TIP SHEET ON DIALOGUE
OECD/DAC – CPDC network

Purpose

This tip sheet provides a basic introduction to the concept of dialogue. It also outlines the main elements defining dialogue as an approach and as a process, its key applications and the practical implications for programming.

Intended audience

The tip sheet is aimed at practitioners, programme managers in aid agencies and civil society organizations who may wish to promote or organize dialogue processes. It also seeks to be useful to all individuals and organizations concerned with development and peace-building from bilateral and multilateral donors or in a partner country.

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Key messages

1. There are various definitions and "types" of dialogue (sustained dialogue, reflective dialogue, generative dialogue, democratic dialogue among others); however, dialogue as an approach and as a process share a common denominator: they seek to create a quality of conversation that allows for the transformation of inter-personal relations that can lead to a new shared understanding of a complex societal problem.
2. The dialogue approach may be used to tackle problems in a wide array of development areas (natural resources and the environment, HIV/AIDS, MDGs, poverty reduction, democratic governance, etc.).
3. Dialogue processes may be organized or promoted in a wide range of contexts (when tensions arise, in the midst of conflict and after a violent conflict).
4. Dialogue processes cannot be improvised. You need specific tools and methodologies to structure such complex processes.
5. Dialogue processes have to be designed and implemented on the basis of a sound political, economic and social analysis and according to the cultural context of the county/community at stake.
6. While the field of dialogue keeps growing, there is a need to develop capacity-building mechanisms and tools so that best practices and lessons learned can be disseminated and used by local actors.

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Introduction

A genuine and established democracy has proven to be the best way of assuring peace and managing conflicts within society. Traditional approaches to deal with the challenges of development and its conflicts, such as poverty, inequity, disease, globalization and environmental degradation both
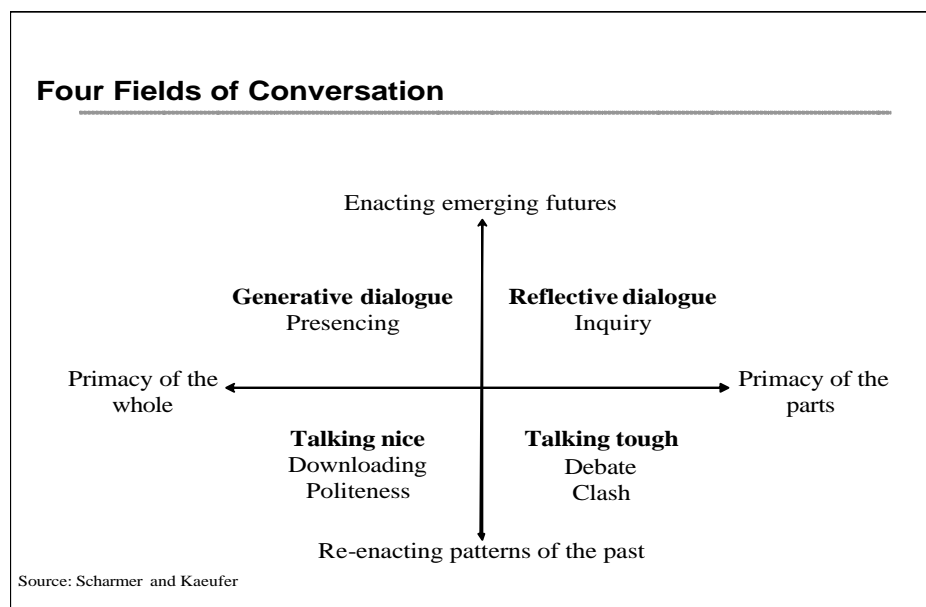
globally and within countries tend to be piecemeal and short-term in scope. Additionally, in many developing countries, the ability of democratic institutions to provide solutions to these difficult problems is being seriously questioned. Many approaches to respond to those critical development challenges focused more on the symptoms rather than on root causes. The search for root causes requires a focus on the micro level of human interaction. This implies understanding better and influence the connection between personal transformation and institutional change, especially as it involves political leaders and other decision-makers. It means utilizing the nature and quality of **dialogue** as a fundamental means of injecting vitality into democracy and of increasing meaningful participation in the political process.

Thus, throughout the world, the need for workable strategies for multi-stakeholder consensus building has never been greater. Increasingly, political and social leaders have turned to dialogue as an important tool for strengthening governance and democracy and for preventing and managing violent conflict.

Key concepts, definitions and elements

Many definitions of dialogue exist but all of them include a component about transforming inter-personal relations. For instance, Bohm[1] argues that <u>dialogue describes a specific quality of conversation or communication that can lead to a collective new understanding</u> Another example of this approach is presented by Hal Saunders[2], a researcher and a practitioner of dialogue, whose best known experience relates to the dialogue in Tajikistan. He suggests the term "sustained dialogue" as a systematic interactive process sustained over time to transform relationships that block essential changes in society.

There are other ways of approaching the concept. Scharmer and Kaeuefer[3] have defined four fields of conversation that describe four different types of conversations based on the quality of dialogue.

Four Fields of Conversation

Enacting emerging futures

Generative dialogue
Presencing

Reflective dialogue
Inquiry

Primacy of the whole ← → Primacy of the parts

Talking nice
Downloading
Politeness

Talking tough
Debate
Clash

Re-enacting patterns of the past

Source: Scharmer and Kaeufer

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[1] Bohm, David (1996), On Dialogue, Routledge, London.
[2] Saunders, Hal, (1999), A public Peace process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts, Palgrave: New York
[3] Bettye Pruitt and Katrin Kaeuefer, (2001) Dialogue as a Tool for Peaceful Conflict Transformation, Volume 3, Number 4, Reflections.

Finally, the Community of Practice on Democratic Dialogue, steered by UNDP, IDEA and the OAS, with the support of the Canadian International Development Agency, has agreed on a set of criteria that help define "democratic dialogue" processes as follows:

	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	PROCESS
CHARACTERISTIC	Democratic dialogue aims at addressing complex problems that are not being adequately addressed by existing institutions. The goal of dialogue is to complement existing institutions, by establishing multi-stakeholders' consultations, consensus-building and communication channels where stakeholders feel their views are being represented and acknowledged.	Participants ~~are~~ are a microcosm of the system that creates the problem.	The process is both open and inclusive, allowing the building of the trust necessary to reach agreements for concrete action.
CHALLENGE	To define the relationship between democratic dialogue and democratic institutions, and to embed the dialogue in a larger framework.	The challenge is to connect the small group to the macrocosm it represents, that is, to society at large.	The challenge lies in focusing on results and creating a safe space for relationship and trust building that leads to action.

Consequently, dialogue may be understood in two ways: as an approach which may be used in all forms and contexts of social interaction: and, as a political process with a finite timeframe. Clearly, the process will need to use the approach although the latter does not necessarily involve the set-up of a process.

Dialogue, as an approach, can be used to address, in a participatory and inclusive manner, a wide array of development challenges, from water, governance, HIV/AIDS to the Millennium Development Goals. For instance, dialogue has been used in Mauritania to bring key stakeholders together around the achievement of the MDGs. It has also been used all over the world ~~used~~ to develop community responses to HIV/AIDS. Actually, the approach may be used in all matters of social interaction, at all levels, from the family and work place to policy reform processes.

Dialogue processes have shown to help build the channels of communication and resolution necessary for the survival of democratic systems. Based on the democratic principles of openness, inclusion and transparency, these processes have increasingly proved to help societies and governments address disputes and conflicts without resorting to violence. In the case of Panama, the dialogue "Bambito I" contributed to the decrease of political tensions around the future of the Panama Canal. In a context of economic and political crisis, the Argentine Dialogue, by helping stakeholders voice their concerns and by supporting the elaboration of a social legislation, called "Men and Women Heads of Households Program and the Remedial Program", was instrumental in reducing the level of political and social tensions in the country. Importantly, dialogue processes are not relevant only for developing states; as a matter of fact developed democracies use dialogue in a constant and efficient way.

Dialogue processes have also proven to be critical in building civil society and promoting a resilient society. For instance, the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue (ISSD) supported an Inter-

Tajik Sustained Dialogue process. "The focus of the dialogue has been on transforming relationship dynamics so that the conflict could be addressed positively"[4].

Dialogue processes can be categorized as one of the many democratic tools that favor transparency, public participation, and inclusion. These processes should be seen as complementing and strengthening democratic institutions rather than replacing them. For instance, the multi-party dialogue in Guatemala resulted in a formal agreement by all political parties to jointly work on the implementation of the components of the Peace Agreements and to reform the internal functioning of the Parliament.

Dialogue processes can also be instrumental in helping articulate a common vision for the future of a country. These processes are especially useful after a violent conflict. Examples of such methodologies include the cases of South Africa Montfleur Scenario Building (1991-1992) and of Vision Guatemala (1998-2000).

In this sense, dialogue complements other tools of conflict management, such as mediation, debate and negotiation. This said, it also differs from these other processes by certain specific qualities that can be summarized as follows: 1) its first objective is to change relations to create new bases for mutual respect and collaboration rather than obtain an agreement on the division of tangible goods and rights; 2) its expected result is~~of~~ the creation of new human capabilities, including the political ones, to resolve the problems rather that to satisfy specific interests through an agreement between the actors; 3) it may be useful in situations where the actors are not ready for a negotiation; 4) it is considered successful when participants are able to open-up to the other's values, judgments and positions and not only to their own; 5) it develops a collective knowledge base which surpasses the sum of individual wisdom; and; 6) it has been noted to generate innovative, creative and more sustainable solutions.

Clearly, there will be contexts in which dialogue is not the right tool, or perhaps the right one but not an option at the time. Dialogue is not a panacea for every problem. For example, when violent conflict is ongoing, the most valuable tools will be mediation and negotiation among leaders who have the power to call a halt to fighting. Or, within a sharply divided political system, it may be necessary to negotiate formal agreements among political leaders or parties to establish a context in which dialogue can go forward. Practitioners must then size up the situation and assess the opportunity for a transformative process and determine how the conditions may be created for the process to happen.

Key questions to consider when supporting dialogue processes

There are a number of indicative questions that can help assess the opportunity for a dialogue process and then help articulate the process in a given country:

Analyzing the problem

1. What is the status of the problem(s)? Is it defined, framed?
2. What is the context? What is the context at other levels – national, regional, global, affecting the problem?

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[4] Saunders Harold H., 2003, "Sustained Dialogue in Managing Intractable Conflict", Negotiation Journal, January.

3. Who are the main actors of the problem(s) system (s) – the stakeholders? How do they interact with each other? What are the power relations among them? What is the status of their relationships? Who is talking to who? What is their level of legitimacy and credibility?
4. What is the level of political will from all the stakeholders who are going to be involved? Why would they participate in a dialogue process or in any other process?
5. What is their overall perception about the problem(s)? What solutions and/or mechanisms to tackle them do they bring forward?
6. Who are the change agents in society who could act on the problem? Are there any enablers of dialogue?
7. What other dialogue process have been used before? What happened with them? Why have they failed or succeeded? What did they contribute?
8. Is dialogue the appropriate tool? Would other tools, such as negotiation or mediation yield better results? What other mechanisms can act as a complement to dialogue?
9. What are the minimum conditions for dialogue? What are the opportunities and risks for dialogue?

When analyzing the problem it is also crucial to keep in mind a few basic prescriptions: assure diversification of sources; doing the analysis is in itself an intervention and it creates expectations; the transparency and legitimacy of the analysis and those performing it are important. In addition, it is essential to set up a monitoring and evaluation strategy from the outset of the process.

Designing the process

1. What kind of co-design process is needed, how should it be structured?
2. What will be the purpose of the dialogue? How can it be determined collectively? How can expectations be managed?
3. Who and how should the dialogue be convened?
4. What type of dialogue is needed and what is the best methodology[5] to address the issues in line with purpose and context?
5. How to select and engage the participants?
6. How to create confidence and ownership in the process?
7. What is the type and level of expertise needed to launch and conduct the dialogue? Is it available locally?
8. What would be the role of external actors?
9. How can a safe space for dialogue be set-up?
10. What sort of facilitation is needed, and by who? How should the facilitator(s) be selected? What will be his/her role and profile?
11. How will the process input into established democratic institutions and processes, including constituencies?
12. What type of communication strategy is needed? What outreach materials should be developed?
13. How do you deal with potential spoilers?
14. What is the level of financial resources needed?
15. What management or support structure is the most appropriate?
16. What funding sources are available?
17. What is the correct timing?

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[5] Some examples of methodologies can be found at: Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy: www.imtd.org; The International Institute for Sustained Dialogue www.sustaineddialogue.org ; World Café www.theworldcafe.com Generon: www.generonconsulting.com; Open Space: www.openspaceworld.org

Practical implications for programming

The results and impact of dialogue processes remain difficult to measure in quantitative terms. In the same way as other conflict prevention initiatives, dialogue processes may not have any short term visible impact on a community or society. However, they can have a longer term impact by planting the seeds for more resilient societies and communities, who can, as a result, address conflict in a more constructive manner. The Development Community (DC) can contribute in very concrete ways to strengthen support to dialogue processes:

The DC can support the systematization and exchange of dialogue experiences and knowledge
- Support the exchange of knowledge through virtual forum, joint websites, and annual international seminars on best practices.
- Further develop methodologies to consolidate short and long case studies on dialogue experiences across the word
- Further develop evaluation methodologies of dialogue experiences
- Set–up mechanisms for experience sharing and learning between practitioners across thematic areas and regions
- Promote the expansion of the "field" of dialogue through support for conceptual and applied research

The DC can promote dialogue by using the dialogue approach in its own work
- Use the dialogue approach to program and implement its programs both amongst donors and with recipient countries
- Advocate for the use of the approach in development cooperation areas such as the environment, HIV/AIDS, poverty and inequity reduction, the attainment of the MDGs, etc.
- Use the dialogue approach to engage the DC on global issues and concerns

The DC can directly support national dialogue processes:
- Provide technical support to national dialogue processes
- Provide external expertise as needed
- Support the mobilization of resources for national dialogue processes

The DC can support the consolidation of a global network of practitioners on dialogue processes:
- Support the organization of seminars that can gather practitioners of different regions of the world to encourage cross-fertilization of knowledge and experience
- Support the construction of flexible teams that can provide targeted support to local dialogue processes

The DC can support capacity-building mechanisms and tools so that best practices and lessons learned can be disseminated and used by local actors.
- Develop tools such as guides, handbooks and toolkits on dialogue for field practitioners.
- Support the elaboration of a curriculum on dialogue methodologies and experiences to train local leaders (government, NGO, staff from international organizations)
- Support the organization of training seminars by regions or sub-regions directed at leaders (government, NGO) and staff from international organizations.

Partnerships

A variety of organizations – think tanks, non-governmental organizations and development agencies – developed conceptual and practical knowledge about dialogue processes. The following is an indicative list:

United Nations Development Programme: www.democraticdialoguenetwork.org
International IDEA: www.idea.int
International Institute for Sustained Dialogue: www.sustaineddialogue.org
Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy: www.nimd.org
The Carter Center: www.cartercenter.org
WSP International: http://www.wsp-international.org/
Global Leadership Initiative: www.theglobalinstitute.org/L2_theinit.html
Partners for Democratic Change: www.partnerglobal.com
World Conference of Religions for Peace: www.wcrp.org
Organization of American States: www.upd.oas.org
National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation: www.thataway.org
Centre for Deliberative Democracy: http://cdd.stanford.edu
Search for Common Ground: www.sfcg.org/sfcg/sfcg_home.html
Society for organizational Learning www.solonline.org
Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy: www.imtd.org
Generon Consulting: www.generonconsulting.com

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