa Livelihoods Program and the African Cocoa Initiative highlighted a misalignment between industry stakeholders when it came to building more effective delivery-focused partnerships. As such, the World Cocoa Foundation launched CocoaAction to align incentives and provide a framework under which best practices are developed, tested, and shared for industry-wide learning. CocoaAction could be called an action engine under the umbrella of the World Cocoa Foundation. Its work involves specific sub-groups of companies and other stakeholders participating in delivery partnerships around issues, such as the availability of planting materials, availability of fertilizers, and soil fertility, and greater inclusion of female farmers.

Recommendations

It is recommended that these two frameworks, the launch story typology and the functional typology, are used as tools at the outset of any exploration into the appropriateness of an MSI when addressing a particular issue. This was indeed the motivation for conducting this study, which looked at the impact of climate change on the resilience of smallholder farmers, and asked, "Is an MSI the answer?" Although the issue is clearly a multi-stakeholder one, it was not clear that the MSI mechanism was necessarily appropriate to its constituent challenges. MSIs are not the tool for every multi-stakeholder problem, as many MSI reports agree and the findings of this study reinforce.

Further, while existing guidance on what makes an MSI work in implementation and practice focus on critical factors around leadership, governance and shared ownership, and so on, this study has identified two important additions. The first, that the success of an MSI will be proportionate to the degree to which it has a specified pathway to action. This is an observation that reinforces similar points in the existing literature. Second, is a new distinction around the learning agenda. MSIs with a clear learning agenda appear to have greater success in advancing the issue they are focusing on.

Conclusions

Those interested in launching, working with and/or strengthening MSIs and their utility would benefit from using the defining characteristics for stakeholder context (awareness/importance, existing ownership, momentum/alignment, and trigger) and function (approach, structure, and theory of change), alongside other guidance, to ensure a stronger assessment of the appropriateness of an MSI and its function.

Furthermore, these characteristics can help create a shared and common language among the driving agents and lead partners to gain a better understanding of what MSIs

can do, and under what conditions MSIs can emerge and should be utilized as tools to solve complex problems. System leaders should think carefully about what MSIs can and cannot do. MSIs are not always the right tool for complex multi-stakeholder challenges at a given point in time. They have specific core functions that define their foundations from which other aims can also be achieved, but the core functions are what makes the specific type of MSI appropriate (or not).

Finally, further research is required to assess the typologies across multiple issue areas and to better understand how best to use the MSI tool, with a view to better implementation and impact. A similar assessment of other important themes, such as pathways to impact and the role (and benefits) of learning and knowledge sharing, would be a useful study with ready application.

Endnotes

1 World Bank Group (2014). *Increasing the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder initiatives through active collaboration*. Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Wilton Park.

2 Global Development Incubator (2015) *More than the sum of its parts: Making Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives Work*. [pdf] City: New York and Washington D.C. Available at: http://globaldevincubator.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Making-MSIs-Work.pdf

3 See, for example, Miller-Dawkins, M. (2014) *How can you tell whether a Multi-Stakeholder Initiative is a total waste of time?* [Blog] Oxfam Blogs. Available at: https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/how-can-you-tell-whether-a-multi-stakeholder-initiative-is-a-total-waste-of-time/ [Accessed June 2016]

4 For the purposes of this paper, an MSI is defined as: a structured collaborative action between multiple actors from different sectors with inherently different interests, through which stakeholders come together to address an issue that is common to all, typically delivering 'collective good'.

5 The Group of Eight Industrialized Nations – France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, the United States, Canada, and Russia.

6 Global Development Incubator (2015) *More than the sum of its parts: Making Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives Work*. [pdf] City: New York and Washington D.C. Available at: http://globaldevincubator.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Making-MSIs-Work.pdf.

7 Miller-Dawkins, M (2014) *How can you tell whether a Multi-Stakeholder Initiative is a total waste of time?* [Blog] Oxfam Blogs. Available at: https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/how-can-you-tell-whether-a-multi-stakeholder-initiative-is-a-total-waste-of-time/.

About the Corporate Responsibility Initiative (CRI)

The Corporate Responsibility Initiative (CRI) at the Harvard Kennedy School's Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government (M-RCBG) is a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder program that seeks to study and enhance the public contributions of private enterprise. The initiative explores the intersection of corporate responsibility, corporate governance, and public policy, with a focus on analyzing institutional innovations that help to implement the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, enhance governance and accountability and achieve key international development goals. It bridges theory and practice, builds leadership skills, and supports constructive dialogue and collaboration among business, government, civil society and academics. Founded in 2004, the CR Initiative works with a small Corporate Leadership Group consisting of global companies that are leaders in the fields of corporate responsibility, sustainability or creating shared value. The Initiative also works with other leading corporate responsibility and sustainability organizations, government bodies, non-governmental organizations, foundations and companies to leverage innovative policy research and examples of good practice in this field.

CRInitiative.org
www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/mrcbg/programs/cri

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