ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF DIALOGUE PROCESSES:

SOME REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD

UNDP

THE CARTER CENTER

Democratic Dialogue

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Contents

Overview

The growing use of dialogue processes to address emerging crises worldwide and to find consensus among stakeholders on a particular complex economic, social or political issue has been accompanied by the need and demand for better evaluation methodologies to:

1. Measure the impact of dialogue interventions (intended and unintended consequences),

2. Better understand when and how dialogues should be used and how they can be designed and conducted for maximum impact,

3. Convince external and internal actors to participate in, or support such intervention, and

4. Help build the field of dialogue by identifying good practices, systematizing lessons learned and finding common elements for comparative studies.

Ultimately, evaluation processes seek to better capture the meaning of success and how it can be measured in the context of dialogue. Yet, whether evaluation is seen as a tool for learning or accountability and advocacy, it is fraught with sizeable challenges, dilemmas and tensions when defining the interventions' scope, purpose, and approach.

This summary outlines reflections of dialogue and conflict resolution practitioners around the multifaceted roles and elements of evaluation, and its relevance in shaping dialogue processes mostly understood in this document as conflict resolution processes but also as a relational (dialogic) approach for human interaction and transformation. It shares discussions from the Generative Workshop on Evaluation jointly convened by UNDP and the Carter Center that took place at the Carter Center, Atlanta, USA on January 24-25, 2007. By highlighting key lessons learned and by introducing preliminary thoughts on a comprehensive framework to systematically evaluate dialogue processes, this paper aims to provide dialogue practitioners with some conceptual and practical guidelines on the evaluation of dialogue processes.

1 Purposes and goals of the Generative Workshop

In January 2007, the Carter Center and the United Nations Development Programme convened a workshop to reflect and learn about evaluation and assessment of dialogue processes, by exploring the subject from diverse approaches and practical experiences in Latin America, the Caribbean and other regions of the world. It brought together dialogue practitioners from the field, conflict resolution experts and academics, as well as professionals from UNDP and the Carter Center.

The workshop intended to generate relevant knowledge on how to analyze and improve the depth, quality and impact of dialogue interventions. In particular, it facilitated discussions on a set of useful indicators and criteria to measure results and impact of dialogue processes and laid the foundation for an effective impact assessment methodology.[1]

Dialogue can be defined both as a process and as an approach. It is a participatory, inclusive process aimed at solving complex social, economic or political issues by bringing together, in a safe space, the stakeholders of a particular problem or concern. The facilitated process fosters understanding among the participants and seeks to identify new consensual options and shared visions. Dialogue, as mentioned by participants of the workshop can achieve the following goals: share understanding and vision, transform relations between or within groups, influence policy making, create content for further policy advocacy.

By contrast, the dialogic approach can be best described as a code of conduct for dialogue practitioners and a quality of interaction that can be effective in bringing about positive changes. The code of conduct 'extrapolates from the governing principles on how to go about the work of promoting, organizing and facilitating dialogue processes'[2]. This is the reason why dialogue and other processes such as mediation and negotiation can adopt approaches that are more or less dialogic, depending on the guiding principles and quality of the interactions between the participants[3].

During the Generative Workshop, dialogue was mainly considered as a process - sometimes more as a conflict resolution process (a tool within a larger toolbox of conflict resolution methodologies) than as a broader societal change methodology - and not so much as an approach. This tendency can be explained by the composition of the participants to the workshop. Dialogue practitioners tend to define dialogue as an approach while conflict resolution experts are more inclined to define dialogue as a process at the same level as other conflict resolution processes such as mediation and negotiation.

Evaluation can be broadly defined as a judgment on the progress made to achieve particular goals and objectives, identify intended and unintended effects and provide insight on the reasons why a particular process was successful or not[4]. Like the mythical personage of Janus, a complete evaluation strategy is not

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1. Retolaza, I. and Díez Pinto, E. (2007). Evaluating Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: a Comparative Analysis –, A background paper prepared for the *Generative Reflection Workshop: Assessing the Impact of Democratic Dialogues*, Carter Center, Atlanta, January 24-25 2007

2. 'Democratic Dialogue – A Handbook for Practitioners' (2007)
3. 'Democratic Dialogue – A Handbook for Practitioners' (2007)
4. idem

only looking at what has happened but it also provides onward-looking guidance.

This document reflects the predominance of dialogue understood as a conflict resolution process. It aims at presenting initial reflections on the roles, purposes, and challenges of evaluating dialogue processes and how this affects and contributes to the definition of a broader framework for evaluation. Primary thoughts on such framework will be presented at the end of this paper.

2 Scope and purposes of evaluating dialogue

Dialogue as a tool for democracy-building and conflict prevention has suffered from its own fame. Used under different names, contexts and for different purposes, dialogue has in some cases seen its core essence and principles diluted into badly-designed processes, which have, in turn, strongly affected its credibility as a field of practice. In some instances, dialogue has been proposed as the right process but its impacts or effects seem to have been limited and a 'dialogue fatigue' appeared. Stakeholders end up being tired of 'talking' and do not see any progress in the succession of dialogues. Such dialogue fatigue has developed for various reasons: 1) dialogue is used in the right context, but the process is badly designed and/or facilitated, 2) although the process is carefully designed, the dialogue is organized in wrong contexts and participants are not ready to take genuinely part in the process, 3) dialogue processes are well-designed, participants are ready to genuinely participate in the process but the results of the dialogue are not implemented at the public policy level.

Evaluating dialogue processes has thus become vital for dialogue practitioners, promoters and participants to understand when dialogue is relevant, when it is not, under which conditions it leads to impact and at what level, and how it can ultimately influence the policy level and provoke positive change within a society.

> 'Dialogue is a process to contribute to the creation of citizenship, citizenship in the purest sense of owners of a society'.
>
> *Participant*

Why is the need for dialogue increasing in Latin America and the Caribbean?

1. The development of Democracy in the region itself is demanding more participatory mechanisms.

2. Paradoxically, the disenchantment with democracy and the limited positive social and economic results have given rise to new needs for innovative solutions which can be created through dialogue processes.

3. The emergence of new actors in the political arena require new spaces of discussions and interactions that are more inclusive than traditional institutional channels.

4. The social polarization in Latin America coming from the high levels of inequality

5. The 'winners take all' type of approach that does not allow for collaborative approaches to politics and further exergue political tensions

Based on the discourse of
Rebeca Grynspan, Director of RBLAC

During the workshop, evaluation purposes were defined as twofold: 1) to ensure accountability, and 2) to provide guidance for future processes (learning).

2.1 Evaluation and accountability

2.1.1 To identify and gauge societal change

When asked what they thought the main goal of dialogue was, dialogue and conflict resolution practitioners participating in the workshop on evaluation agreed on the following: dialogue processes promote societal change and foster constructive relationships. Indeed, dialogue links and promotes individual, organizational and societal change. As a consequence, to evaluate dialogue processes is to identify and gauge societal change at different levels of a society.

A theory of change refers to how practitioners believe change at the individual, inter-group and systemic levels can happen given recognized assumptions and actions that will lead to positive transformation. Because theory nurtures practice and vice versa, clarity on the theory used in the design to provoke change helps build clearer dialogue processes. Dialogue practitioners need to be explicit on the theory of change they are using to provoke positive transformation of the relationships existing among stakeholders. Lack of clarity on how to initiate change may lead to various disconnected and fruitless attempts to positively impact individuals and societies as a whole.

Yet, because theories of change have usually been implicit in the design of a dialogue process, it is hard to evaluate how specific activities result into an alteration of perspectives or assumptions or into a change in relationships with other groups. There is a growing need in the field to identify, clarify and test the hypothesis and assumptions on how to create change within a society using methodologies such as mediation and dialogue.

Thus, to make a theory of change explicit upfront can achieve the following results: 1) it enables practitioners to follow a strategy while adapting to specific contexts and dynamics, 2) it allows for testing particular theories of change and thus nurtures the theoretical framework

from which dialogue processes are justified, 3) it participates in the development of the practice by identifying new tools leading to change.

Evaluation participates in the need to clarify the theories of change used but it also helps identify new theories arising from the practice as part of a posterior learning exercise.

'if there was a way for (…) a constant opportunity for a dialogue between opposing parties where neither side had to lose face if they convened a discussion, this would be a wonderful way to avoid much of the political problems not only in this hemisphere, but in others.'
President Carter

2.1.2 To measure impact at micro, mezzo and macro levels

Measuring the 'impact' of dialogue processes can be a daring endeavor, especially when trying to assess the impact at the macro level. Because reality is complex, systemic and chaotic, the contribution of dialogue processes to change is not linear and the causal chain to move from one level of influence to another may not always be neither relevant nor clear. Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity, we will divide the impact of dialogue into three categories: the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

The micro level refers to the individuals participating in the dialogue. Practitioners are usually aware and knowledgeable about the instruments and indicators they can use to measure changes within individuals and in the relationship between them. The evaluation focuses on measuring change in attitude and skills.

The mezzo level corresponds to the broader community. When dialogue practitioners intend to measure the impact at the mezzo level, they are searching for indicators of change 'outside the conference room'. At the mezzo level, the

participants of the dialogue process are the agents of change. They bring back to their community the learning that came out of the dialogue. How they expand that learning to their community is what the impact at mezzo level is looking for. The indicators will search for proves of whether the participants are becoming agents of change in their own constituencies, adopt a dialogue language and apply the skills learned to positively influence the groups' perspectives.

The macro level corresponds to the broader level of impact. It is also referred as the overarching goal of a dialogue process by dialogue practitioners when trying to convince donors to support their initiative.

2.1.3 To evaluate both the process and the outcomes

Evaluations, to be complete, should look at both the process and the outcomes. Process-oriented indicators aim to identify the quality of both the design of the process and the facilitation. These indicators are internal to the process (internally-driven). They do not seek to measure the impact of the dialogue intervention. They help monitor the process, ensuring that the facilitators preserve a safe space, equalize power among participants and orient the discussions towards the achievement of a common understanding among the various stakeholders. Process-oriented indicators belong to the micro level.

Outcome-oriented evaluation aims to identify tangible and intangible results of the dialogue. This type of evaluation aims to understand the external 'visible' or 'invisible' impact or effect of the process both at mezzo and macro levels. They are usually identified at the end of the process and tend to measure the impact 'outside the room'. This part of the evaluation is thus more 'externally-driven'. Tangible results can be the signing of agreements, laws, public commitments, joint activities resulting from the dialogue and the public and private institutionalization of monitoring mechanisms and structures once the dialogue is over. Intangible results would be more in the fine change of relationships between groups or among stakeholders (collective action and common initiatives on other issues, change in the stereotypes, attributions and assumptions,

level of trust and interaction). It seems important that, to measure 'intangible results', the social psychology and sociology disciplines be involved in the determination of indicators and methodologies.

2.2   Evaluation and learning

2.2.1 DURING: to keep focus and energy in the process

Evaluation as a practice has traditionally been considered at best as a separate exercise isolated from the general design of the dialogue process, and at worst, as a separate discipline with little interaction between the two. Recently, conflict resolution practitioners have understood the need to use evaluation not only as a demand coming from the donors, but also as an instrument to improve the practice and share learning.

From a burden, evaluation has been progressively considered as a means to bring energy into the process. Indeed, evaluation methodologies enable practitioners and participants to re-focus the process, and to reconsider inputs, goals and impact.

'The move from focusing on external use of evaluation to internal uses of evaluation reflects a growing maturity of the dialogue field.'
Participant

During the workshop, a comparative analysis of three evaluation processes was presented: the cases of Colombia and Jamaica where the methodology of civic scenarios was used and Argentina where sectorial roundtable methodology was used. As explained by the authors, 'none of the three dialogues had any sort of pre-established monitoring system in place. No indicators were defined before the dialogue started and no formal entity was in charge of implementing a learning-oriented monitoring system'[5].

'Evaluation is a way to keep energy in the process, and to approach and recruit new participants in the project.'
Participant

❖ Evaluation helps set realistic goals and expectations

The participants recommended that evaluation be part of the design of a dialogue intervention because it helps focus the process on realistic, achievable goals and intended impact. Indeed, one of the problems identified by practitioners and donors is that, in order to secure funding, project managers using dialogue as part of the project's design, or dialogue practitioners themselves, tend to present fuzzy, unrealistic goals to the donor community. More precisely, the goals and intended impact described in funding proposals tend to focus on the macro level, where, as mentioned earlier, there is almost no possibility to demonstrate the relationship existing between a dialogue initiative and a change at the political, social and economic macro levels.

Additionally, the donor community needs to be educated on the expected outcomes of a dialogue process, its potential but also its limitations. They tend to expect outcomes or contributions that a dialogue process may not be able to achieve. We are not saying that dialogue processes have no impact at the macro level, but in general, it should not be considered as the major area of focus when searching for funding because it is extremely difficult to prove the effectiveness of dialogue initiatives at that level. To present goals at the macro level will imply stretched conclusions that are often poorly substantiated and which will ultimately lead to frustrations, not only on the donor side but also

5 Retolaza, I and Díez Pinto, E. (2007). Evaluating Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: a Comparative Analysis

on the participants' side if they are told that such process will lead to a societal change when it is not obvious at all. One has to be careful when managing expectations.

The expected goals agreed within the dialogue team and with the participants and donors will help define the theory of change used by the dialogue practitioners. The theory will influence each and every single aspect of the dialogue design and implementation. To properly monitor and evaluate a dialogue process is to make the underlying assumptions of the dialogue practitioners visible.

Good evaluation strategies transform wishful thinking into careful thinking on the goals to be attained, their feasibility and conditions that are required to reach the objectives set. The evaluation identifies the inputs and activities necessary to develop the dialogue process, the series of outputs whose combinations lead to the attainment of specific outcomes, which, when combined, lead to intended or unintended impact.

❖ Evaluation helps reflect on key elements of the design

The first part of this section intends to show the need for realistic goals when dialogue has been defined as the appropriate tool to be used in seeking understanding among stakeholders. Evaluation must be also reflective on the choice of dialogue as the methodology of intervention. Indeed, it can also be that dialogue is not the right tool to be used under specific contexts: for instance, when the level of conflictivity is too high, and a safe space cannot be guaranteed.

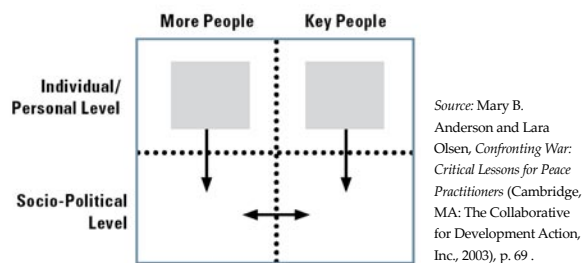### ❖ Dialogue as part of a 'toolbox' of interventions

Thus, it is important to consider that dialogue as a process, but not as an approach, is part of a conflict resolution 'toolbox'. It is not the solution for every problem, and using it independently from the context in which it should operate, and without considering and weighing other conflict resolution and consensus-building tools, is a mistake that evaluation should be able to identify and help prevent.

Pushing the thought to its edge, the choice of dialogue could also be weighed against the choice of not intervening to prevent a crisis from developing. No intervention can lead to a conflict that can provoke quicker and greater societal changes. We could consider that dialogue, like many conflict prevention processes and other types of interventions such as humanitarian aid, can prevent these crises from occurring and thus may block or postpone positive change.

In order to choose the right instrument, a careful analysis of the context in which the intervention will take place is crucial. Such analysis must include a review of the issues at stake, actors that should be involved in a process, power dynamics, and an exhaustive review of past interventions. Similarly, before an evaluation takes place, and especially if it is external or a long time after the event to be assessed took place, a careful analysis of the context, actors and issues at stake has to be prepared.

❖ Key people versus more people

One key element of the process design is the choice of the participants. Depending on the theory of change chosen by the dialogue practitioners, the targeted group(s) may vary and the social level involved may be different (elite dialogue vs. grassroots dialogue).

Source: Mary B. Anderson and Lara Olsen, *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners* (Cambridge, MA: The Collaborative for Development Action, Inc., 2003), p. 69 .

When dialogue aims at policy change, meaning when the goal of a dialogue is to develop content for further advocacy or public agendas, ownership by national or local decision-makers of dialogue processes is very important to bridge the gap between dialogue and policy decision-making. Dialogue is an instrument complementary to democratic institutions in that it helps strengthen weak or transitional institutions where the political culture is dysfunctional or anachronic. On the one hand,

choosing not to include decision-makers in the dialogue process may: 1) compromise the further implementation of agreements and actions, 2) jeopardize what has been agreed on and/or done during the dialogue. On the other hand, the inclusion of decision-makers in the process will require a good management of power.

The State or political actors may be involved in different ways: high ranked officials do not always need to participate directly in the process but they have to be involved in the process from the onset, be aware of the agreements that were reached and serve the role of interlocutors for the implementation of proposals defined by the participants. There are various ways to engage stakeholders, but it is correct to assume that to influence the socio-political level, the involvement of the elite is essential or the process is doomed to fail. In Colombia and Jamaica, the linkage with policy makers was not created and the outcomes of the dialogue process were not implemented by the politicians who did not feel connected to the agreements reached. This is likely to happen when policy dialogues are held by social actors (civil society) who do not tend to consider the need to include policy makers in early stages of the process and not only when the dialogue is over.

The management of the political space from the onset is crucial. It has a lot to do with the connections between key political leaders and the dialogue process, whether the decision-makers directly participate in the dialogue or not. The dialogue team needs to meet and establish good contact with them: networking is essential to obtain the engagement of the highest spheres and find allies in the political establishment. This is the reason why the composition of a dialogue team is important: it needs to be accepted by stakeholders, retain the trust, and support and protect the process against threats to its success. Each member needs to be recognized as an unprejudiced and objective person, equidistant from the various groups represented in the dialogue. When the conveners want top political leaders to participate in the process, they need to make sure that there will be no manipulation and that

they won't spoil the process. If decision-makers do not participate in the process, that space must be managed in such a way that some ownership be created when it comes to implementing the agreements generated by the dialogue. At the end of the process, it is important for the dialogue team to accompany decision-makers in implementing the decisions coming out of the dialogue. The absence of follow-up after the dialogue could limit the influence of the dialogue on higher levels, the levels that may lead to contributions at the macro level. The lack of accompanying from the dialogue team can lead to 'dialogue fatigue' (the agreements reached do not influence decision-makers).

❖ The management of power

Dialogue was defined by the participants as a power-distribution tool. Dialogue works best when its design and facilitation consider power as a dimension that needs to be dealt with. Balanced or asymmetric power creates dynamics that must be taken into account within, around and throughout the dialogue process and space. One of the most complicated aspects of organizing a dialogue process is selecting its participants. Dialogue practitioners are usually concerned with the potential risk of political manipulation by powerful participants and the subsequent counter-productiveness of a process reinforcing power inequalities.

Dialogue as a tool for power redistribution
'There is a strong relationship between dialogue and power. Through dialogue, existing power relations may be changed as many more persons participate in the process of developing alternatives to their problems.'

Elena Díez Pinto, summarizing discussions on power and dialogue

One dialogue promoter explained that one way to convince high-level people with a lot of power to participate in a dialogue process is to show that even though 'in the room' they have to equally respect the views without trying to convince or threaten the others, 'inside and outside the room' they will gain respect and legitimacy. In that sense, legitimacy is a constructive form of power. As mentioned by some dialogue practitioners, Leaders are sometimes criticized by their own constituencies for participating in dialogue exercises but positive outcomes of such a process may end up increasing their legitimacy and thus consolidate their role as representatives.

The challenge around selecting participants as representatives of their community or of a particular group of interest was also raised. As summarized by Iñigo Retolaza, there is a need to guarantee that the participants participate in good faith, and that they are accountable for the outcomes of the process and for 'effectively canalizing the voices and interests of those who they claim to be representing'[6]. The participation of leaders in a dialogue is thus everything but a neutral decision: it influences the core design, impact and success of the selected process.

Additionally, as highlighted by Retolaza, participants mentioned the strategic importance of working at the local level, especially when dealing with the elite/power situation:

'decentralizing public dialogues down to sub-national levels was understood as a mechanism for democratizing dialogue itself (moving beyond elites' dialogue) as well as bridging the gap between the representatives and their constituencies. On the other hand, bringing public dialogues closer to lay citizens and sub-national stakeholders was seen as a sound mechanism for greater ownership and broader acceptance of the outcomes achieved and hence of the actions to be taken later on.'[7]

❖ The role of the media

Depending on the context in which the dialogue takes place, the media can either be an internal or external actor that can reinvigorate a process by putting some constructive pressure on the participants so they comply with the agreements reached, or jeopardize it by unveiling sensitive discussions, taking sides, or questioning the validity of a process. Sometimes it is best to incorporate the media from the very beginning so the public opinion is aware of the dialogue; and sometimes it is preferable to keep the discussions confidential until the dialogue ends. Dialogue practitioners must carefully weight participation of the media during the design of the process. Public opinion must be broadly reached out with clear and powerful messages and it is thus very important to work with the media so the messages that are conveyed correspond to the reality of the process.

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6 Retolaza, I. (2007). Dialogue and Power Relations: How far can we go?
7 idem

2.2.2 AFTER: to propose constructive guidance for future action

As mentioned earlier, one of the goals of evaluating conflict resolution processes is to improve the practice by identifying key lessons learned throughout the process and at the end. Being reflective enable dialogue practitioners to improve their skills, avoid the same mistakes, and better define their instruments to provoke social change.

This is the reason why evaluations should be oriented towards future action. It should explore the successes and failures of each process, both in terms of process and results and identify what could be done differently so dialogue practitioners maximize the effectiveness of the methodology used and adapt their theory of change to specific contexts and interactions.

Thus, an important characteristic of a good evaluation is that it provides constructive guidance for future initiatives and helps build the practice and the legitimacy of dialogue as a valid and effective instrument for social change.

Developing knowledge about dialogue requires a multi-stakeholder collaborative learning approach including academics, practitioners, donors, promoters, politicians, different generations, gender balance, social activists, facilitators, conveners. A committed learning community involving these various stakeholders will create and maintain the state-of-the-art of dialogue and move from fragmented thoughts to shared meanings.

The role and purpose of evaluation actually depends on the definition given to dialogue and if it is understood as a process with a start and end or as an approach which can be applied in any sort of process of human interaction.

PURPOSES OF EVALUATION:

❖ To measure the contribution of dialogue by:
- Gauging its influence on societal change
- Identifying its impact at micro, mezzo and macro levels
- Evaluating both the process and the outcomes

❖ To learn from the process and build the field of dialogue by:

- Helping set realistic goals and expectations
- Reflecting on key elements of the design
- Better defining success in a dialogue process
- Proposing constructive guidance for future action

❖ To be a tool for accountability

❖ To be a tool for advocacy

Based on the discussions that took place during the workshop

3 Challenges

The evaluation of dialogue processes present special challenges that Peter Woodrow from the CDA-Collaborative Learning Projects summarizes the following way: the timing, tracing and measuring of impacts is difficult: some effects can be observable immediately and others long after the process has ended. In terms of tracing and measuring impact, he identifies three main challenges: 1) measuring the non-quantifiable, 2) difficulty of attribution (what is the dialogue process itself responsible for in terms of social change), and 3) potential negative effect of attribution.

In addition to this analysis, six other challenges and dilemmas were identified by the group. These challenges and dilemmas deal with: 1) the purpose of the evaluation, 2) its scope, 3) its use, 4) its focus, 5) its delimitation, and 6) its nature. Finally, participants questioned the role and relevance of indicators and the use of criteria as a more relevant and strategic level to evaluate dialogue.

3.1 Purpose: accountability vs. practice improvement

The original objective of evaluation was to measure the impact or contributions of dialogue and make the practitioners accountable. The donor community has been very keen in 'seeing the results' of the often considered 'soft' processes such as dialogue. To show the impact was the primer objective of evaluating a dialogue.

Progressively, evaluation has become a tool for learning. By identifying key lessons learned, evaluation contributes to the improvement of dialogue as a field of practice. Evaluation fosters reflective practice by helping practitioners keep the focus on the goals to achieve and by providing them with tools and indicators that will help assess their progress. It also helps to improve the process. By setting criteria and searching for excellence, evaluation, when included from the beginning, contributes to the guarantee of an ethical and professional process, especially when the evaluation includes both process-oriented and outcome-oriented indicators.

As mentioned previously, the donor community and the dialogue practitioners may have different views on the purpose of evaluating dialogue processes. Donors tend to be very focused on the quality of the process designed by dialogue practitioners and the measurement of its success (accountability) whereas for dialogue practitioners, the evaluation must also serve the role of building the practice and improve learning among the dialogue community (practice improvement). The evaluation and its findings should thus be relevant for both internal and external actors and the criteria and indicators used shall serve both purposes.

3.2 Scope: micro, mezzo, macro vs. short-term/ long-term

Depending on the initial theory of change and expected contribution of the dialogue process, the framework to be developed should define a strategic scope and timing to ensure that intended and unintended impact is considered at each societal stratus, or at the stratus that is considered relevant for the dialogue intervention (individual, organizational and socio-political levels).

Yet, there are almost no tangible indicators of change that could be used to show the causal linkage existing between dialogue processes and societal change. More particularly, if a dialogue process had to have any impact at the macro level, it would probably take years to make it visible. Consequently, two of the main risks dialogue practitioners face are: 1) the tendency to use 'stretched' indicators of success at the macro level (dull indicators), and 2) the temptation to erroneously use micro or mezzo indicators to prove societal impact of dialogue processes at the broader level.

One of the conclusions coming out of the workshop is that the practice should primarily focus its work on evaluation at the micro and mezzo levels. These two levels are the most pertinent for conflict resolution activities. At the higher level, the causal link is very difficult to prove, and it may actually be counterproductive to search for change at that level, especially within a limited timeframe. The macro level could be managed differently by conflict resolution practitioners and promoting institutions, but without disconnecting it from the other two levels. One of the main challenges is how to actually link the political space to the dialogue process.

Depending on the level of evaluation one is looking at (micro, mezzo, macro), some dialogues may appear undeniably successful at the micro level and a burning failure at the macro level: a dialogue can be very successful in changing perceptions between the participants, and a failure in influencing policy making processes.

Improving the measurement of success at both micro and mezzo, insisting on the link between micro and mezzo (mezzo being the most strategic level of impact of dialogue processes) is the way to go. This does not mean however that the macro level should be discarded. By contrast, the macro level should be considered; impact should be searched, but probably in a longer-term perspective.

3.3 Use: process design vs. comprehensive framework

The use of a framework of evaluation should be context-specific, user-friendly for the dialogue practitioners, flexible enough to be adapted to the changing situation but also prone to comparative analysis among cases so best practices can be drawn and knowledge shared.

3.4 Focus: process vs. outcome

The evaluation, to be comprehensive, must include process-oriented indicators of success and outcome-oriented indicators of success. The combination of both will enable the evaluation to make practitioners accountable and improve the practice. A dialogue process can lead to concrete positive outcomes but the process may have been badly led, and a well-managed dialogue may lead to limited success if the agreements reached are not taken forward.

3.5 Delimitation: process vs. project

Dialogue is usually part of a bigger intervention or programme and it is unclear whether the evaluation should/could isolate the impact generated by the sole dialogue process or if it should be evaluated within the framework of the broader initiative. The Jamaican experience has showed the challenge of trying to evaluate the impact of the sole dialogue.

3.6 Nature: structure and openness

There are tensions between the somewhat rigidity of an evaluation structure and the organic nature of a dialogue which adapts to the context and dynamics in which it evolves. One participant mentioned that if one is very focused on evaluation, it can end up limiting

the flexibility of the process. Evaluation and the structure it implies from the onset of the project may very well contradict the organic nature of dialogue which develops according to the context in which it evolves.

Such tensions can lead to frustrations between dialogue practitioners who follow the organic approach and the donors who tend to prefer a well-structured process designed from the beginning of the initiative with fixed criteria and indicators. It is a concern when evaluation is used to convince donors that are not part of the dialogue process and that are not always educated about dialogue and expected contributions of the intervention. Misunderstanding by donors of the goals and results a dialogue can influence the evaluation purposes, criteria and indicators and be different from the type of evaluation that would be best fitted to evaluate social transformation.

CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS OF EVALUATION

Accountability vs. Practice Improvement

❖ How to make the evaluation relevant to internal and external actors, considering that both will expect the analysis of different indicators?

Scope and Time of Dialogue contributions to change

❖ How to evaluate a process at micro, mezzo and macro levels? How to combine it with short-term, medium term and long term perspectives?

Tailor-made evaluation vs. Need for comparison

❖ If dialogue processes are tailor-made, how to design a framework of evaluation that will enable comparative analysis among experiences but also a specific assessment of the impact (output and outcome) a particular dialogue has had?

Process vs. Outcome

❖ How to build an evaluation that embraces both process and outcome oriented indicators?

Project vs. Process

❖ Are we analyzing a process or a project?

Structured evaluation vs. Open process

❖ How to set up a structured evaluation strategy while keeping the process open and flexible?

Based on the discussion of the Generative Workshop on Evaluation, January 25-26, 2007.

4 Initial thoughts on the comprehensive framework

Because each evaluation process is defined along with the dialogue intervention, it is context-specific. It would thus be counterproductive and actually wrong to propose a 'recipe' for evaluation strategies. Nonetheless, some characteristics deem essential to contribute to an accurate, complete and well-articulated evaluation strategy. Evaluation methodologies are successful if they are participatory, adaptable and open processes prone to comparative analysis.

4.1 General principles guiding the framework

4.1.1 Participatory and dialogic

To be successful, evaluation processes must be participatory so they can include the voice, perspectives and interests of all the people and entities involved in the process using a dialogic approach.

The inclusion of the donor community in the evaluation process is important for two reasons. First, it fosters discussions between the dialogue practitioners and the donors on the expected outcomes and impact the intervention will have, thus setting common realistic expectations. Second, it is also a strategic activity for it helps convince donors of the validity and professionalism of the dialogue process: more than simple discussions among people, dialogue processes are designed to achieve specific goals and outcomes.

Finally, including the donor community often helps define a complete evaluation strategy. The donor community can help include a more

'results-oriented' perspective of the evaluation strategy. Indeed, dialogue practitioners are often criticized for being too focused on 'process-oriented' indicators, whereas donors are way too often focused on results without giving much importance to the process-based indicators. In addition, the donor community is usually more interested in finding indicators of accountability whereas dialogue practitioners are more inclined to search for lessons learned and best practices. The definition of a common evaluation strategy helps bridge the gaps between the two visions and find a balanced number of process and outcome oriented indicators as well as accountability vs. lessons learned indicators. To better educate the donor community on the essence and goals of dialogue processes and to develop strategies to convince them to fund more open-ended process are key to achieve a fruitful collaboration and partnership.

In addition, it is essential to involve participants of the dialogue in the evaluation process from the very beginning. The discussion on the objectives to be achieved and the constraints and opportunities brought by the contextual and structural conditions of a particular dialogue intervention help participants set realistic expectations with the facilitators. By defining together the objectives of the dialogue, it makes the process theirs. Defining jointly the evaluation strategy with the facilitators thus helps foster ownership because the participants identify on their own some of the outcomes they want to see emerge from the conversations.

Moreover, it is also very important to carefully involve local or national authorities in the process. In case the governments are not interested in participating in a dialogue, getting them involved in the evaluation strategy is a

good way to convince them to get more actively involved. By having them see that dialogue processes are more than mere discussions among people and that its impact can be assessed helps get rid of skepticism from their part and can be as fruitful as to convince them to actually participate in the process.

Yet, one has to be careful when designing the evaluation strategy in a participatory way. If not carefully led, the process could lead to some manipulations from the donors or the local or national authorities. This is the reason why the common design of evaluations among various stakeholders of a dialogue process should use the dialogic approach. As mentioned earlier, a dialogic approach aims to learn from each other, to listen without trying to convince the others, to accept the others' values and perspective and search for common understanding. Dialogue is also a tool for designing and leading an assessment of a dialogue process.

Thus, evaluation, in addition to be a tool for learning and accountability has also become a tool contributing to the empowerment of stakeholders. Agreeing on a solid evaluation strategy is contributing to a successful dialogue.

4.1.2 Adaptable

The second characteristic of a successful evaluation process is its propensity to adapt to the context in which the dialogue is organized, but also to the dynamics and goals that emerge as the process unfolds. As mentioned earlier in this paper, dialogue processes do not operate in a vacuum. On the contrary, they build on a particular context, on permanent or temporary dynamics whose evolutions are often difficult to foresee. Political or social tensions may arise, power balances may shift, new ideas and perspectives may emerge. The evaluation needs to take into account contextual and structural parameters to be able to assess the external (exogenous) and internal (endogenous) factors of a successful dialogue process. Consequently, there may be different frameworks and indicators for different stages of dialogue process.

4.1.3 Open to intended and unintended consequences

Thirdly, the design of the evaluation must allow for intended and unintended outcomes to be reflected and analyzed. The process must be sufficiently open and responsive to new consequences to be able to grasp these intended and unintended outcomes, being positive or negative. This implies that the indicators of progress/change/impact may be modified or added during and after the process took place.

4.1.4 Prone to comparative analysis

Additionally, the participants in the workshop added a final criterion: that the evaluation strategy is prone to comparative analysis. As mentioned earlier, one of the goals of evaluation is to participate in the creation of a field of practice through identifying lessons learned (which help improve dialogue methodologies) and building credibility (by showing results that are not punctual but systematically reached by certain types of dialogue). To be able to do so, dialogue experiences and results -although all of them are context-specific- should be analyzed through the same 'prism'. Instead of having common indicators of success, the general framework could focus on general common criteria. Baseline criteria and indicators for crossed comparisons must be completed with contextual indicators.

Ultimately, all dialogue processes aim to provoke positive societal change through the creation of constructive relationships within or between communities. A common framework would enable to draw lessons learned from various examples and thus build lessons learned at the level of practice; lessons learned that are more general, and not connected to a particular context.

In addition to allowing comparison among cases, the framework should also allow for comparison with other conflict resolution tools such as mediation or negotiation.

BRAINSTORMING IDEAS ON THE COMMON FRAMEWORK OF EVALUATION:

❖ The framework should not only enable comparison across case studies but also between conflict resolution tools. It is important to understand the trade-offs of each process, especially if we are talking in terms of evaluation.

❖ The framework should allow for reflective practice.

❖ The framework should allow the identification of intended and unintended results.

❖ The framework should be able to distinguish between a very good implementation of the dialogue and the same dialogue being totally irrelevant at the socio-political level.

❖ The framework needs to take the context into account: this is not easy because the context, which is always idiosyncratic, plays a big role in how the process is designed and which outcomes can be expected.

❖ Evaluation is a tool for a means: the framework has to be useful and relevant for dialogue practitioners.

❖ The framework should be designed in a way that enables identification of lessons learned and good practices because they will help build the field of dialogue.

❖ The framework should be useful not only to assess results, outcomes and outputs, but also for the design of the process.

❖ Link methodologies to theoretical approaches: the field may not have developed or used enough theoretical knowledge on how to link the individual to organizational and societal levels of change. Methodologies need to be rooted in theories, not only in the accumulated experience and best practices.

COUNTRY CASE	THEORETICAL APPROACH
Jamaica	Sustained Dialogue's Theory of Change World Bank's Social Capital Implementation Framework
Argentina	Evaluation as an Integral and continuous process Constructivist approach Participatory and dynamic
Colombia	Transformative potential of dialogue Third order change Learning history

4.2 Implications in terms of measurement

4.2.1 Indicators vs. Criteria

Indicators:

Indicators provide evidence on the achievement of particular results. They enable practitioners assess the progress made towards the completion of a particular outcome or goal. Nonetheless, the very use of indicators to measure the contribution of dialogue processes to positive societal change has been questioned. Numerous concerns were raised when discussing the relevance of indicators:

❖ Pre-defined indicators may limit what is looked at, and evaluators/ practitioners may miss important opportunities for having an impact.

❖ Vague, broad or grandiose goals lead to poor indicators and stretched interpretation of the same: it is tremendously important to have realistic goals.

❖ Indicators may need to change over the course of a programme as the process evolves to adapt to often volatile contexts.

❖ Dialogue as an open-ended process makes the definition of predetermined, narrow-ended indicators almost contradictory with the very nature of the process. Some processes are spontaneous and little structured. The creation of indicators, fear some practitioners, can limit the freedom of the process. At the same time, too much freedom and evasive goals could lead to a restricted impact or contribution to positive change.

'The most reliable indicator in Mostar, in Bosnia-Herzegovina was the type of music they played in the local bars. If the level of tension was very high, they would play nationalistic music on both sides. If the tension was sort of slow, then they would play general east European or American pop music. From the local perspective, that was the sharpest indicator.'
Participant

❖ Overemphasis on quantitative measures, when dialogue often involves non-quantifiable outcomes and impact.

❖ Indicators become a substitute for good analysis and interpretation. Indicators should not equate goals. As mentioned by Koenraad Van Brabant, indicators are only the indication of 'something else'. It is the something else that matters, not the indicator itself.

'Indicators should be the way to make sure that criteria exist.'
Participant

For these limitations, some practitioners actually questioned the focus on indicators because they may not be able to identify to what extent institutional and social change can be attributed to a dialogue intervention. From the participants' perspective, focusing on criteria instead of indicators seemed to be more appropriate in the definition of an evaluation framework.

'We need to be very careful that we don't equate evaluation with indicators because that would be a very dangerous path to go down.'
Participant

Proposal for categorizing indicators:

Peter Woodrow, a conflict resolution expert, proposed to group indicators into three main categories: Participant/Individual level, Project/Programme level, and Socio- Political level. The grouping of indicators into categories can achieve the following results: 1) to address all levels of contribution to social change (from individual to macro levels), 2) to understand how these indicators show the relevance of the dialogue to deal with the driving factors of conflict.

The criteria could be fixed and pre-determined (same criteria across dialogue experiences) whereas the indicators would depend on the context in which the dialogue takes place and thus they have to adapt to the situation and its evolution across time. The indicators would then serve the purpose of substantiating the criteria.

Proposal for Criteria of Evaluation[8]:

1. relevance – appropriateness of the dialogue to address key issues at stake

2. effectiveness – in achieving the stated goals

3. efficiency – of the delivery of outputs and outcomes in a timely manner

4. impact – results/effect of the dialogue at the micro/mezzo/macro levels

5. sustainability – of improved relationships and mechanisms in place to implement agreements resulting from the dialogue

6. linkages – of key people and more people

7. consistency with values of conflict prevention and peace-building

8. coverage – of the various dimensions of conflicts (international/regional/internal/intergroup

9. coherence

4.2.2 The Impact

Many participants were uncomfortable with the term impact and how to measure impact. The term seems too broad and unmanageable. Other participants proposed studying the contributions (positive and negative), influence, effects, side-effects, spin-offs. The same applies for using the term causality when dialogue processes are not linear. It is better to talk about evidence or argument in this case.

4.2.3 Tools for evaluation

The following tools were proposed during the seminar:

❖ Group/individual interviews

❖ Narrative analysis

❖ Letter of testimony

❖ Cost-effective analysis

❖ Gender-based participation matrix

❖ Coverage from the press

❖ Perception of the public opinion (polls)

Such tools could be part of the evaluation and be connected to the indicators and criteria.

The development of the framework will be designed by academics and dialogue practitioners on the basis of these initial considerations.

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8 Proposed by Peter Woodrow at the Generative Workshop on Evaluation, January 25-26, 2007

5 Conclusions and Challenges Ahead of Us:

The field and practice of dialogue are currently experiencing a discrepancy between the methodological frameworks developed by practitioners to put together the best dialogue processes, and the methodological richness of available evaluation methodologies. To keep on strengthening dialogue as a field, practitioners must bridge the gap and ensure that evaluation and dialogue reinforce each other: evaluation helps design and improve dialogue whereas dialogue can be the approach used to design an evaluation strategy.

1. Design a common evaluation framework

Evaluation efforts serve two major purposes: 1) to measure the contribution of dialogue to positive societal change, thus making dialogue practitioners accountable and use it as a tool for advocacy, and 2) to foster reflective learning and improved practice of dialogue as a methodology to solve complex issues in a consensual way. It is hoped that the development of a Common framework for evaluation will conciliate both purposes and successfully link theory to practice. The design of such framework will include dialogue and conflict practitioners as well as academics. It will be nurtured by the discussions within the growing community of practice worldwide.

2. To better understand and manage power

At the crux of the discussions on evaluation was the need and overarching goal of developing successful dialogue processes aimed at solving complex societal issues and bringing positive change. Even though the development of a comprehensive framework for evaluation is a necessary exercise, it is also clear that many other analyses, thoughts, and sharing of experiences and lessons learned on how to improve the practice are also relevant. Among them, managing power and effectively dealing with the political space are significant areas of study and reflection to further develop this field of practice.

The participants recommended sustained discussions among the members of the Community of Practice on power and the management of power within and around the dialogue process.

3. To better convey the role and purposes of dialogue to policy makers

During the workshop, President Carter emphasized the need to elaborate a policy note targeted at decision-makers to explain the roles and purposes of dialogue, and which objectives it has achieved. Such user-friendly document would be used as an advocacy tool relevant for high-ranked officials.

4. The Dialogue Community will play a key role in ensuring the continuous growth of dialogue as a field of practice.