

**Understanding best practices and barriers that promote and hinder
successful multistakeholder partnerships for sustainability transformation
in India**

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Vienna, 18 06 2025

Ruchi Bachani

List of Abbreviations

Multi Stakeholder Partnership	MSP
Sustainable Development Goal	SDG
Non-Governmental Organization	NGO
Public Private Partnership	PPP

Abstract

The linkage between the sustainable development goals (SDG) & multi stakeholder partnership (MSP) is determined, where it states the role of multi stakeholder partnerships between government, nonprofit organizations, civil society, donors, financial institutions and academic institutions are increasingly recommended as core interventions for achieving the sustainable development goals (Eweje et al. 2020). There is existing research available on the concept of multi stakeholder partnership (MSP) in India. The literature provides extensive insights on the role of MSP in addressing societal challenges associated with SDG. Despite the richness of the literature, the gap I witnessed was lack of information on stakeholder driven insights and their role in strengthening MSP in India. In addition, it lacks stakeholder centric information in understanding the best practices and risks which hinder the performance of MSP in achieving sustainability transformation in India. The purpose of the thesis is to gather information on the best practices and risks which promote and hinder the performance of MSP in achieving sustainability transformation in India. The research has adopted a qualitative thematic analysis approach with semi structured interview technique. There are a total of seven interviews representing government, NGO and donor categories. The analysis will present sector agnostic activities, with a clear focus to identify best practices and barriers to ensure the MSP runs effectively and achieves its desired goals of sustainable development in India.

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1 Chapter: Introduction

In September 2015, the United Nations established the sustainable development goals (SDG). They are also called Global Goals or Agenda 2030 with an “aim to end poverty, protect planet, and ensuring prosperity for all” (Schramade, 2017, p. 87). It is discussed that the “Formation of SDGs lays out a strong path for development policy and practice, keeping its focus on broad global goals with very clear targets” (Scheyvens et al., 2016, p. 371). The constant struggle has been to identify ways to achieve success on sustainable development goals (SDG), despite the clarity on the goals to be achieved for SDG. Among the various SDGs, the sustainable development goal 17 (SDG17) focuses on driving partnerships with diverse stakeholders such as government, nonprofits, businesses, along with other stakeholders for achieving a sustainable future. The goals for partnerships aim at reducing duplication of efforts and saving cost, by bringing together the shared resources, skills, and technologies (ISDM 2024). This could be achieved through multi stakeholder partnerships (MSP), which drives inclusiveness through collaboration between the various stakeholders (ISDM 2024). Multi-stakeholder partnerships enable collaboration, which results in an increased sense of legitimacy, trust, and accountability. MSP is a strong collaborative mechanism for leading scalable and sustainable interventions through accountability, transparency, and trust (Noreau 2024). They are defined as a co-operative workspace, which improves efficiency in problem solving and being able to implement solutions (IWRM Action Hub, n.d.).

The objective of this study is to analyze the best practices and risk which promote and hinder the performance of MSP in achieving its goal of sustainable development in India. During the process of conducting the review, a thematic analysis framework is adopted. The framework is designed prior to the actual process of review through reviewing existing literature. The information captured will be spread out across the following six (6) themes : i) conceptual understanding, it deals with core concepts in the study; ii) key roles and principles, it highlights the expectations from MSP; iii) stakeholder understanding, provides details on stakeholders in an MSP; iv) benefits from MSP, discusses the incentives receive when stakeholders engage in an MSP ; v) best practices, which are actives suggested to improve the performance of MSP; vi) risk it highlights the challenges in the success of MSP.

1.1 Brief overview

1.1.1 Conceptual Understanding

MSPs are addressed as collaborators, cross-sectorial partnerships, and many more. They are associated as Public Private Partnership (PPP) for development, Cross Sector Collaborations and Collective action. (Stibbe and Prescott (n.d.)

Research by Paula Aguiar and Berg (n.d.) determines effective and inclusive governance practices central to sustainability transformation. The research has broken down the goals of

social development and human well-being into four categories such as Normative, Societal, Political, and Institutional for bringing sustainable transformation.

1.1.2 Roles and Principles of MSP

It positions an MSP as a flexible governance tool (Horan 2022). Aiming to work with diverse, varied stakeholders, capable of handling the tradeoff between goals and targets. It establishes a need for a tight governance mechanism for developing an inclusive, transparent and accountable process for an MSP (Hemmati n.d.).

1.1.3 Stakeholder Understanding

The three core stakeholders are defined as – Government, NGOs and Donors. The role of government in an MSP is the one bringing credibility to the partnership. The role of civil society organizations/NGOs has been positioned at the center of an MSP, it is through them the partnership learns about the on-ground challenges, and the role of donors is providing financial and non-financial resources along with technological support (WPAB 2025).

1.1.4 Benefits from MSP

The literature by IWRM Action Hub (n.d.) states improved efficiency in problem solving and implementing solutions. Along with addressing MSP as a cooperative workspace. It establishes that the result of a successful MSP lies in delivering an innovative solution for addressing social issues, which is extremely difficult for a single entity alone to build (WPAB 2025).

1.1.5 Best Practices for MSP

There is a need to establish a practice of constant reflection, which is core to the philosophy of sustaining efforts for MSP. There is a need for a strong leadership with effective communication skills to be able to present long-term engagement and commitment with ease, especially in the case of cultural differences (Sandosham and Winder 2008).

1.1.6 Risk for MSP

Poor leadership competency and organizational skills in managing diverse expectations and multiple ideas from varied stakeholders are a strong reason for risking the functioning of an MSP (WPAB 2025). The biggest barrier in prioritizing common objectives of an MSP is when stakeholders prioritize individual goals and self-interest. The research focuses on understanding the risk associated with cross sectorial partnership opportunities for achieving sustainable development vary as per region (Bendell, Collins, and Roper 2010).

1.2 The Statement Gap

The role of MSP is associated with addressing wicked societal problems, and the existing literature provides detailed perspectives on the role of MSP in addressing these challenges. There exists a rich availability of literature on the concept of MSP, its principles and analyzing MSPs execution. At the other hand, it lacks the details on understanding the best practices, risks associated with MSP through the perspectives of three stakeholders – government, NGO, donor for achieving sustainability transformation in the Indian context.

This thesis chooses to complement the existing literature by contributing the insights on best practices and risks associated with MSP from the lens of three stakeholders - Government, NGO, and donors in the Indian context. The thesis has applied a qualitative research method. The qualitative research lens examines the existing literature available on multi stakeholder partnerships, based on which the thematic areas crucial to answer the research question: What are the key best practices and risk in achieving Multistakeholder Partnerships for a successful, sustainable transformation in India? is developed. Under the thematic analysis framework, process coding and descriptive coding techniques have been applied. The sampling technique for the study is called the purposive technique. In this technique, the researcher is allowed to select participants based on pre-defined criteria or characteristics relevant to the study's focus (Memon et al. 2025). The respondents chosen for the thesis bring prior experience of working or managing a multistakeholder partnership with its focus in the country of India. The chosen respondents have no prior experience of working in an MSP together. They all bring strong and varied experience of working in an MSP agnostic to a particular sector. Through a professional network, eleven (11) interviewees were reached out and seven (7) were interviewed. The idea being to ensure there are two (2) interviewees assigned to each stakeholder category.

Out of the total seven (7) interviewees, there are three (3) representing government respondents. All of them bring experience of working in government institutions in managing and leading MSPs; In the NGOs category there are two (2) interviewees, one is a founder of an NGO, and the other is a senior leader within an NGO. Finally in the donor category with two (2) interviewees, both bring extensive experience in engaging with MSP, representing mid-large scale donor portfolios. The interviews will follow a semi structured approach. The critical aspect of this thesis is studying the system-transformative aspects of the ecosystem, which include identifying barriers and best practices to ensure the MSP runs effectively and achieves its desired goals agnostic to any one sector.

The interviewee examining process follows a three-stage process: i) Mapping strong actionable and concepts to each interviewee ii) Identifying it under process or descriptive Coding iii) Finally, identifying common actions/concepts by comparing two respondents within one stakeholder category and then aligning the responses to the literature review.

The research aims to answer the question – What are best practices and risk promoting and hindering multi stakeholder partnership in achieving sustainability transformation in India?

The thesis is structured as follows, the first chapter elaborates on the existing literature which is divided into six thematic areas with the focus of providing information on the broad concept of MSP along with the best practices and risk mentioned in the literature, the second chapter discusses the research objective, research design, data collection technique and details on the interviewees. Chapter two will provide information to understand the approach adopted to conduct the existing study. The third chapter deals with empirical analysis and results, here the three major stakeholders – gov, NGO and donors' interviews are analyzed into two themes: best practices for MSP and risk for MSP. The analysis highlights the consolidated insights derived from the stakeholder interviews, creating an opportunity for further discussion and review before implementing suggestive practices in real-time settings.

2 Chapter: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The thesis aims to understand the key best practices and risk in achieving successful, sustainable multistakeholder partnerships in India. The structure to facilitate this review provides information through six (6) thematic areas: i) conceptual understanding, which discusses the core concepts involved in the study; ii) key roles and principles, which highlights the expectations from MSP and its characteristics; iii) stakeholder understanding, providing details on essential stakeholders of an MSP; iv) benefits from MSP, discussing the perks received when stakeholders engage in an MSP for addressing sustainable development goals ; v) best practices, which are recommended strategies for improving the performance of MSP; vi) risk which identifies the roadblocks to a successful MSP;

The thematic analysis in the review focuses on the overall perspectives of bringing success to an MSP on global platform, with limited literature available from the Indian context. To address this gap, my study aims to examine the individual responses of core stakeholders—government, NGOs, and donors—to learn the tried and tested interventions for each stakeholder to ensure the success of a Multistakeholder Partnership (MSP) initiative.

2.2 Conceptual Understanding

In this section, the three most important definitions to be discussed are: Multiple Stakeholder Partnership (MSP), Stakeholders, and Sustainability Transformation.

2.2.1 Multi Stakeholder Partnership (MSP)

Multi Stakeholder Partnership is defined as a channel with an objective of bringing together interested actors in addressing a specific challenge or working towards a complex opportunity. The core rationale of MSP is to achieve larger impact in collaboration, which would be difficult to gain alone (Stibbe and Prescott, n.d.).

Stakeholders are defined as individuals, organizations, or groups having a common interest in a specific decision. These are players of a partnership, who have the capacity to influence a decision and the ones to be affected by it (Hemmati n.d.).

The literature by Stibbe and Prescott (n.d.), explains the background of the Multi-Stakeholder Partnership (MSP), stating that it was promoted by the Johannesburg Summit in 2002 and the Rio+20 Summit in 2012, where MSPs were officially included as outcomes. The literature states that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly highlight the need for multi-stakeholder partnership within Sustainable Development Goal 17 – “Partnerships for the

Goals.” They are an interdisciplinary tool for implementing all the other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

MSP are addressed as collaborators, cross sectorial partnerships, and many more. The literature by Stibbe and Prescott (n.d.) stated MSP as Public Private Partnership (PPP) for development, Cross Sector Collaborations & Collective action. MSPs are different from regular partnerships. In a standard partnership model, there are 2-3 players, whereas an MSP is an ecosystem of players with individual perspectives working towards a common goal (WPAB 2025). The literature by Eweje et al. (2020) determines the linkage between the SDG & MSP, where it states the role of multi stakeholder partnerships between government, nonprofit organizations, civil society, donors, financial institutions and academic institutions are increasingly recommended as core interventions for achieving the sustainable development goals. In conclusion, multi-stakeholder partnerships are strategic interventions developed to address complex and wicked problems related to societal development, quality of life, and environmental sustainability.

2.2.2 Sustainability Transformation

According to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, outlined in the Future Earth Initiative and EU Grand Challenges, sustainability transformation is a fundamental concept for achieving long-term societal development, enhancing human well-being and is built on attaining environmental accountability and protection (Daedlow et al. 2016). Research by Paula Aguiar and Berg (n.d.) determines effective and inclusive governance practices central to sustainability transformation. The research has broken down the goals of social development and human well-being into four categories such as Normative, Societal, Political, and Institutional for bringing sustainable transformation. It emphasizes the need for structural changes which are essential in achieving sustainable development goals.

2.3 Key Roles and Principles of an MSP

One of the unique principles of an MSP is facilitating participatory arguments, learning to achieve equitable and effective outcomes (CIFOR's Global Comparative Study on REDD+ 2017). MSP is addressed as a collaborative model of engagement with an aim to bring together the joint efforts of all the players involved in an MSP (WPAB 2025).

The role of an MSP is determined as a flexible governance tool with an aim to work with diverse stakeholders capable of handling the tradeoff between goals and targets Horan (2022). The literature by Hemmati (n.d.) address MSP as a tight governance mechanism for developing an inclusive, transparent and accountable process.

2.4 Stakeholders in MSP

The section will focus on understanding the nature of primary stakeholders and their role in an MSP.

Understanding stakeholders and their contribution to an MSP:

Onboarding of stakeholders who are the decision makers and the ones who will be impacted by the MSP should be identified prior to initiating the MSP (The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition Report 2018). It states that each stakeholder has a different challenge and a unique task to perform. Hence, during the process of stakeholder selection, the context of the problem is crucial in defining the nature of stakeholders. The literature by Stibbe and Prescott (n.d.), has documented the nature of the stakeholders, along with the strengths they offer to the functioning of an MSP

Table 1: Strengths of Stakeholders in MSPs

Non-Profit Organisation	Business	Government	International Agency	Donors / Foundations
Knowledge of the community	Brand Vale	Public Infrastructure & Systems	Global Network	Funding
Passion for social capital	Tech & Process Innovation	Regulatory Framework	Technical Knowledge	Freedom to experiment
People centric approach	Resources: Infra, Commercial	Democratic Legitimacy	Political Access	Create proof of concept.

(The Partnering Initiative 2019)

According to the literature by WPAB (2025), three core stakeholders are defined as NGOs, Government and Donors/Corporations. The literature defines the role of government in an MSP as the one bringing credibility to the partnership. The role of civil society organizations/NGOs has been positioned at the center of an MSP. It is through them that the partnership learns about the on-ground challenges that surfaces in the voice of vulnerable communities and facilitates the implementation of the partnership. Community groups are important stakeholders, who are responsible for community mobilization efforts to unite the voice of grassroots communities. Here, an important stakeholder that supports nonprofit organizations in their community mobilization efforts is community groups; they are equally important, as they focus on uniting the voices of many grassroots communities. Finally, donors/corporations are focused on providing financial and non-financial resources along with technological support. The research by WPAB (2025) has merged the strengths of business and donors/foundations indicated by Stibbe and Prescott (n.d.) into one single stakeholder, which is donors/corporations see Table 1.

2.5 Benefits through Multi Stakeholder Partnership (MSP)

The section will dive deeply into understanding the benefits gained through an MSP for solving complex issues.

MSP reduces duplication of efforts and saves costs by bringing together shared resources, skills, and technologies. Enabling the joint sharing of resources and expertise results in collaborating synergies to address complex problems, with shared responsibility for efforts and cost (ISDM 2024). According to Noreau (2024) and ISDM (2024), working in multi stakeholder partnerships enables collaboration. Leading an increased sense of legitimacy, transparency, trust, and accountability.

The literature in IWRM Action Hub (n.d.) emphasizes the importance of a MSP, resulting in improved efficiency in problem-solving and implementing solutions, defining MSP as a cooperative workspace.

Overall, the various literature complements the insights gained to understand the way benefits through MSPs are defined, in achieving sustainability transformation. The aim of study under the current thematic area is learning about the perspectives of the primary stakeholders – government, non-profits and donors/foundations in an MSP around benefits they gain, when they are participating in one.

2.6 Best Practices for Multi Stakeholder Partnership (MSP)

Through this section, literature backed effective strategies for promoting multistakeholder partnerships (MSP) will be discussed for achieving the goal of sustainability transformation.

Consistent efforts in driving MSP irrespective of its nature leads to having open and agile stakeholders (Noreau 2024). This practice enables the stakeholders to make changes in due course strategically, depending on the roadblocks encountered. Sandosham and Winder (2008) describe a need to practice constant reflection, which is core to the philosophy of successful MSP.

The literature from Noreau (2024) establishes the need for strong leadership with effective communication skills, presenting long-term engagement and commitment with ease, especially in the case of cultural differences. The literature by Sandosham and Winder (2008) emphasizes the importance of documentation and communication of each phase of the partnership. These perspectives echo a need for a strong leader with effective skills in engagement for a successful MSP. It also states the need for project management skills and governance systems to address the dynamic nature of the MSP. It recommends its implementation at the dialogue and action stage of an MSP for effective functioning. As per the literature of IWRM Action Hub (n.d.) managing inclusive and engaging conversations among different partners at the execution stage of an MSP can be handled through developing a framework. It is a strong practice followed within the scope of project management for fostering meaningful conversations between different stakeholders. It states the use of effective strategies in navigating hierarchies within a

multi-stakeholder partnership, between communities, and struggles arising due to gender or age-based experience. The research by Stibbe and Prescott (n.d.) reinforces the importance of managing power imbalances to ensure equity for the overall functioning of the partnership. In the absence of strategies for managing power, the values of mutual respect, equity and shared responsibility among the partners involved are comprised, which hinders the performance of MSP in achieving sustainable development, which is stated by Hemmati (n.d.). Failure to such sensitive aspects results in a poor decision-making process, lack of equal commitment between the stakeholders, and an unsustainable partnership.

The literature states the importance of reflection, the presence of a strong leader, communication skills, governance, project monitoring, and power management for the effective sustenance of an MSP. My research will study the best practices recommended by each stakeholder – government, NGO and donors in strengthening MSP for achieving sustainability transformation in India.

2.7 Risks for Multi Stakeholder Partnership (MSP)

The insights gathered on the risk for MSP through the literature have been documented in a cluster-centric method. The risk for an MSP is categorized under the themes of Leadership, Governance, Stakeholder Management, and Collaboration. The risk discussed in each cluster presents a need for a strong value-based competency framework.

2.7.1 Lack of Leadership and Organizational Skills

Poor leadership competency and organizational skills in managing diverse expectations and multiple ideas from varied stakeholders are a strong reason for risking the functioning of an MSP (WPAB 2025). Research by Eweje et al. (2020) states the importance of organizational capacity, resources, and transparency in delivering results. The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition Report (2018) determines MSP at the risk of creating power struggles, leading to power asymmetries and strengthening the participation of powerful stakeholders. Failure to set up accountability, transparency and inclusive practices leads to power imbalance, which are major causes leading to an MSP failure. Absence of leadership and organizational management skills hinder the process of navigating and managing diverse stakeholder expectations and power hierarchies.

2.7.2 Poor Governance and Project Management

According to Sandosham and Winder (2008) research, a crucial step to implement during an MSP is understanding the underlying cause of the problems to be addressed through an MSP. Additionally, being aware of the past solutions tried to address the challenges is an important milestone to prioritize in the journey of an MSP. The literature by WPAB (2025) discusses the failure in planning common goals and unclear communication guidelines in early days results in risking the success of an MSP.

In Bendell, Collins, and Roper (2010) study, the biggest risk in prioritizing common objectives of an MSP is when stakeholders prioritize individual goals and self-interest. Lastly, the risk of access to local data from grassroots organizations, including from the local government, has been positioned as a threat to the success of an MSP by (Hub, n.d.). The lack of timely access to data leads to inadequate monitoring. Hindering the success of MSP through poor decision-making. Overall, the lack of skills to practice strategic communication, effective planning & monitoring, and problem solving creates barriers in the functioning of an MSP.

2.7.3 Ineffective Stakeholder Partnership and Management

According to Eweje et al. (2020), the process of developing and sustaining an MSP is tough and complex. The efforts get even more challenging, when each stakeholder belongs to a different sector and is rigid about their own culture and philosophy. Conflicting interest among the varied stakeholders, becoming a major barrier in the success of an MSP (The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition Report 2018). According to Sandosham and Winder (2008), the absence of grassroots organization in an MSP, results in a lack of community-led ownership. The absence of clear guidelines on the roles of different MSP partners, their alignment with the goal of an MSP and the unequal representation of stakeholders hinders the implementation of an MSP.

2.7.4 Lack of Collaborative Culture

According to the literature by ISDM (2024) and The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition Report (2018), distrust among the stakeholders is a major reason for the failure of an MSP. The literature by Noreau (2024) states that the presence of diverse stakeholder expectations makes it difficult to design standardized metrics for achieving accountability and transparency in an MSP.

2.8 A statement of the Gap

The existing literature has provided a deep understanding of the role of multi stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) in addressing the complex challenges associated with sustainable development goals. Despite the literature providing an overview of the diverse stakeholders in the MSP eco-system, it lacks stakeholder focused understanding on the risks and best practices, which hinder and promote MSP for achieving sustainability transformation. There are limited insights on the practices adopted by the different stakeholders – Government, NGO, Donors for achieving the success of an MSP in the Indian context.

My thesis aims to address this gap by studying the factors that hinder and promote success of multi stakeholder partnerships targeting primary stakeholders – Government, NGOs, Donors. It involves examining the challenges and effective strategies from the perspective of the three primary stakeholders. The research will contribute to identifying best practices and risk

discussed for each stakeholder fostering the success of MSP in achieving sustainability transformation in India.

3 Chapter: Methodology

3.1 Research Objective

This research aims to understand the best practices and risk that promote and hinder the success of multi-stakeholder partnerships in India for achieving sustainability transformation. The scope of the study is analyzing the challenges and strategies on the holistic approach to multi-stakeholder partnership from the lens of the three primary stakeholders of the study: i) government, ii) non-profit, iii) donors. It examines the process of how each stakeholder comprehends multi-stakeholder collaboration aimed at achieving sustainability transformation, remaining agnostic to any one domain/sector.

The reason why MSPs are a valuable focus for this thesis project is to understand the connection between sustainable development goals and multi-stakeholder partnerships. According to ISDM (2024), the Sustainable Development Goal 17 (SDG 17), titled “Partnerships for the Goals,” has observed the importance of multi-stakeholder partnership as a guiding principle for addressing inequality and poverty to achieve its agenda by 2030. The literature establishes a strong connection between Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the role of the Multi-Stakeholder Partnership (MSP) in achieving sustainable transformation. According to the literature (Hemmati, n.d.), multi-stakeholder collaboration for sustainable development involves various societal sectors coming together to achieve sustainable transformation and support the process of achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, along with the Sustainable Development Goals. The literature has established MSP as a robust tool for addressing complex societal challenges, positioning it as a sector-agnostic intervention with a clear focus on the diverse Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In my journey to examine the existing literature on multi stakeholder partnerships, the struggle I encountered was being able to identify sector agnostic literature on MSPs in the Indian context. The literature which was dominantly available focused on sector or project specific analysis on a particular MSP. This situation made me choose my focus of study to complement the existing literature by contributing the insights on best practices and risks associated with MSP from the lens of three stakeholders – Government, NGO, and donors in the Indian context.

3.2 Research Design

I have applied a qualitative research method, which is defined by Willy and Newell-McLymont (2021) as an approach to understand the meaning behind individuals, groups attributed to societal or human problems. It takes into consideration the intention of the actors, when analyzing their behavior. Through a qualitative research lens, I examined the existing literature available on multi stakeholder partnerships and identified thematic areas crucial to answer my

research question: What are the key best practices and risks in achieving Multi Stakeholder Partnerships for a successful, sustainable transformation in India?. I applied a thematic analysis approach at the literature stage to identify patterns and themes, which are crucial in understanding the research and present the analysis in a systematic structured framework. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) define thematic analysis as the process of identifying patterns in data, which are interesting and important themes. They are crucial in addressing research or communicating issues. The six themes studied in my literature are: i) Conceptual Understanding ii) Roles and Principles iii) Stakeholder Understanding iv) Benefits v) Best Practices vi) Barriers and Risk with a clear focus to study its relevance in India, making India as case for my study. Out of the six themes studied in the literature, my major focus will be to examine the best practices and risk across the three major stakeholder categories i) Government ii) NGOs iii) Donors making them crucial and central to my case setting. The process of defining the themes has adopted a deductive approach, where the researcher initiates the analysis with the themes, which are identified by the researcher through a literature review (Dawadi 2020). The approach to predefined themes gave my study the direction of analyzing qualitative data, where the themes laid the foundation for the primary coding framework. Responses to the questionnaire focusing on studying the best practices and risks categorized under their dedicated themes. Under which process coding and descriptive coding techniques have been applied for a comprehensive analysis The approach to process coding technique identifies action in the data. It uses gerunds (“-ing” words) exclusively supporting the analysis in the search of ongoing activity, interactions or emotions to the responses (Saldaña 2009). The descriptive coding technique summarizes the responses by associating a word or short phrase with the responses. They act as an identification code for a topic (Saldaña 2009). Adopting dual coding techniques will benefit analysis with a robust mechanism for presenting results, which aims to provide clarity on the key actionable concepts applied by respondents in the chosen thematic area. Through the dual approach, the analysis will show depth in its qualitative findings.

3.3 Sampling Methodology

The selection of the sample for the study followed a purposive sampling technique. It is a method where the researcher is allowed to select participants based on pre-defined criteria or characteristics relevant to the study’s focus (Memon et al. 2025). In my study interviewees are selected based on their experience of working or having worked in leading/managing and multi stakeholder partnership (MSP) with a strong focus on Indian context. All the interviewees selected have no common experience of working together on a single MSP. They all have varied and diverse experiences working on different MSPs. The method for selecting the sample of interviewees followed a technique to map the critical skill sets and knowledge required for the interviewees to answer the research question in detail. Through my professional network, I reached out to eleven (11) interviewees, out of which seven (7) were interviewed, keeping the focus on having two (2) interviewees assigned to each stakeholder category. The breakdown of all the seven (7) interviewees is as follows i) Government: three (3) interviewees, all of them bring experience of working in government institutions in

managing and leading MSPs; ii) NGO: two (2) interviewees, one is a founder of an NGO and the other is a senior leader within an NGO; iii) Donor: two (2) interviewees, both bring an extensive experience in engaging with MSP, representing mid-large scale donor portfolios. All the respondents are seasoned senior professionals with more than 10+ years of diverse professional experience. They bring strong experience of engaging or leading an MSP in the domain of education, livelihood, public administration, agriculture and water. Their responses will have a strong leaning towards their domains of work, which is important to acknowledge. At the same time, it is crucial to understand that the focus of my study is not driven towards comparing multi stakeholder partnerships in one domain to another. This aspect of comparing an MSP in one domain to another is a potential area for another research. In this research, the aim is to study the systemic challenges and best practices encountered by the three major stakeholders i) Gov, ii) NGO iii) Donors when they participate in developing and running an MSP to achieve sustainability transformation in India. All the interviewees have provided consent for the interview and for its recording. The consent form highlighted the freedom to drop from the study at any time. The interviewees were informed about the recordings being erased once the final research is submitted

3.4 Data Collection

This research has used a semi structured interview technique for conducting an audio interview through Zoom platform. The semi structured interview supported the flow of conversation in being focused on the thematic framework at the same time, providing flexibility and adaptability to the interview process (Mashuri et al. 2022). The questionnaire was drafted based on the literature review under the thematic framework. Before sending the questionnaire to the interviewee, I facilitated a conversation to discuss the scope of the research and the reasons behind choosing the interviewee. Following the conversations, I sent the questionnaire, along with information on the research objective, to the interviewee a few days before the interview. The most important aspect of the questionnaire is to ensure that the responses given by the interviewees are specific to their experience of working in MSP rather than their general observations on the topic of MSP.

3.5 Limitations

A limitation of my research is that it does not include a comparative analysis between the two cases engaging in an MSP setting within a single sector or between two or more sectors. In addition, it does not compare all the six thematic areas across the three stakeholders. The focus is primarily to engage in learning the best practices and risk for the three stakeholders. Since identifying, comparing all the thematic areas and engaging all stakeholders in a single MSP is a time-consuming and difficult task, with the limited time available, I decided to focus on diversity of stakeholders who bring a rich experience in managing and leading MSPs to unveil their experiences on building a successful MSP.

4 Chapter: Empirical Analysis & Discussion of Results

4.1 Introduction

This analytical chapter aims to answer the research question: What are the key best practices and risk in achieving Multistakeholder Partnership for a successful, sustainable transformation in India? The insights from the seven interviews will be presented through two themes: i) Best Practices ii) Risks. The approach I have adopted in studying these themes is through three stakeholders: i) Government ii) NGOs iii) Donors.

This analysis followed a three-stage process: i) First I mapped strong actionable and concepts to each interviewee ii) Then I clubbed it under Process or Descriptive Coding iii) Finally, I identified common insights by comparing two respondents within one stakeholder category and then aligning the responses to the literature review.

I conducted seven interviews across three stakeholder categories i) Government, ii) NGO iii) Donors. The selected interviewees are all leaders in their individual domains.

Government: The interviewees selected are either working or have worked in the past in government departments, institutions having experience of engaging or leading a multi stakeholder partnership. i) Respondent A (Policy & Implementation), ii) Respondent C (Project Head), iii) Respondent G (Civil Servant engaged in the state education department).

Non-Profit: The interviewees selected bring rich leadership, strategic management experience and operational efficiency background. i) Respondent B (Founder), ii) Respondent D (Implementation Leader)

Donor: The interviewees selected are leaders managing a huge portfolio of varied programs implemented at scale. Respondent E (Program & Grant Lead), Respondent F (Corporate Social Responsibility Leader, CSR).

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Best Practices for Multi Stakeholder Partnerships (MSP)

The aim of this theme is to learn the various strategies to be adopted for improving the performance of MSP.

4.2.1.1 Best Practices – Government

Based on the three interviews conducted, two best practices for MSPs have been commonly identified by respondents, which are operational and strategic in nature. A functional platform for facilitating transparent and timely communication. Due to sudden unexpected challenges,

which negatively impact the functioning of an MSP. Creating an open platform through collaboration enables each stakeholder to participate with a clear aim of strengthening the partnership of MSP. It is evident through the respondent C interviewees when he said the importance of being open to discussing new ideas, open to be challenged and an opportunity to perform tweaking of the project in the middle of its operation. On similar lines, respondent A has expressed the importance of executing the process of deviation in the strategy during an ongoing initiative. The objective can be achieved if the team is trained to openly speak their minds. Respondent G has expressed the importance of capacity building to middle manager cadre in the government to be equipped with speaking directly and openly to the top leadership in the government.

The second efficiency centric strategy aims to develop processes which reduce time and redundancy in the operations of the MSP. Respondent C has expressed the need to improve operational efficiency by stating the need to decrease paperwork. This recommendation aims to reduce duplication and increase the performance of the team in achieving the goals of MSP. One such process is shared by respondent G, where he speaks about the need for ngos to hire smart staff members, who can facilitate conversations and can effectively work with different cadre of government machinery. During the operations of MSP, there are unexpected and multiple revisions to be performed at the last minute based on the feedback from the field. Respondent A highlights the need to have a process which facilitates the procedure of acknowledging the list of resources required to improve effectiveness in the operations of MSP.

In addition, each of the three interviewees shared suggestions which were typical only of their job. Based on his background in policy and implementing projects with different stakeholders, Respondent A pointed out the need for and importance of building a culture which inculcates the values of trust, faith and empathy between the stakeholders. These values are the foundation for building and sustaining a common aligned relationship.

Based on his experience of managing large scale programs across the country, respondent C has emphasized inculcating the procedure to discuss sustainability and long-term planning with the MSP stakeholders prior to initiating one. Through this step, the aim is to ensure that the MSP is independent in the future.

A senior civil servant, respondent G recommends facilitating the process through which middle managers gain full clarity on the objectives and the challenges of MSP, as they work with top managers and are equipped to handle challenges of floor officers.

4.2.1.2 Best Practices – NGOs.

Based on the two interviews conducted, two best practices for MSPs have been commonly identified by respondents, which is process and plan driven. Setting up a regular frequency of engaging donors and government stakeholders through monthly reports and project progress documents impacts the quality of engagement between the stakeholders. Respondent B has laid down the importance of monthly reporting, pressing importance on the frequency of engagement in driving the quality of interventions in the MSP. The quality of program

reporting has a huge role to play in the way third party assessments are conducted to track progress. Respondent D shares the importance of designing a good measurement criterion, which enables program intervention and at the same time results in building confidence of the stakeholders in the MSP.

The second-best practice discussed by the two interviewees is understanding the problem deeply. Many times, the MSPs are designed without understanding the underlying causes to be addressed in the process of developing an MSP. This gap results in the failure of MSP. Hence, it's essential to spend a lot of time deeply analyzing the problems and root causes of them. Through this process, respondent B, recommends that NGOs to be the voice of the marginalized communities, in facilitating the real problem to be addressed. Simultaneously, the staff involved in the problem diagnosis process needs to be passionate about working on the ground. This interest and passion among NGO team members is very crucial in performing the task effectively, as recommended by respondent D.

In addition, each of the two interviewees shared suggestions which were typical only of their job. Based on his background in leadership development and founder of a ngo, respondent B pointed out the practice of designing and implementing pilot interventions, prior to the actual launch in addition, the aiming to scale programs. This practice supports the NGO team in being able to address any challenges which can be mitigated prior to the actual launch of the MSP. Being able to incorporate the strategic mindset of designing pilot interventions is a great skill to acquire by the NGOs.

Based on extensive experience in operational efficiency and in large-scale implementation, respondent D recommends an inclusive and ongoing capacity building process of team responsible for improving the performance of MSP. There is a constant need to upgrade and evolve systems and processes of stakeholders leading the MSP to achieve efficiency. This process can be achieved through incorporating a standardized component of training among the team members of MSP.

4.2.1.3 Best Practices – Donors

Based on the two interviews conducted, two best practices for MSPs have been commonly identified by respondents, which is stakeholder collaborative focused. Developing a stakeholder supportive model, which aims to bring together ideas and suggestions of different stakeholders together to work collaboratively. Aiming to focus on supporting ngos with flexible funding model and amplifying impact to address the uncertainty of on ground challenges. Respondent E, shares from her experience on the strengths of applying a stakeholder supportive model in enabling MSP partners to make their impact scale and bring last minute support to ensure the quality of MSP is in no way compromised. On similar lines, respondent F shares her experience of scenarios where funding disbursement to ngos is delayed due to the long process time of corporates, in such situations the aim of the stakeholder supportive model takes the forefront in enabling ngos in sustaining the program. Through these conscious practices donors' approach to stakeholder management for MSPs functioning is very well achieved.

The second-best practice discussed by the two interviewees is donors taking lead in driving collaboration as an engagement tool between all the stakeholders of the MSP. Respondent E shares the importance of facilitating dialogue to ensure all stakeholders are on the common page is a critical practice to be incorporated for addressing any miscommunication and underlying issues in the running of the MSP. She focuses on the principle of driving regular conversations across the entire duration of MSP. On the same lines, respondent F points on the need for donors to nudge NGOs and government stakeholders in creating relationships. This promotes engagement, understanding towards each other, and leading to driving efforts collaboratively for ensuring the success of MSP.

In addition, each of the two interviewees individually expressed best practices which were typical only to their job. Based on her background as Grant Management Program Lead, respondent E shares the growing need and willingness among donors to acknowledge capacity building of teams as a commitment towards long term alignment. Based on the growing legal and compliances requirements in India, a centralized change in learning & development processes among the staff, will further empower their performance in MSP operations.

Based on her experience in corporate social responsibility, respondent F highlights the importance of building trust between partners. It is a foundational tool for driving interventions. Through trust building activities, there is an aim to promote team satisfaction and growth, which are extremely crucial for the success of MSP.

4.2.2 Engaging interview insights with the literature

The data analyzed through interviewees complements the literature review. In the literature, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of course correction in response to roadblocks encountered. The impact of consistent efforts in driving MSP results is that stakeholders become open to new ideas (Noreau 2024). In line with the aspect of being open to conversations and ideas, respondents A and C, in their interviews, shared their recommendations on the importance of allowing changes during execution based on field feedback, as well as being open to new ideas and criticism. Respondent B places a strong emphasis on ensuring consistency in program reporting, which drives donor and government engagement, as noted in the literature by Sandosham and Winder (2008). It determines the efficacy of documentation and communication at each phase of the partnership. The literature by the IWRM Action Hub (n.d.) emphasizes the importance of managing inclusive and engaging conversations through a framework, a strong practice within the scope of project management. On a similar note, through interviews with respondents E and F, we have learned about the impact of a stakeholder-supportive model and the process of collaborative culture, which involves an emphasis on developing a framework to mitigate funding uncertainties and adjust the schedule of stakeholder dialogue. To conclude, best practices such as being flexible in making alterations to the field plan during MSP execution, consistent donor and government engagement, facilitating collaborative conversations, and adopting a stakeholder-supportive model are strategies backed by both literature and practical experience that promote multi-stakeholder partnerships in achieving sustainability transformation in India.

4.2.3 Risks for Multi Stakeholder Partnerships (MSP)

The objective of this theme was to understand the areas which are critical in ensuring the success of MSPs and if there are any risks associated with MSPs to the respective stakeholders.

4.2.3.1 Risks – Government

Based on the three interviews conducted, two potential risk factors for MSPs have been commonly identified by respondents, which are action oriented and process centric. A potential risk factor in achieving MSP success is an inefficient monitoring process. Lack of allocation of appropriate resources by the government stakeholders to the monitoring process hinders the timely execution of it. It is crucial on the part of the government to participate in the monitoring process as it creates a platform for regular review of work and sharing of on-ground information. Respondent A has emphasized the need for monitoring by stating the unexpected challenges which arise on ground, which can be addressed through timely monitoring. It is not executed in a timely manner. At times there are unrealistic expectations from different stakeholders; these create risk for the success of MSP. Through effective monitoring processes, there is a smooth flow of information resulting in open conversations between stakeholders. Lack of goals and alignment between the stakeholders has been associated as one of the potential risks by Respondent G. Through facilitating an efficient monitoring process, the stakeholders can facilitate discussion, review of task performed, feedback and challenges in the execution of MSP.

The second potential risk discussed is ineffective stakeholder engagement; it results in creating misalignment of expectations between the stakeholders. Respondent G has highlighted the aspect of misalignment by stating that donors expect quick implementation, which is agreed at the leadership level between the stakeholders, although when the work speed is low, that results in frustration. At the same time, Respondent A states the importance of effective stakeholder engagement by sharing the need to discuss collectively the goals to be achieved. Stakeholder engagement has the potential to bring all stakeholders on to the common platform through regular governance calls. Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial to ensure timely action on any resource requirement changes, which ensures all the stakeholders are aligned to the ground needs. Respondent C has expressed the potential risk of partners backing out from MSP, which can be addressed through an effective stakeholder engagement process. In the absence of which there is a potential threat of partners backing out, which negatively impacts government reputation and their plans.

In addition, each of the three interviewees have singled out risks which were typical only to their job. Based on his background in policy and implementing projects with different stakeholders, Respondent A pointed to the lack of financial planning and inadequate resource mobilization as problems in running MSPs. Lack of on-ground understanding of the challenges results in ineffective budgeting for the program. There are times when the resource requirements change due to unexpected field challenges. Ineffective fund management results in delaying the supply of resources, negatively impacting the outcomes of the MSP.

Based on his experience of managing large scale programs across the country, Respondent C shares inadequacies in project planning impacting the quality of MSP. Lack of implementing exit planning prior to the launch of the MSP, failing to map stakeholders as per the need of the MSP, and missing community representation in the MSP, results in the failure of MSP.

As a senior civil servant, Respondent G highlights the gaps in the information flow between different stakeholders of the MSP negatively impacting implementation efficiency. This leads to poor performance of implementation partners while dealing with government stakeholders.

4.2.3.2 Risks - NGOs

Based on the two interviews conducted, two potential risk factors for MSPs have been commonly identified by respondents, which are descriptive and process centric. A potential risk factor in achieving MSP success is aiming for stakeholder commitment without clarity; it results in systemic drift. Lack of clarity among stakeholders in their roles and responsibilities with driving MSP is a challenge. There are times when MSP on paper has achieved its stakeholder alignment without having transparent discussion on the expectations of each stakeholder. Respondent B & D from their individual experiences have narrated instances where investment of stakeholder is unequal, especially when donors expect their role to be only focused on funding and the other responsibilities are divided between government and nogs. In this situation, nogs end up performing for government stakeholders too. This has been witnessed as a strong risk for failure of MSP. At the same time, despite all the stakeholders' intentions being positive, the gap lies in taking ownership and driving decision making. Due to a lack of clarity and information among stakeholders on the actual work, there is a standstill, which results in hindering the performance of MSP.

The second potential risk discussed is the lack of documentation and communication among stakeholders strongly contributing to amplifying the problem results in a situation “where no one feels anyone is doing anything”, said by respondent D. Respondent B on the issue of communication and documentation, expresses the difficulty of educating the donor on impact and challenges consistently. In his experience donors expect excitement to keep the MSP

ongoing, navigating ways for keeping the relationship intact is challenging. These issues are critical in achieving the success of MSP from the perspective of an early-stage non-profit.

In addition, each of the two interviewees individually expressed risks which were typical only to their job. Based on his background in leadership development and founder of a ngo, respondent B pointed out the instability in the government machinery, which impacts the performance of MSP. There is a constant requirement from ngos to keep the government updated on the work being achieved within the scope of MSP. Failure to do so leads to a negative impact on the MSPs' performance. The challenge in this process happens when the officers responsible are transferred, leading to a vacuum in the system.

Based on extensive experience in operational efficiency and in large-scale implementation, respondent D shares the gap in developing scalable models in an MSP. The gap in operating MSPs at scale is due to the lack of system development, responsible for improving efficiency and effectiveness. MSPs are meant to be implemented at a scale to achieve desired results.

4.2.3.3 Risks - Donors

Based on the two interviews conducted, two potential risk factors for MSPs have been commonly identified by respondents, which are reflective, and management driven. A potential risk factor in achieving MSP success is lack of governance mechanisms in building effective stakeholder management processes and cross feedback mechanisms. The importance of clear guidelines on stakeholder expectations and review processes are strong practices to strengthen the governance structure of the MSP. Respondent E has expressed the need to define boundaries and a clear role plan, a strong step in building an effective governance structure for ensuring success of MSP. Respondent F shares the need to establish a strong cross feedback mechanism, which aims to receive and provide feedback based on the monitoring of the MSP to ensure progress and success of MSP.

The second potential risk discussed is weak stakeholder management. Understanding stakeholder strengths and challenges is strategic to the success of MSP. Respondent F shares the need to support nonprofits in building connections; it is crucial for their success, which eventually impacts the MSP. Similarly, Respondent E recommends facilitating stakeholder goals and expectation alignment activity in managing and navigating stakeholder strengths.

In addition, each of the two interviewees individually expressed risks which were typical only to their job. Based on her background in Grant Management and Program Lead, respondent E shares the drawbacks of donor dominance in building trust and transparency in the stakeholder relationship, which has a direct impact on the functioning of the MSP. Dominance by any actor

will lead to the failure of an MSP, as it curbs freedom of expression, negatively impacts the flow of information, and eventually results in toxic engagement.

Based on her experience in corporate social responsibility, respondent F shares lack of rigors monitoring at the initial stage of the MSP is a step towards failure. There is an urgent need to ensure the review of monthly reports with observations from the field in ensuring the aligned outcomes are achieved. She has mentioned the downside of just signing papers having no clue of ground reality will eventually lead to the failure of MSPs outcomes.

4.2.4 Engaging interview insights with the literature

The research interviews have indicated broadly complementary results to the literature review. Literature of Noreau (2024), stating the difficulty in designing standardized metrics in presence of diverse stakeholders for achieving accountability and transparency in MSP is in line with the views of respondent E, where she shares the drawbacks of donor dominance in building trust and transparency in the stakeholder relationship, which has a direct impact on the functioning of the MSP. Both these views have determined the importance of accountability and transparency in the success of MSP. Respondent B & D have strongly expressed the lack of communication gap, resulting in poor decision making, leading to MSP Failure. The literature by WPAB (2025) discusses the failure in planning common goals and unclear communication guidelines resulting in negatively impacting the MSP. Respondent A has shared the lack of effective monitoring practices, failing to address unexpected challenges on the ground, which the literature acknowledges, by stating the risk to access to local data from grassroots organizations, including from the local government, has been positioned as a threat to the success of an MSP by (Hub, n.d.). Lack of collaborative culture, poor governance and project management are the broad risk clusters from literature review, aligned with the three stakeholder's interviews as major risk for the success of MSP.

4.3 Consolidating the best practices and risk analyzed through the interviews:

The analysis provides a wide and suggestive framework answering the research question on the best practices and risks which promote and hinder the functioning of multi stakeholder partnership to achieve sustainability transformation in India.

The best practices are mostly in a process-centric approach with a clear focus on action. Capacity building is a best practice identified by NGOs and donors. At the same time, lack of monitoring is highlighted as a common risk between government and donors. Whereas the identified risks are a mix of descriptive and process approaches, with a clear focus on the

problem. Insights gathered from the risk are largely broad concepts, whereas the best practices are specific activities within the larger theme of risk.

Table 2: Best Practices for MSP

Government	NGOs	Donors
Functional platform for facilitating communication	Engaging stakeholders with monthly progress reports	Developing a stakeholder supportive mode
Process development to reduce time and redundancy	Understanding the problem deeply	Developing engagement tool between all the stakeholders
Culture building on values of trust, faith and empathy	Designing and implementing pilot interventions	Capacity building of teams
Developing procedure on sustainability and long-term planning	Capacity building of team	Building trust between partners
Developing process for middle managers to gain clarity on the objectives & challenges of MSP		

Table 3: Risk for MSPs

Government	NGOs	Donors
Inefficient monitoring process	Gap in developing scalable models	Lack of governance mechanisms
Ineffective stakeholder engagement	Weak stakeholder commitment	Lack of cross feedback mechanisms.

Lack of financial planning and inadequate resource mobilization	Lack of documentation and communication	Weak stakeholder management.
Inadequacies in project planning	Instability in the government machinery	Lack of trust and transparency
Gaps in information flow		Lack of rigors monitoring at the initial stage

5 Conclusion

This thesis sets out to define a framework highlighting the best practices and risk identified from the interviews of three stakeholder categories: government, NGOs and donors with an objective to improve the performance of MSP in achieving sustainable development in India. The purpose of the thesis is to learn the best practices and risk associated, which promote and hinder the performance of multi stakeholder partnerships in achieving sustainability transformation in India.

The methodology to frame the analysis followed a qualitative research technique with a thematic analysis approach. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sampling method. The interviewees selected for the study bring rich and technical experience in MSPs across different sectors/domains. As this thesis focuses on a sector-agnostic approach, the plan undertaken to learn the factors that support and hinder the performance of MSP also yields insights into the larger systemic transformative concept of MSP in India.

The findings can be summarized into two broad categories i) process, these are insights which are action oriented and ii) descriptive, these are insights which are conceptual in nature. It is observed that the best practice theme is mostly in the process-centric category, with a very clear call for action. At the same time risk factors have a blended approach towards descriptive and process approaches. Insights gathered from the risk theme are majorly broad concepts. The best practice theme has identified action-driven activities, positioned as a solution for mitigating the risk identified. Capacity building of team members is a common best practice identified between the NGOs and donors. On the other hand, lack of monitoring is a risk commonly identified between government and donors. Overall aspects such as driving engagement, building value and inclusive culture practices, process & technology development and team building are common buckets identified between the three stakeholders as best practices for MSP. Inefficient monitoring, lack of feedback, data-based decision making, poor project planning and lack of governance structure are the buckets identified between three stakeholders as risk for the efficiency of MSP in India. The analysis presents sector agnostic activities, with a clear focus to identify best practices and barriers to ensure the MSP runs effectively and achieves its desired goals.

A limitation of my research is that it does not include a comparative analysis between the two cases engaging in an MSP setting within a single sector or between two or more sectors. At the same, the three stakeholders are only studied under two themes – best practices and risk. This opens the path for future research, where one single MSP can be studied in detail in one single sector, comparing two MSPs in the same sector, or performing a comparative analysis of two MSPs in two different sectors on the entire (six) 6 thematic areas. Through the current study, the analysis has the potential to abreast the stakeholders from the three categories on the factors promoting and hindering the growth of MSP in India. The results can support the stakeholders in preparing in advance for the identified best strategies and risk factors for experiencing optimum success of an MSP. Overall based on the insights identified through the thesis, multi

stakeholder partnerships (MSP)s can be effectively understood, and adopted within the Indian context across the spectrum of stakeholders working in the domain of MSP. i) the thesis provides a understanding of the dynamics between the three stakeholders, promoting mutual respect and trust; ii) through the research it provides the detailed analysis on the risk factors that stakeholders can encounter in the future, this allows them for proactive planning and mitigative action. iii)the thesis promotes strategic understanding of each stakeholder's strengths, promoting the adoption of best practices for strengthening the performance of MSP. Overall, the findings aim to promote collaborative culture, outcome driven mindset and leverage process and technology in driving multi stakeholder partnerships (MSP) for achieving sustainable development in India.

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