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## Promises Kept?

### The Issue of Accountability in Multistakeholder Partnerships

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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last three decades, transnational multistakeholder partnerships (MSPs) have become key actors in financing and delivering the global sustainable development agenda.

Yet, with limited oversight and accountability, MSPs are found to run the risk of eroding aid effectiveness, reinforcing donor conditionalities and promoting financialised instruments that privatise development.

To minimise these risks, common reporting standards and peer-to-peer review and learning systems need to be developed.

## The promise

Multistakeholder partnerships (MSPs) bring together donor countries, developing countries, the private sector, philanthropy, and civil society (Figure 1). MSPs emerged as an alternative to initiatives to finance and deliver sustainable development.

While many MSPs are local and small-scale, there are also transnational MSPs with global reach and considerable resources, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Gavi-The Vaccine Alliance, Global Environment Facility (GEF) or Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN).

Transnational MSPs manage substantial financial resources, including public resources provided by donor and developing countries. They also carry out development interventions and programmes that impact the daily lives of many people. Transnational MSPs make **three key promises**:

- **Access to long-term resources.** Promising the ability to bring together multiple donors and make resources available as long-term financing solutions to global challenges.
- **Targeted financing.** Claiming they can channel resources into specific developmental issue areas, e.g., healthcare, education, or biodiversity conservation, that may not be adequately financed by developing countries' own resources or bilateral donor-partner relationships.
- **Responsiveness.** Advocates of MSPs routinely refer to their transformative potential and agility in responding to long-term needs as well as crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

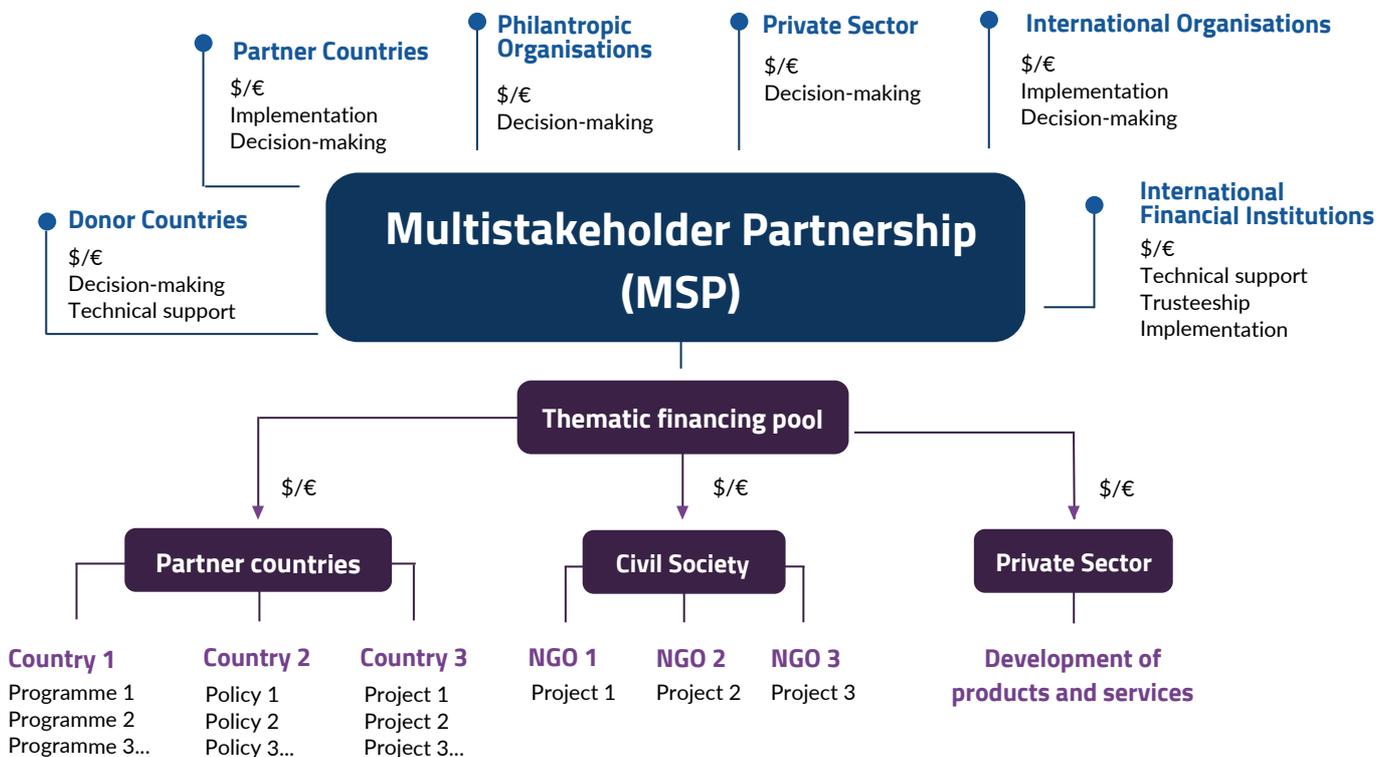


Figure 1. What is a multistakeholder partnership?

## The rise

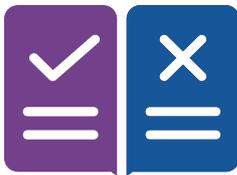
MSPs are now ubiquitous in the sustainable development arena and have seen exponential growth since 2010. International development policymakers are convinced of their value-added in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and overcoming global challenges, as reflected by SDG 17 on Partnerships for the Goals.



As of February 2022, the UN Partnerships Platform counts more than 6000 partnerships and voluntary commitments, up from 190 in 2010. The upward trend is likely to continue, given that the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and The Partnering Initiative recently set up the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator to give a boost to foster further effective partnerships to achieve the SDGs.<sup>1</sup>

## Promises kept?

Demonstrated shortcomings of MSPs in living up to the principles of aid effectiveness, such as country ownership and the harmonisation of donor and developing country programmes, are compounded by **three key accountability issues**:



### Lack of clarity about applicable rules

Transnational MSPs are not subject to legal regimes that govern public actors, such as human rights law and development cooperation commitments.

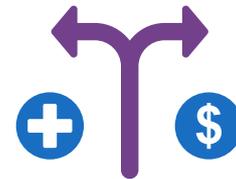
They can also negotiate tax exemptions and immunity agreements in the countries they operate (e.g., the Global Fund).



### Lack of oversight

These accountability issues are facilitated by the absence of oversight mechanisms, such as:

- clear normative standards to govern MSPs.
- structures to ensure answerability to developing states and their populations.
- prevention and remedy mechanisms for failures.



### Shift away from public priorities in development financing

The 'innovative financial tools' used by MSPs such as Gavi-the Vaccine Alliance and the Global Fund deploy public resources in private financial schemes. This raises concerns around the privatisation of development policy priorities, the legitimisation of market-based and corporate models, and the financialisation of development assistance.

1. The United Nations Partnership Platform (2022). Available at: [sdgs.un.org/partnerships](https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships)

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Adopt a responsibility-based framework that incorporates a definition of inclusivity and mutual accountability to replace corporate and private models with public interest considerations and puts the needs of beneficiaries at the centre.
- 2** Structure financing activities to generate additional new financing and minimise competition for limited public funds.
- 3** Implement regular and transparent monitoring and reporting programs using sector-wide standards to increase public oversight.
- 4** Correct accountability deficits and performance shortcomings by adopting a rotating peer review process, like the Universal Periodic Review at the UN.
- 5** Through the peer review process, promote comprehensive and timely reporting, the verification of donor commitments, and a direct engagement with beneficiaries in how the funds should be used.

## About the author



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Dr Erdem Türkelli's research focuses on international law, hybrid financing for development and accountability. Her broader work is on economic actors under international law, transnational human rights obligations, international legal responsibility regimes and children's rights.

## More on this research

 Erdem Türkelli, G (2021), 'Transnational Multistakeholder Partnerships as Vessels to Finance Development: Navigating the Accountability Waters', *Global Policy*, Vol 12, No 2, pp 177-189. Open Access at: [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1758-5899.12889](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1758-5899.12889)

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