

8. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: Implications for Evaluation Practice, Methods and Capacities

ANGELA BESTER

Independent Evaluation Consultant
South Africa

LEON HERMANS

Assistant Professor, Policy Analysis
Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands

INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for multi-stakeholder partnerships for achieving the goals of the Agenda (the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)). Multi-stakeholder approaches to development are not new, and the SDGs seek to renew and strengthen the emphasis on multi-stakeholder approaches. The importance of promoting diverse partnerships and greater cooperation between governments, civil society, parliaments and the private sector to increase awareness and use of evaluations was also one of the key messages from the National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) Conference 2015.

Multi-stakeholder approaches to development come with a number of complexities and challenges. NEC 2017 sought to explore the following questions:

- What do evaluators understand about multi-stakeholder partnerships and approaches?
- What does this mean for evaluation practice? Are our current methodologies and approaches appropriate for dealing with the complexities of multi-stakeholder approaches?
- What capacities do we need to evaluate multi-stakeholder approaches?
- What tools are at our disposal?

These questions were explored in two workshops at the conference.²¹² This paper reflects on the discussions in these workshops, and on the implications of multi-stakeholder approaches for evaluation practice and evaluation capacities in the SDG era.

212 Workshop 1: Multi-stakeholder partnerships for achieving SDGs – Implications for evaluation practice, and Session 26: Multi-stakeholder partnerships and the SDGs: Analytical approaches for their evaluation.

WHAT ARE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS?

Within the context of development, multi-stakeholder partnerships can be defined as voluntary initiatives involving governments, intergovernmental bodies, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in pursuit of a common goal or commitment. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can exist at local, national, regional and global or transnational levels. Multi-stakeholder partnerships vary in scope, from large-scale global initiatives to smaller local initiatives. They may have many partners or a small number of partners. Other terms used are “multi-stakeholder initiatives”, “multi-stakeholder platforms” and “multi-stakeholder approaches”.

Hematti and Dodds²¹³ suggest that to avoid confusion, it is preferable to talk of “multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development”. They define these as “... specific commitments and contributions, undertaken together by various partners intended to support the implementation of transformation towards sustainable development and help achieve the SDGs and other relevant sustainable agreements”.²¹⁴

Multi-stakeholder partnerships use a multi-stakeholder approach and aim to be inclusive of all relevant stakeholders, those who influence decisions as well as those affected by the decisions. Public-private partnerships involving contracting out government services to the private sector. Build-operate-transfer models do not fall within the definition of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Partnerships for sustainable development are not new. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002) emanating from the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), for example, saw Member States commit themselves to partnerships to mobilizing financial and non-financial resources, including capacity development and technology transfer.

The Bali Guiding Principles on Partnerships that were formulated in the preparations for the WSSD identified a multi-stakeholder approach to partnerships as one of the guiding principles for the WSSD:

“Partnerships should have a multi-stakeholder approach and preferably involve a range of significant actors in a given area of work. They can be arranged among any combination of partners, including governments, regional groups, local authorities, non-governmental actors, international institutions and private sector partners. All partners should be involved in the development of a partnership from an early stage, so that it is genuinely participatory in approach. Yet as partnerships evolve, there should be an opportunity for additional partners to join on an equal basis.”

213 Hemmati, M. and F. Dodds, Principles and Practices of Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development – Guidance and Oversight from UN Decisions, March 2017, <http://friendsofgovernance.org/index.php/papers/background-paper-for-session-1-principles-and-practices-of-multi-stakeholder-partnerships-for-sustainable-development-guidance-and-oversight-from-un-decisions/>.

214 Ibid.

PERSPECTIVES FROM NATIONAL EVALUATION PRACTITIONERS

The workshop on multi-stakeholder partnerships asked participants to share their understanding of such partnerships: how they would define them, their relevance for development and to provide examples of multi-stakeholder partnerships at national, regional and global levels.

“Collaboration” was the word most workshop participants used to define multi-stakeholder partnerships. They saw multi-stakeholder partnerships as collaboration amongst a range of institutions that included government, civil society, the private sector and international development agencies and development partners, to achieve development results or a common development objective. One participant’s definition captured the views expressed by many others—a multi-stakeholder partnership is “...collaboration of different institutions (non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia, donors, government) to achieve a particular goal. It may entail doing joint planning, financing and monitoring & evaluation”.

Workshop participants identified a narrow range of examples of multi-stakeholder partnerships. The example most commonly cited was the partnership between governments and United Nations agencies as reflected in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. There were examples of national multi-stakeholder partnerships for specific purposes, namely, HIV and AIDS and post-conflict reconstruction. There were also examples of multi-stakeholder partnerships at district and local/village levels in the area of health. When citing examples of multi-stakeholder partnerships at regional level, there was a tendency on the part of workshop participants to conflate intergovernmental bodies, for example the African Union, the Association of South East Asian Nations and the European Union, with multi-stakeholder partnerships.

In discussions about why multi-stakeholder partnerships mattered or the value/relevance of multi-stakeholder partnerships for the SDGs, the following themes emerged:

1. **The complexity and interconnectedness of the SDGs** were a recurring theme among workshop participants. They felt that the issues were complex and could not be addressed effectively by a single actor or single institution. Although they acknowledged that development has always been a complex matter, they believed that the SDGs, given their interconnectedness or indivisibility, increased the complexity.
2. **Coordination:** Against this backdrop of complexity and interconnectedness of the SDGs, workshop participants saw multi-stakeholder partnerships as mechanisms for coordination amongst organizations and sectors, so that programmes and actions are harmonized for greater impact and for greater efficiency in the use of resources. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are seen to cut across the silo approach that often characterizes development efforts.
3. **Mobilizing resources and expertise** was another theme that emerged from the workshop discussion. Several participants saw multi-stakeholder partnerships as vehicles for mobilizing resources from a range of partners. Multi-stakeholder partnerships were also seen to serve as a platform for sharing knowledge and expertise among partners.

4. **Inclusiveness** was another theme that emerged from the workshop discussion. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are vehicles for inclusiveness, ensuring that no one is left behind, especially vulnerable groups. The inclusive nature of multi-stakeholder partnerships was seen to promote transparency and give credibility to development initiatives.

ANALYTICAL APPROACHES FOR EVALUATING MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACHES

Implication of multi-stakeholder partnerships for evaluation processes and methods

Multi-stakeholder partnerships have several important implications for evaluators. Some implications have to do with the role of evaluators and the evaluation as a more participatory and inclusive process, conducted by a multi-stakeholder team and with private sector involvement. Other implications have to do with the analytical methods required. A multi-stakeholder partnership essentially consists of multiple stakeholders who agree to work in partnership towards a common goal. An analytical assessment of the impacts and workings of these partnerships therefore requires methods that can adequately deal with their multi-stakeholder nature. This was the topic of a second workshop during NEC 2017.

In evaluation, the dominant approach is to use impact evaluations based on linear results chains, typically a causal chain that connects input-output-outcome-impact. If we use such a linear causal chain to evaluate multi-stakeholder partnerships, we quickly encounter stakeholders somewhere in this results chain. A first question for evaluators therefore is: when can we treat this stakeholder component as part of a linear chain, and when does it get more complicated?

Arguably, things get more complicated when more stakeholders are involved, who depend on each other's resources and expertise over a longer period of time. When stakeholders interact over longer periods of time, they get to know each other, they learn about each other's capabilities and they often start anticipating each other's responses. Obviously, such conditions apply to many, if not all, multi-stakeholder partnerships.

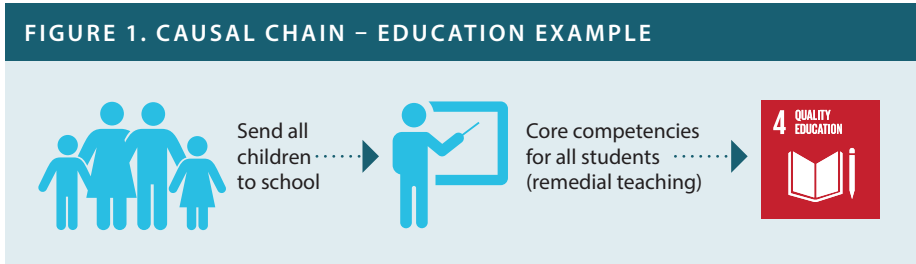
From linear impact models to multi-stakeholder models

A very small step from linear causal chains is to put the actor interactions on a linear causal chain. If one actor does A, then who is, in our theory of change, required to respond? If one does A, we depend on someone else to do B. But what else could they do? And what are they likely to do?

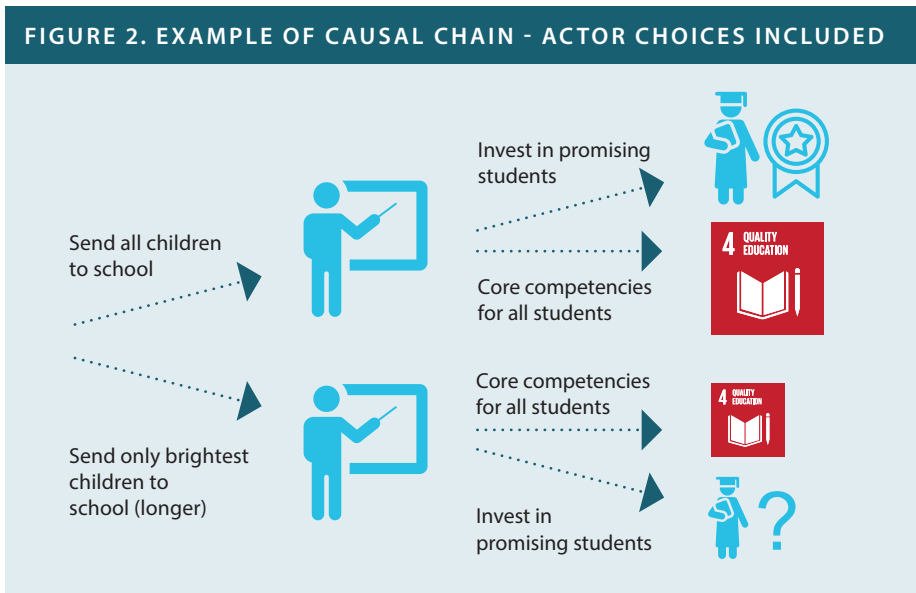
During the workshop, we looked at an illustrative example, offering another perspective on a chapter on education in the seminal book by Banerjee and Duflo.²¹⁵ One of the insights described in this text is that contrary to popular belief, it is best if families send all their

215 Banerjee, A. V. and E. Duflo, *Poor economics: A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty*, Public Affairs, 2011.

children to school, valuing every year of schooling equally. Another piece of insight is into the benefits of remedial teaching, whereby efforts are made to ensure that all students gain certain core competencies. This leads to a partial causal chain, which for the sake of illustration is kept simple, as shown in Figure 1.



If we apply our actor-oriented reasoning to this causal chain, we will realize that both stakeholders have alternative options. Teachers, who face limitations in resources and time, with large classes of students and low salaries, may also choose to concentrate their efforts on the brightest students, who are most likely to succeed in later academic careers. This is probably a more rewarding success experience for teachers. Anticipating such choices from teachers, parents may indeed do wise to only send their brighter children to schools (Figure 2). The resulting logic explains the results, or better, the *non-results*, described by Banerjee and Duflo.²¹⁶ In fact, it is a typical example of a social dilemma, where two parties jointly create an outcome that is not favoured by any of them. If we understand the structure that produces these non-results, we



216 Ibid.

can look more systemically for ways to change the incentives or the choices for the stakeholders involved, to alter the likely outcomes towards more preferred ones. In this example, we are in effect using game theory, constructing a game tree or a game in extensive form.

ANALYTICAL METHODS TO EVALUATE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PROCESSES

Game theory, contrary to what the name might suggest, is not so much a theory but an analytical method. Besides game theory, there are several other methods we can use to evaluate multi-stakeholder partnerships. They all share, or at least can be positioned within, the same conceptual framework. Essentially, the outcomes of actor interactions can be better understood and analysed if we take into account four key elements. We need to understand what interests and motivates actors. What are their goals and objectives, what are their values? We need to understand the power and influence of actors—their resources. Also, it helps to understand how actors reason and how they perceive a certain situation. These perceptions might differ from one actor to another. And finally, the network of existing relations and the rules that structure them are of key importance.²¹⁷

Translated to multi-stakeholder partnerships, this means that evaluation methods should distinguish between outcomes that are of interest to different stakeholders. Also, since partnerships are seen as a way to mobilize resources and expertise, evaluations should assess the resource and expertise contributed by different partners, and the role these have played in establishing impacts. Furthermore, in partnerships, relations and strengthening relations might be as important as delivering specific outputs. In fact, for some partnerships, the relationships might be the outcome that is being aimed for.

Table 1 shows how different methods help to understand actor interactions from different angles. Many of these methods, as well as very similar methods, have been applied by evaluators before.²¹⁸ However, they are not yet part of the mainstream toolkit of most evaluators. When it comes to evaluating multi-stakeholder partnerships, they could be used more often. Not just to assess the impacts of these partnerships, but especially to learn why they are working well, or what bottlenecks exist that prevent them from realizing their true potential. Good resources for further learning about these methods are available by now.²¹⁹

In addition to skilled evaluators, the use of such methods also requires the commissioners of evaluations to recognize such methods as valuable additions and to request evaluations that go beyond the more traditional assessments of impacts and results. During NEC

217 Hermans, L.M. and S.W. Cunningham, with M. De Reuver and J. Timmermans, *Actor and Strategy Models: Practical Applications and Step-wise Approaches*, John Wiley & Sons, 2018.

218 Leeuw, F. L., 'Reconstructing program theories: Methods available and problems to be solved', *American Journal of Evaluation*, 24(1), 5-20, 2013; Cross, J. E., E. Dickmann, R. Newman-Gonchar and J.M. Fagan, 'Using mixed-method design and network analysis to measure development of interagency collaboration', *American Journal of Evaluation*, 30(3), 310-329, 2009; Hermans, L., S. Cunningham and J. Slinger, 'The usefulness of game theory as a method for policy evaluation', *Evaluation*, 20(1), 10-25, 2014; Lahdelma, T. and S. Laakso, 'Network analysis as a method of evaluating enterprise networks in regional development projects', *Evaluation*, 22(4), 435-450, 2016.

219 For instance, see Hermans et al., 2018.

2017, several speakers in other sessions also argued for evaluations that would help to adapt, not to predict; for evaluations that would aim for learning; and evaluations that would help to explain non-results. For these types of evaluations, the use of actor models and actor analysis methods seems essential when it comes to multi-stakeholder platforms.

TABLE 1. OVERVIEW OF ACTOR ANALYSIS METHODS FOR EVALUATION

FOCUS	METHOD	TYPICAL USES
Values and objectives	Value-focused thinking	Identifying values held by different actors in partnerships addressing ill-structured problems.
	Preference elicitation, Analytic Hierarchy Process	Assessing actor preferences in relatively well-structured decision problems.
Resources (power dynamics)	Analysis of options, conflict graphs	Conflicts with multiple actors, relatively ill structured.
	Extensive games (game trees)	Relatively well-structured conflict situations. Situations where information of actors about each other's actions requires attention.
	Cooperative game theory (coalitions)	Cooperation and coalition analysis in relatively well-structured arenas.
	Transactional analysis	Negotiation in ill-structured arenas.
Perceptions (causal assumptions)	Comparative cognitive mapping	Identifying and comparing beliefs on "theories of change" across different stakeholders.
	Argumentative analysis	Debates, disagreement about joint action or decisions.
Relations	Social network analysis	Structures of relations in larger networks of actors. Information flows, collaboration patterns.

Source: Based on L. Hermans & S. Cunningham 2018

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The topic of multi-stakeholder partnerships and their implications for evaluation practice is vast, and the two workshops were hopefully a starting point for reflecting on the topic in greater detail in other forums. We offer the following reflections for further exploration by evaluation practitioners and those who commission and manage evaluations.

Methods and tools to evaluate complexity: Multi-stakeholder partnerships introduce greater complexity, and evaluators require methods and tools to suited to evaluating complexity. There are several existing tools and methods that have been used in social research that are not necessarily in the mainstream of evaluation practice. Evaluators should be open to experimenting with less conventional tools and methods for evaluating multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Not all partners are equal in a multi-stakeholder partnership, even though this might be a stated intention of the multi-stakeholder partnership. Not all partners have an equal voice

or feel that they have an equal voice in the partnership. Some partners are better resourced than others and dominate the partnership. Multi-stakeholder partnerships have the potential to further disempower less-resourced partners. For example, private sector partners may be better resourced than their civil society counterparts, and hence better able to participate in the multi-stakeholder. Power is also distributed unevenly within the same sector. For example, large international and national NGOs tend to be better resourced than community-based organizations and more likely to be “heard” by government. Evaluators need to understand power dynamics in multi-stakeholder partnerships. They will need tools for power analysis in these partnerships. Evaluators will also need political astuteness and facilitative skills to navigate the political complexities, in addition to their skills in evaluation methodology.

Understanding the private sector: The workshops identified the private sector as an important partner in multi-stakeholder partnerships for the SDGs. It is likely that many government evaluators have limited knowledge or experience of working in the private sector. The private sector is heterogenous and has a different discourse and “rules of the game” from the public sector. Government evaluators will need to develop their capacities in engaging with and evaluating private sector contributions to the SDGs.

Inclusive evaluations: Evaluation practice will need to be more inclusive than has generally been the case to date. If evaluating a multi-stakeholder initiative or partnership, evaluators need to involve all relevant stakeholders from the outset. And those commissioning evaluations should ensure that inclusiveness begins with preparing the terms of reference for the evaluation. Reference groups or steering committees for evaluations would need to be inclusive of stakeholders, beyond government, and include civil society, the private sector and other non-State actors.

Multi-stakeholder approaches to evaluations: We may begin to see multi-stakeholder approaches to the evaluations, that is, evaluations as multi-stakeholder partnerships. For example, evaluation teams could include evaluators from civil society, the private sector, government and development partners. Are we able to develop a common evaluation language for evaluators from diverse sectors with diverse and divergent interests?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Beisheim, Marianne and Nils Simon, ‘Multi-stakeholder partnerships for implementing the 2030 Agenda: Improving accountability and transparency’, Independent analytical paper commissioned by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016, <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/2016doc/partnership-forum-beisheim-simon.pdf>.

Brockmyer, B. and J. Fox, *Assessing the evidence: The effectiveness and Impact of Public Governance-Oriented Multi-stakeholder Initiatives*, Transparency and Accountability Initiative of the Open Society Foundation, September 2015.

Dodds, Felix, ‘Multi-stakeholder partnerships: Making them work for the Post-2015 Development Agenda’, www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/pdf15/2015partnerships_background_note.pdf.

- Fowler, Alan and Kees Biekart, Multi-stakeholder initiatives for Sustainable Development Goals: The importance of interlocutors, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pad.1795/epdf>.
- Gleckman, Harris. 'Multi-stakeholder governance: A corporate push for a new form of global governance, State of Power', 2016, <https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/state-of-power-2016-chapter5.pdf>.
- Hemmati, Minu and Felix Dodds, *High-quality Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for Implementing the SDGs*. New Frontiers Publishing, August 2016.
- International Civil Society Centre, 'MSPs: Building Blocks for Success (by Pattberg & Widerberg)', Berlin: ICSC, 2014, https://icscentre.org/downloads/14_10_02_Multi-Stakeholder_Partnerships.pdf.
- Kusters, Koen, Louise Buck, Maartje de Graaf, Peter Minang, Cora van Oosten and Roderick Zagt, Participatory Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation of MultiStakeholder Platforms in Integrated Landscape Initiatives, <http://edepot.wur.nl/412341>.
- Martens, Jens, Multi-stakeholder Partnerships – Future models of Multilateralism? Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2007, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/04244.pdf>.
- Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: issue paper published by Global Knowledge Partnership, published by Overseas Development Institute (United Kingdom) and Foundation for Development Cooperation (Australia) 2003, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/2117.pdf>.
- Truex, R. and T. Soreide, 'Why multi-stakeholder groups succeed and fail', Policy research working paper 5495, World Bank Sustainable Development Network, December 2010.
- van Huijstee, Mariëtte, 'Multi-stakeholder initiatives: A strategic guide for civil society organizations, Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations,' March 2012.