

## Public Dialogue

The purpose of dialogue is to build true community among participants. Public dialogue can be considered as one of the cornerstones of Participatory governance. Facilitating people to listen, learn and discuss fosters an environment of active, inclusive participation. It will empower community members to constructively address issues that affect them in their daily lives. At the same time, Public dialogue offers an effective means for policy makers to be informed about community concerns, needs and priorities. It serves to find ways in which community demands can be addressed effectively.

Dialogue is a distinct way of communicating since it generates genuine interaction through which people listen to each other intently enough to have their thoughts or opinions changed by what they learn. When facilitated effectively, Public dialogue tools can foster a wide variety of societal processes in both the short and the long run including democratization, and peace-building and reconciliation processes, leading to social and political transformation.

### Tools in the Public Dialogue Category

There are eight tools in this category. They are:

- **Multi-stakeholder dialogue (MSD)** aims to bring relevant stakeholders or those who have a 'stake' in a given issue or decision, into contact with one another. The key objective of an MSD is to enhance levels of trust between the different actors, to share information and institutional knowledge, and to generate solutions and relevant good practices.
- **Generative dialogue** is a way for people to surface their unspoken and often unconscious assumptions, beliefs, and values about the world. The goal of generative dialogue is to increase participants' understandings of their own assumptions, as well as those of their dialogue partners.
- **Sustained Dialogue** is an ongoing process that builds upon the transformative qualities of dialogue to enable participants to systematically probe and gradually deal with the causes of deep rooted human conflict.
- **Public Conversations** is a form of dialogue designed to tackle deeply divisive topics, aimed at increasing mutual understanding, improving communication and building more constructive and collaborative relationships.

- **Facilitation** is from the Latin root 'facil' meaning 'easy' and is all about making things easier, smoothing the way, making the most of an organisation's time, and reaching objectives. It emerges from the recognition of how people behave in groups and ensures that human tendencies like straying off the subject, failing to listen to others, dominating, avoiding engagement or going over time, are managed.
- **Mediation** is a form of alternative dispute resolution and aims to assist multiple disputants in reaching an agreement. Whether an agreement results or not, and whatever the content of that agreement, if any, the parties themselves determine the resolution rather than accepting something imposed by a third party. Mediators use appropriate techniques and/or skills to open and/or improve dialogue between disputants, aiming to help the parties reach an agreement on the disputed matter.
- **Public Hearings** are meetings where specific grievances or concerns are aired before a 'jury' or an official panel/commission. The concerned government officials also participate to present their responses to the grievances/concerns aired. After hearing the grievances/concerns and the official responses, the jury or the panel passes orders, directions/actions on the case.
- **Poverty Hearings** are dialogue forums that provide the opportunity for poor people to speak out and articulate their needs, problems, views etc. for themselves. Poverty hearings also encourage those with power, authority and different experiences to listen to the voices of the poor.

## Benefits

- Public dialogue prompts discussion and partnership among diverse stakeholder groups.
- Generates enhanced understanding of different positions and perspectives.
- Builds trust and relationships between diverse communities, stakeholder groups, and between stakeholders and decision-makers.
- Helps decision-makers to understand what communities want and why.
- Increases transparency and accountability in governance processes.
- Can be effective in profiling and addressing the specific needs and issues of socially marginalised groups, including women and poor people.
- Helps in conflict resolution and peace-building and in transforming the dysfunctional relationships that prevent organizations or communities from working effectively.
- Brings incremental benefits such as defusing of tension, decrease in violence and a more humane relationship between groups in conflict.

- Provides a unique space for problem solving, knowledge sharing and presenting examples of good practice.

### **Challenges and lessons**

- Bringing together diverse groups/communities can be problematic and often has social and political repercussions.
- Dialogue tools are often time and resource intensive. Adequate follow-up is essential and therefore requires long-term commitment.
- Often, there is no direct relationship between the dialogue process and official decision-making processes. This can impede the impact of dialogue and, in the long term, lead to the disillusionment of participants.
- In a complex political context, there are many factors at work and it is most often impossible to demonstrate a direct cause and effect relationship between the dialogue and subsequent change. Moreover, many process and behavioural outcomes are not tangible and therefore difficult to identify and document.
- It is important to manage the expectations of dialogue participants.
- Another important challenge is ensuring the meaningful inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged communities in the dialogue process.

## Key resources and organizations

### Conflict Resolution Information Source (CRInfo)

<http://www.crinfor.org/action/browse.jsp?nid=2427>

☞ Conflict Resolution Information Source (CRInfo) is a free service, funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. As a "linking" site, it maintains a keyword-coded catalogue of over 20,000 web, print, and organizational resources, as well as event listings and other conflict resolution-related resources including mediation skills.

### Generative Change Community (GC Community): *GC Community Quarterly Newsletter: October 2008*

<http://www.gc-community.net/GCCNewsletter-October08.pdf>

☞ Bringing practitioners of dialogic change processes into dialogue to develop collective knowledge is a core element of the GC Community's approach to pursuing its mission. The quarterly newsletter provides useful methodological inputs on generative dialogue.

### Church Action Against Poverty: *Hints on holding a Poverty Hearing*

<http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/getinvolved/poverty-hearings>

☞ Church Action on Poverty is a national ecumenical Christian social justice charity, committed to tackling poverty in the UK. Being one of the pioneers in Poverty hearings, it has published a guide for conducting poverty hearings.

### Global Call to Action Against Poverty

<http://www.whiteband.org/about-gcap/what-is-gcap/>

☞ The Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) is a growing alliance that brings together trade unions, INGOs, the women's and youth movements, community and faith groups and others to call for action from world leaders in the global North and South to meet their promises to end poverty and inequality.

### Hemmati, M et al. *Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability - Beyond Deadlock and Conflict*. London Earth Scan (2002)

[http://www.minuhemmati.net/eng/mssp/mssp\\_book.htm](http://www.minuhemmati.net/eng/mssp/mssp_book.htm)

☞ This 300 plus page document is probably the most comprehensive publication on multi-stakeholder processes and methodology replete with practical examples.

### Impact Alliance: *Resource Folder on Facilitation Techniques*

[http://www.impactalliance.org/ev\\_en.php?ID=3779\\_201&ID2=DO\\_TOPIC](http://www.impactalliance.org/ev_en.php?ID=3779_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC)

☞ The Impact Alliance is a global action and learning network committed to strengthening the capacity of individuals and organizations to generate deep impact within the communities they serve. The resources in this folder offer ways in which facilitators can improve their

skills and learn new ways to facilitate community meetings, carry out trainings and workshops for non-governmental organizations or community-based organizations.

International Institute for Sustained Dialogue, USA

[www.sustaineddialogue.org](http://www.sustaineddialogue.org)

☞ The International Institute for Sustained Dialogue is an independent organization formed in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. The Institute helps citizens around the world to transform their conflictual or destructive relationships and to design and implement sustainable change processes.

Institute for Local Government, California – USA (2005): *Getting the Most of Public Hearings - Ideas to Improve Public Involvement*

[http://www.cnrep.org/documents/handbooks/Getting\\_the\\_Most\\_Public\\_Hearings.pdf](http://www.cnrep.org/documents/handbooks/Getting_the_Most_Public_Hearings.pdf)

☞ This is very useful guide on how to organize public hearings and the skills and resources required for the same to maximize the benefits of public hearings.

<http://pioneersofchange.net/communities/foresight/articles/Kahane%20on%20talking%20and%20listening.pdf>

☞ In this thought provoking and useful article, Kahane describes his experiences of using Generative Dialogue as part of under the project 1997-2001 Vision Guatemala

Multi Stakeholder Process Resource Portal

<http://portals.wi.wur.nl/msp/?Links>

☞ On this portal one can find practical information on how to facilitate participatory learning processes with various stakeholders. It provides theoretical foundations, methods and tools to create learning processes, facilitation tips, examples, literature and links.

Pioneers of Change Associates, Johannesburg (2006); *Mapping Dialogue: A Research Project Profiling Dialogue Tools and Processes*

<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/3754237/Mapping-Dialogue-A-research-project-profiling-dialogue-tools-and-processes>

☞ This is a very useful dialogue related tool-kit for practitioners and includes a concise description of Sustained Tool with a case study. To freely download the pdf document, one has to register with docstoc.com

Public Conversations Project (PCP): PCP Dialogue

<http://www.publicconversations.org/resources/guides>

- ☞ PCP Dialogue is the methodology created by the Public Conversations Project (**PCP**) The information is accessible in both English/ En Espanol

### Stakeholder Forum

[www.stakeholderforum.org](http://www.stakeholderforum.org)

- ☞ Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future is an international multi-stakeholder organisation working on sustainable development; supporting the increased involvement of stakeholders in international and national governance processes. The organisation played a key role in the preparations for and follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Their website contains all that one needs to know about stakeholder dialogue processes.