

DIALOGUE & MEDIATION

A Practitioner's Guide

*Processes and lessons for participatory
Dialogue and Mediation*

West Africa Network for Peacebuilding [WANEP]

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An Overview: Defining the Context

Dialogues^[1] have become critical in the post cold-war era as many countries increasingly face more intra-state unrest than inter-state wars. The number of active major civil wars has steadily fallen from 21 in 1991–92, to less than 10 each year since 2002^[2]. The characteristics of the new emerging wars are quite different from what inter-state wars presented and the repercussions have more than ever, affected civilians and populations as well as resources, and crippled governments' ability to function. Describing these modern wars the 2011 World Development Report^[3] observes that 'the organized violence that disrupts governance and compromises development also includes local violence involving militias or between ethnic groups, gang violence, local resource-related violence and violence linked to trafficking (particularly drug trafficking), and violence associated with global ideological struggles'. This violence is often recurrent, with many countries now experiencing repeated cycles of civil conflict and criminal violence. According to the 2011 World Development Report facts and figures, countries lose an estimated 0.7 percent of their annual GDP for each neighbour involved in civil war.

For this reason, the response to violent intra-state conflict ought to entail much more than 'keeping the peace' and forging national consensus and a national peace agreement. On a continent of multiple conflict situations, platforms for mediation have become critical in (re) engineering community and national cohesion.

¹ Although this practice guide draws on political dialogues it also considers the other aspects of dialogues including social and cultural, economic and religious nuances of dialogues. It involves disputants or parties in conflict talking together directly to try and understand the issues of conflict and also understand each other without necessarily resolving the issues that divide them. In the processes of dialogue, third parties may assist the parties in conflict to talk together, to explore issues and understand each other better and possibly lay the ground work for a resolution of the issues

² World Development Report 2011, p. 52

³ Ibid , p.81-82

Dialogues have become critical in the post cold-war era as many countries increasingly face more intra-state unrest than inter-state wars.

The importance of dialogue and mediation continues to grow as the world experiences changes in the nature of armed conflict and political crisis.

Countries need structural and systemic transformation that can keep them from falling back into crisis.

As nations developed democratic structures, the over-emphasis on institutional and regulatory frameworks caused a sidelining of interactive platforms that might help institutions function efficiently and promote stability.

Although a number of groups and organisations have ventured into the area of dialogue in recent times, not much is documented around the *insights* these activities generate. The effort to promote knowledge in dialogues and mediation around conflict has often been limited to a 'classroom approach' to learning, which focuses on 'what is' and 'what is not'. Evidenced by the many participants who undergo training and yet are unable to undertake dialogues and mediation, it is apparent that the mere knowledge of the theories around dialogues and mediation does not guarantee successful application and practice. Several 'potential' mediation practitioners have had their activities terminated, stalled or undermined due to a 'faux-pas' in convening dialogues. Many more, after going through training never apply this tool, because faced with real life conflict situations, they lack the 'how to' in convening and conducting political dialogues.

So while knowledge building in conflict resolution, mediation and related activities expose the nature and characteristics of these elements in society, they do not necessarily equip practitioners with what it takes to navigate this terrain and operate on platforms that help to avert conflicts such as political dialogues. The question then is, *what does a practitioner do in dialogue?* How can successful dialogues be realised in potentially volatile situations? How are decisions reached in a participatory manner that resonates with all and reduce tensions? How can political dialogues be convened in a comprehensive, forward-looking manner that produces results upon which systems can be built and sustained? What must practitioners do and in what order? Does one size fit all? What are the rules if any to effective dialogues? What are the values, ethics and principles to uphold?

Dialogues are not only to resolve conflicts but more importantly to heal wounds, reconcile groups, build confidence and trust in institutions and in people toward social cohesion and national development. At any given time, practitioners may be dealing with religious differences, political, ethnic, gender, racial and economic undertones and plain power relations that produce different outcomes and so practitioners must find the right combination of elements to ensure successful outcomes. Dialogue is a process. It requires expertise with efficient diligent preparation to make it successful.

This **practitioners' guide** for dialogue and mediation therefore reflects on, unearths and documents broad experiences and insights in ways that practitioners can relate to, under varying conditions. Although the guide presents some standards in 'how to convene dialogues', its tone is more of descriptive codified best practices rather than prescriptive.

The guide makes the **assumption** that users have already undergone the necessary training in mediation or conflict resolution. The guide therefore becomes an *application tool*. This guide further serves as a *reflective material*. It is based on experiences from actual dialogues and therefore is very 'hands-on', practical and well-informed.

Overall the guide proposes steps, insights and lessons that promote participatory dialogues with the ultimate goal of transforming conflicts, communities and nations. It is easy to use, friendly and concise.

WANEP's Work in Dialogue and Mediation

WANEP, a leading Regional Peace-building organization in West Africa appreciates dialogue and mediation as endogenous to West African cultures and traditions. WANEP's experiences of dialogue processes have been generated from platforms convened to resolve real conflicts in the West African sub-region and the African continent in general. Out of these experiences, a major deficit from dialogue practice is the weakness in integrating dialogue and mediation institutions and structures in the development of the institutions of the modern state in West Africa. At the political levels, political parties in power assume that they can rule and make binding decisions exclusively. Such decisions could be as trivial as naming a Presidential Office building or as major as an economic development policy direction. Dialogue at the political level is critical for the development of systems of governance at state level and ensuring continuity of major development policies without significant alterations regardless of which political party is in power.

Over the past 12 years of its work in peace-building and conflict transformation, WANEP realized that there is hardly a context specific practice guide to assist Mediators and Moderators in disputes. Trained mediators end up with skills for mediation and dialogue but without the necessary information to ensure that their mediation and dialogue process is efficient and effective.

WANEP is keen on developing a Practitioner's Guide for Dialogue and Mediation aimed at assisting Mediators and Moderators of Dialogue as well as increasing the confidence of users of mediation as a veritable instrument for settling disputes.

This guide therefore draws heavily on WANEP's experiences in the field of dialogue and mediation and on definitions and structures that have proved useful in over a decade's work for use by a wider public.

WANEP has collaborated with organisations such as the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC) and the Swedish International Development (SIDA) to engage in critical dialogue processes.



1. Operationalizing Key Terminologies In Dialogue And Mediation

Users of this guide must have had basic training in conflict prevention or resolution and possibly dialogue and mediation as tools to foster peace. This session seeks to i) provide practitioners with quick reminders of key terminologies and ii) operationalize the usage of such terminologies in this guide.

Many terminologies in this field of work have broad and varying definitions. Several of them are also used interchangeably.

a. Dialogue

Dialogue is an interactive conversation between one or more sides working together towards a common understanding. It encourages the parties to listen to each other with open-mindedness with the aim of understanding the issues between them and each other. While the purpose of dialogue is not necessarily to generate solutions, dialogue could prepare the ground towards reaching solutions better than positions earlier held individually. Unlike debates which seek winners, dialogues search for a common ground or consensus as its goal. In most instances, a third party assists the parties in dispute to talk together. Such third party assistance is referred to as facilitated dialogue. In its expanded form, dialogue is “a process for sharing and learning about another group’s beliefs, feelings, interests, and/or needs in a non-adversarial, open way, usually with the help of a third party facilitator. Unlike mediation in which the goal is usually to reach a resolution, the goal of dialogue is simply improving interpersonal relationships, understanding and trust”^[4].

This session seeks to
i:
provide practitioners with quick reminders of key terminologies and
ii:
operationalize the usage of such terminologies in this guide.

⁴ Read more on dialogue on the UN Peacemaker website (www.unpeacemaker.org)

Dialogues come in various forms. The major types include^{5]}:

- » High-level or summit dialogue involving the top leadership of contending sections in a country. These are often initiated or mediated by the international community and are often high-risk events.
- » Interventions by civil society organizations that seek and build trust and skill in the process of dialogue. These are relatively low-risk activities.
- » Multi-level dialogue which are situations where dialogues are convened at various levels of society in an effort to engage citizens in building national cohesion and a deliberative culture that help to reduce tensions.
- » Political dialogue refers to a wide range of activities aimed at addressing threats in a society which can cause a lapse or relapse into violent conflict. These dialogues range from high-level negotiations and mediation to community attempts at reconciliation. These processes of dialogue are complementary and normally run in parallel. Therefore any political dialogue process takes into account all the dimensions of dialogues including cultural, social and economic nuances. Political dialogue takes place in many forms; it is initiated and facilitated by a variety of actors; and takes place at various levels of society. Political Dialogues are critical aspects of planning for peace-building, state-building and development.

Dialogues generally add quality to a decision, neutralises tensions and sometimes validates a Judiciary ruling. In this regard if our practices put dialogue at the centre of what is constitutional, dialogue will transcend and respond to crises at all levels.

b. Consensus

A consensus is the point at which everyone agrees they can live with the final proposal; that is, after every effort has been made to meet any outstanding interests. Usually, the facilitator or someone in the group frames and presents what may be coming out as the interest of the group. **Consensus is not unanimity**^{6]}. Unanimity suggests there were no varying views; that everyone supported the proposal. Consensus on the other hand may require a shift in one's point of view to one that they do not necessarily favour but can work with without severe or adverse effects.

⁵ *International Dialogue on Peace-Building and State-Building*

⁶ *A short guide to consensus building: An alternative to Robert's Rule of Order*

C. Mediation

Mediation is a process in which a third party impartially assists in resolving a dispute between two or more parties. It is a non-adversarial approach to conflict resolution. The role of the mediator is to facilitate communication between the parties, assist them in focusing on the real issues of the dispute, and generate options that meet the interests or needs of all relevant parties for settlement of the dispute. Unlike arbitration, where the intermediary listens to the arguments of both sides and makes a decision for the disputants, a mediator assists the parties to design a solution for themselves by providing ideas, suggestions, and sometimes even formal proposals. The parties can themselves choose an option or modify it as they see fit for resolving the conflict. A successful mediation effort seeks to have an outcome that is accepted and owned by the parties"^{7]}. While some may use this terminology, mediation, interchangeably with dialogue, the latter may also be seen as a tool for mediation.

d. Convening

Every dialogue needs to be called by someone or a group of people or organisation with the ability to bring people together. This person or group often has the clout or power to call the meeting and is respected in that regard. Yet the fact that one has a convening power does not mean he/she can convene any dialogue. Where a convenor is acceptable he can be a facilitator of the meeting. Again, some have convening power but cannot facilitate, in which case the person uses his or her 'good office' to convene but not accepted enough to manage the process.

e. The Facilitator or Mediator

A political dialogue requires a credible facilitator with responsive mediation skills. The most critical issue here is **acceptability** by all parties. Factions must respect and cooperate with this person for a credible process. The facilitator must ensure that people feel capable of expressing their views at all times. Before the parties in a political dialogue come together, mediators (or facilitators) can play an important part in helping to identify the right participants, assist them in setting an agenda and clarifying the ground rules by which they will operate and generate a buy-in.

While the terms facilitator (or moderator) and mediator are used interchangeably in many processes, there is a striking difference: *A mediator is a facilitator but a facilitator is not necessarily a trained mediator. In dialogue, it will be useful to have a facilitator with mediation skills.* While facilitators do most of their work "at the table" when the parties are meeting face-to-face, mediators are often called upon to work with the parties before, during, and after their face-to-face meetings.

⁷ *ibid*

A Mediator....

- ❖ May handle pre-negotiation and post-negotiation
- ❖ May push for the acceptance of a position
- ❖ May be spokesperson for either groups in a reporting capacity, for instance a media briefing
- ❖ May be called to monitor implementation



2. Ethics And Key Principles In Dialogue And Mediation: Participatory Rules Of Engagement

Successful dialogues are driven by the core principles of participation which convenors and facilitators must consider for useful outcomes. Such participation should be inclusive of all key stakeholders. Dialogue brings together a diverse set of voices to create a microcosm of the larger society. To bring about sustainable change, people have to develop a sense of joint ownership of the process and become stakeholders in identifying new approaches to address common challenges.^[8] *This also means facilitators must pay attention to traditionally excluded groups such as women and the cultural nuances regarding gender.* In some communities or environments, men and women may not sit in the same meeting room as women may not be permitted to speak openly in public. For instance, during WANEP's pre-dialogue meetings in Jos, Nigeria, the Fulanis were reluctant to bring women to the meeting although gender balance and inclusiveness was an agreed principle. In the end, a separate meeting was held for the women.

a. Listening

This is a principle of active participation. Such listening focuses on the whole and not the part. In dialogue, we are encouraged to stay tuned-in, in order not to miss the context within which things are said. Further, one's opinion is stronger only to the extent to which it is based on what the other has said. This requires intense listening and total physical and mental presence in a meeting.

Successful dialogues are driven by the core principles of participation which convenors and facilitators must consider for useful outcomes. Such participation should be inclusive of all key stakeholders.

⁸ See UNDP paper: *Why Dialogue matters for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding*. February 2009.

Dialogue begins when people meet each other.

Dialogue depends upon mutual understanding and mutual respect.

It focuses on a shared service to a community, nation or group.

At the end of a dialogue, a participant’s perspective is likely to change or shift or be enlarged.

We listen as individuals as well as a group (collectively). Persons in a dialogue listen as a whole, ‘listen for all’ rather than from an individual perspective. Such listening considers diversity in the room and encourages people to speak to the centre rather than to any particular individual. **We listen in order to understand, find meaning and find agreement.**

b. Respecting

The fundamental principle at play here is ‘**respect for myself and respect for others**’.

To see others as part of the whole, and more critically, part of you is to acknowledge the commonalities shared as humanity. This requires looking and seeing more of a person than we usually notice. It requires an appreciation of what may have caused the circumstances, experience or perspective the other person holds. The concept of the whole requires that conversations are held as a whole and diverse views are held together concurrently. Such interaction would consider emotions such as pain, anger, conflict and all other group sentiments. It is important to allow the polarization and sentiments without necessarily seeking to fix it. Respect in dialogues also requires withholding criticisms. People should ‘**disagree without being disagreeable**’. People’s ability to express their opinions allows them to be part of the whole. Neither suppress nor try to relieve the tensions that may arise. These expressed emotions open the door to a new understanding.

c. Suspending

People are encouraged to hold up their views and concerns, judgements, perspectives and certainties in ways that allow others to see and understand. It calls for some detachment from the thought, that is, some separation of the individual from the thinking. This way the thought is appreciated for what it is and can be carried on into dialogue.

d. Voicing

It is important to know what to say and when to say it. This aspect of ‘right timing’ requires intensive listening. It sometimes requires a processing of the thought before speaking- a period of ‘inner silence’. Even when one does not know what to say, the silence helps some of the picture to develop and the outcome can be trusted to some extent.

e. Transparency

The rules of engagement must be clear to all. The agenda, when inclusively agreed, makes compliance easier and promotes respect and other principles mentioned above

f. Seating

Sitting arrangements can facilitate participation. As much as possible, participants should sit in a circle, or in a manner that no one sits behind another (‘*no one sees the back of the head of another*’).

Seating compels participants to relate to each other and to speak to the centre and not to ‘a high table’. People speak as individuals not as (*ganged-up*) groups when they are not seated with the group to which they belong. They will begin to build relationships and bonds with a sitting neighbour they do not know rather than gang up with their own. Further, sitting in a circle, re-affirms the principle of respect. It suggests no one is ‘higher’ or more important than the other, or simply put, equality and respect for all.

WANEP defines dialogues through the lens of core principles

A dialogue is a way of thinking and reflecting as a group. It promotes a collective or shared inquiry into an issue. Therefore as WANEP puts it, it is a conversation with a centre not sides. In other words it focuses on reaching a certain new position from a shift from various perspectives. The energy and ideas in individual positions are channelled into the creation of something new. By the end of such a process, the intellect, power and energy of the different perspectives shift to a centre to signify shared values and a common ground, thereby neutralising tensions and polarizations.

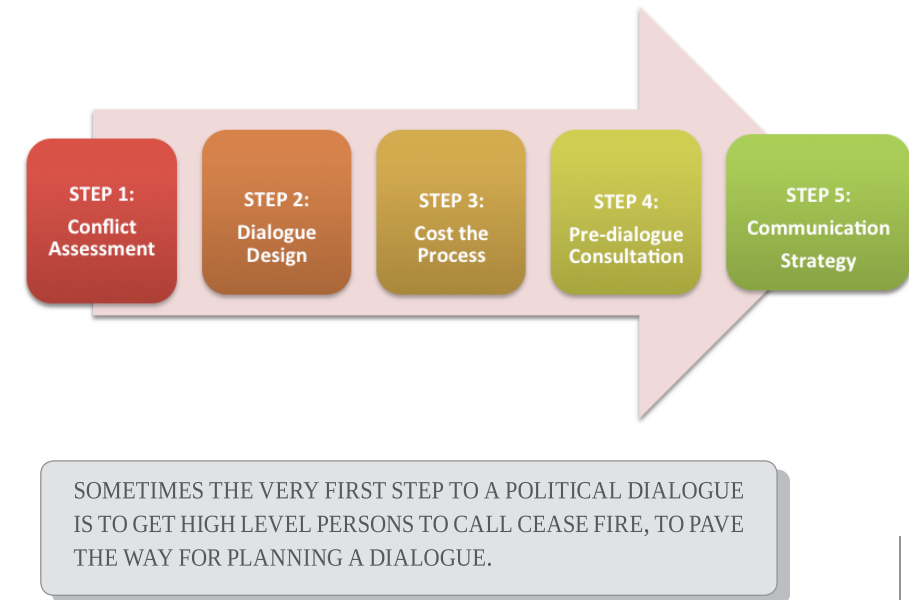
In a dialogue, the process proves to all that no one is trying to win, certainly not in the sense that implies someone then loses as a result. At best, there is a win-win situation. So while encouraging factions to share their views, no particular view is made to prevail or gain points for that matter. What may appear as a mistake or downfall of one group should be seen as gain for the process and for all.

Overall, the practice of dialogue is ‘to change the way we think and the way we think about the way we think’. It is therefore intended to produce life-changing and lasting results.



3. Key Stages Of A Successful Dialogue

a. Pre-dialogue Stage

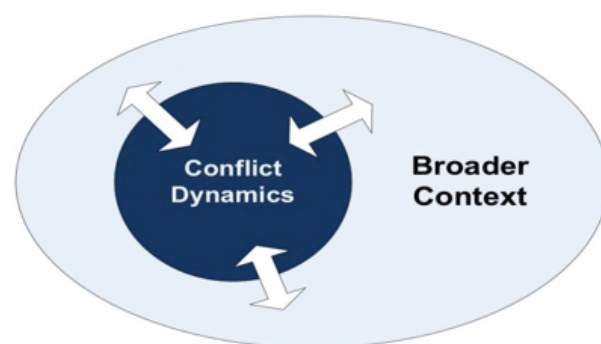


Step One: Do Conflict Assessment and Analysis

A conflict assessment outlines the issues underlying the conflict; who the stakeholding interests are, where they disagree and where they might find common ground. It is usually prepared by an impartial outsider based on confidential interviews with key stakeholders.

Doing a comprehensive conflict analysis reveals historical trends regarding the conflict or tension; what worked, what did not work and why, who has been involved and what methods have been used in the past. It reveals lessons and insights especially reasons for past failures and places the convenor or facilitator on a good path to (re)strategise for success. It may also reveal a format for dialogue, time frame, budgets and so on.

» It may be necessary to interview stakeholders in the conflict without unnerving people. The first set of interviewees in a conflict assessment process could help identify a second round of individuals or organizations who might be able to contribute to the process. Make a documentation of all issues identified by participants within conflict assessment. The choice of issues for the dialogue is critical to the success of the dialogue. Conflict Assessment can be undertaken by experts [outsiders or insiders] to provide a general understanding of the context or the conflict profile. A key output is an 'Assessment Report'. The analysis of this is expected to inform action. Conflict Analysis provides the opportunity to understand the relationships between actors and key stakeholders. It is important to support and provide facilitation of parties in conflict to do their own analysis of the issues and their relationships rather than do the analysis for the parties.¹⁹ The way the issue is eventually framed will determine the extent to which the parties involved engage the process.



Step Two: Design the Dialogue

An inclusive dialogue design and content has proven to be very useful. It contributes immensely to reducing potential tensions that may emerge in the dialogue. It may even help to unravel some of the nuances of the conflict as mentioned in step one above. Although the design process is often led by the convenor, the process also begins to identify potential stakeholders, program content and further assigns roles. This begins to bring stakeholders into the process if it has not already begun in step one.

⁹ For an in-depth understanding of conflict analysis, read more from the draft of Conflict Analysis Framework; a collaborative effort of the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, CDA Collaborative Learning projects, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed conflicts and Norwegian church Aid

Step Three: Cost the Process

Dialogue processes are sensitive and ought to be perceived with credibility. It is important to source funding from credible sources and set up the necessary support system including administrative and logistical arrangement for the smooth running of the process. As much as possible, funders, if they are not key stakeholders in the conflict should not be seen to be influencing the process in anyway other than providing funds or sometime clearly defined technical support. Parties in the conflict may already harbour suspicion over the role of the funder. There have been instances where queries have been raised over the real motives of international organisations or non-Governmental organisations.

Step Four: Hold Pre-dialogue Consultations

This stage is like operationalizing step two (the design) above. The essence of these consultations is to promote a stakeholder buy-in, determine content, and identify possible stakeholders, venue, moderators and other structures. There is the need to get agreement from the onset on how the meeting will be conducted. This process particularly helps to **build trust**. The meeting may be with first line stakeholders, experts in the field, convenors and key officials. There must be an attempt at equal representations from sections of the conflict. (see appendix for an example). The pre-dialogue consultations may focus on the following components:

•Identify the issue(s)

Any deliberative platform like a dialogue is driven by an issue. In a dialogue process the agenda revolves around the issue. The issue has the ability to draw people to the table to talk or, drive them away. It may be useful to set up an issue drafting team either within the consultation group or external persons who must work with representatives of the parties in the conflict in identifying and agreeing on the issue for dialogue. They must also work with the findings in the conflict assessment document or with the analysts. It is critical that the issue identification is done by the parties in the conflict as part of the process of dialogue. No expert can identify the issue in a conflict more than the parties in the conflict themselves. This process does not only allow for an identification of the issue but also reveals how the parties understand one another in their relationships around the issue of the conflict.

Above all, this process ensures that the issue is framed in ways that resonate with parties involved in the (potential) conflict. The pre-dialogue consultation therefore must engage various stakeholders and conduct the necessary research to ensure there is a comprehensive picture of the issue. This enables the parties to see themselves in the issue. The parties must feel there is room to present their perspective in the framed issue. Issues may be added along the way but it is important to get enough issues that resonate with all from the onset.

•Mapping critical groups/stakeholders relevant for the success of the dialogue:

Identify the circles of stakeholders. This refers to individuals or groups that want or ought to be involved in decision-making, but at different levels of intensity. Conduct interviews to determine who should be a participant in the dialogue. Such a conversation should be documented and reviewed by those who

POINT OF INTEREST

Should The Author Of The Assessment Document Be The Facilitator/ Mediator Of The Dialogue?

participated before another round is held. After a list has been drawn up, it is always useful to ask: 'Who is not at the table? This helps to identify missing actors likely to affect the credibility of the process, for instance future generations or Children. Sometimes those who may seem to be representing a particular group may not fulfil all the needs, and additional representation may be useful. If it is a multiple-dialogue process, make room for additional participants as new issues emerge.

•**Identify and select a Facilitator/Moderator/Mediator**

The facilitator is here seen as a manager of the process. It is helpful to have someone who has no stake in the outcome to assist in managing the conversation. In this regard the facilitator is supposed to be non-partisan and be able to remind people of the agreed rules. It is important to clarify, in writing, the facilitator's or mediator's responsibilities to the group for acceptability.

•**Select a Recorder**

Many dialogue processes gloss over the role of a recorder and yet an inefficient recorder or an inappropriate record of proceedings could undermine the ability to keep track of proceedings based on which consensus or agreement is reached. It is important to select an individual acceptable to all the key stakeholders. The parties must feel comfortable with the recorder's presence in the meeting.

•**Choose a suitable date and venue**

Sometimes a neutral venue makes all parties comfortable. In such cases, the premises of a convenor or a public location may be useful. In other instances, dialogues ought to occur in the affected communities for parties to be in their comfort zone and not feel threatened in any way; and the community must see and feel a peace-building process take off. Sometimes in some peace-building process, dialogues occur on and off location for strategic reasons.

Step Five: Plan Appropriate Communication Strategy with the Media

Most times, the conflict that may necessitate dialogue may already be in the public domain and so the media and the general public may look out for outcomes. On the other hand, convenors may need the media to disseminate agreements. The encounter with the media must be managed to avoid fall-outs and maximise positive results. Explore possible communication tools for information dissemination.

b. The Dialogue Stage



Step One: Welcome/Who is in the room

Parties or factions often like 'validation'. Recognise people and let them feel important and welcome. It is also critical to mention **who is in the room and who is expected to be part of the process**. Dialogue processes are characterised by tensions especially when pre-dialogue consultations have not succeeded in breaking the ice considerably. People enter the premises with the hairs on the back of their necks up, wondering who the other person is. Calm nerves by mentioning the representation in the room; if it is same as agreed in pre-dialogue consultations, confirm this, if not mention any slight changes to put minds at rest.

Step Two: Set Rules regarding participation and the conduct of the meeting

Ground rules may cover a range of topics from respect for one another, to behaviour, rights and responsibilities of parties as well as decision-making procedures, strategies for handling disagreement and ensuring implementation of agreements and rules governing interaction with the media. Some may observe 'Chatham House' Rules, generally meaning issues discussed cannot be mentioned outside and no participant can be quoted without their express permission. In political dialogues, it is necessary that participants sign the ground rules as a sign of commitment and as a document they can be held by.

Step Three: Present the Agenda

It is important that participants have a clear sense of what will transpire in the meeting. Present the agenda as agreed in earlier consultations, making room for 'matters arising'. The ground rules and the agenda are likely to generate some discussions as people seek clarifications and contest other matters. These early exchanges, while they may appear trivial offer a good opportunity to begin building relationships and establishing trust.

The recording of proceeding creates a visual record of what a group has discussed and decided

Step Four: Story-Telling, Deliberation and Recording

This is the core of the meeting. The session starts with storytelling by the parties, often uninterrupted. The facilitator undertakes to make this happen. Deliberation then follows with emphasis on the shared development of options. Deliberation is a facilitated discussion that seeks to hear from all parties present with the aim of reaching some agreements. It is not a debate; therefore it does not seek to have a winner. On the contrary, each person’s view is expected to enhance and shape the conversation. It requires tolerance, yet firmness on the part of the facilitator or mediator. Deliberation allows participants in a dialogue to speak as individuals rather than ‘gang up’ as groups or parties. At the same time it challenges them to think of the whole. People present constructive points of views with explanations rather than mere entrenched positions.

The recorder must work closely with the facilitator to capture the conversation. This can be done on a flip chart or can be captured on a screen. It is useful when the recording is visible to all as it promotes transparency but this must not distract participants from the dialogue itself. When using flip charts or white boards, the recorder must stand and write in such a way as not to block participants from reading. The recorder must write simple legible sentences all the time avoiding paraphrasing where possible. Paraphrasing sometimes changes the intended meaning of what is said and might cause irritation or anger. The recorder must order and number the sheets for easy referencing. Whether the recording is done visibly or privately, say on a computer, it is important that the summaries are reviewed in draft by all participants to ensure that everyone agrees with the record of what happened. As often as it is necessary, revisit agreements and ground-rules in the course of dialogues to refresh memories and keep dialogue on track.

Step Five: Decision-Making

As earlier indicated, dialogues do not always seek solutions. Some dialogues simply help the parties to determine the way forward. In some dialogues, decision making or reaching agreements is easily realised, and in others it is a very complex and protracted process. Some dialogues are naturally propelled to logical conclusions; in most cases, decisions, agreements or consensus have to be negotiated. Here the mediation and negotiating acumen of the facilitator is critical.

•Draft a consensus

Based on the recorded proceedings, a perceptible consensus reached in the dialogue must be outlined and reviewed by all sides. Usually if the text is reviewed in plenary, it can generate another set of disagreements over trivia. A single text could be presented to different groups at different times, each improving on the previous draft without knowing who may have added what. This is useful because sometimes people oppose a perspective not on merit but because of who represents that view. The single text approach removes any personalised motive.

Facilitated Dialogue is a third party process; it relies on a facilitator or mediator to get parties to talk.

•Maximise joint gains

This means positions should be negotiated in a manner that makes all sides win. The success of dialogues also depends largely on what occurs after the meeting. It is important that people do not feel more disgruntled than when they came in. Parties must leave with something in hand.

•Test the scope of agreement

Get some commitment from the parties and determine the extent to which each group is willing to sell the decision to its members. Have the parties sign the agreement document and commit to implementation.

Step Six: Group and Individual reflections

Sometimes agreements and consensus are not the most important outcomes we seek in dialogue. It is more valuable and lasting when participants experience a mental shift from their original positions to the ‘centre’ or a shared perspective. Where possible conduct both a group and individual reflection on the process by using questions such as:

- » How have your views changed about the issue?
- » What do you know about the issue now that you did not know before?
- » What will you do differently after here?

Reflections help participants to value the process. They may give their feedback in plenary and/or write their thoughts where possible on pieces of paper for the recorder to capture. Such thoughts or reflections can also be valuable in demonstrating commitment to the post-dialogue agenda.

Mediation is both a role and a group management skill; Time management and People management are critical in mediation. Above all the creativity of the mediator helps to make the ground rules practical.

c. Post-dialogue agenda

The post dialogue agenda must be included in the text adopted at the end of the dialogue in order to secure commitment from the parties and promote transparency.

•Implementation and Compliance

The major concern in the post dialogue period is implementation and compliance. Any agreement resulting from the dialogue should contain within it a clear statement of the steps that will be taken to ensure that the informal agreement will be incorporated or adopted by whatever formal means are appropriate to enforce compliance. In all cases, parties should commit to implementing final agreement possibly by appending their signatures.

Some post dialogue activities require follow-up dialogues. The post dialogue agenda must include a re-opener and conflict resolution methods. For instance, should there be a change in circumstances, or a party fails to live up to its end of the bargain, there must be a way to re-convene the groups for re-strategising and resolution of the challenge presented.

•Monitoring and evaluating progress

Procedures for monitoring the agreement and follow-up activities must be stipulated in the text. The document should possibly assign roles and responsibility, time lines, and resources and logistics needed to track implementation.

Target Outcomes of dialogue and mediation

In dialogue and mediation the most important aspect for the mediator is the *process* and for the parties, is *results*. The ideal is a good process that leads to concrete, valuable and sustained results.

4. Sustaining Dialogues And Their Outcomes

It takes some time to realise the desired impact of dialogues. Dialogues may have to occur at various levels at different times and in various forms. Political dialogues must not emerge from a stop gap approach. These tend to be haphazardly performed, uncoordinated, conflict insensitive and panders to ‘turf’ protection.

Dialogue processes have to be sustained through *systems and structures* including monitoring systems that are designed to **produce learning** for the parties involved. For instance in a post war country where dialogues have been introduced to heal wounds and produce social and national cohesion, the ability to eventually hold elections does not resolve all problems. Parallel programs that build capacity of communities as well as citizens’ forums and platform will help to neutralise potential conflict and create a culture of deliberation and dialogue. There ought to be a concerted effort towards building a peace architecture that includes all sections of the community or society. This also requires sustained funding as well as documentation of insights and learning.

Some Pre-Requisites For Sustained Dialogue

- » **Enhance skill and knowledge** of persons leading the process and build excellent facilitation skills.
- » **Build processes and alliances** around existing infrastructures for peace. According to the 2011 World Development Report, it took the 20 fastest reforming countries in the 20th century between 15 and 30 years—a generation—to raise their institutional performance from very fragile to more resilient levels. These efforts should include state institutions working to neutralise tensions as well as civic groups and traditional structures that use dialogue as a means of averting or resolving conflict. These alliances are useful because often times, some may have formal or informal relations with some of the parties in conflict. Some others will provide technical support such as effective and ‘neutral’ facilitators for the dialogues.

Dialogues may have to occur at various levels at different times and in various forms. Political dialogues must not emerge from a stop gap approach. These tend to be haphazardly performed, uncoordinated, conflict insensitive and panders to ‘turf’ protection.

- » **Collective action by leaders;** The extent to which leaders can come together to strategise regardless of differences goes a long way to determine the success of the dialogue. This also promotes ownership of the process and may begin as far back as when pre-dialogue activities begin to determine participants, venue and so on.
- » **Inclusive and participatory process;** This cannot be overemphasized. Success is informed by the level of inclusiveness. At the core of conflicts are persons who feel left out of a distribution or decision-making processes. It helps to include traditionally marginalised groups such as women and the youth and any groups as the conflict assessment may reveal. Inclusion neutralises some of the existing tensions before dialogue begins.
- » **Clear and enforceable implementation plan;** a dialogue is not really successful until agreements reached have been implemented. There ought to be clear roles in implementation with actors ready to monitor results. This built in mechanism makes it possible to have follow-up processes that strengthen implementation when the need arises.
- » **Ownership of the dialogue and political commitment;** It is when people involved see the process as their own that they are likely to commit and ensure successful outcomes. In recent practice, it has increasingly become clear that commitment is lasting when it is more 'home-grown' and much less influenced by external actors.

External influences on internal dialogues

Dialogues are influenced by a) international conventions and frameworks; b) technical and financial support from donors for dialogue processes, responding to displaced persons, food aid etc. These shape the environment within which dialogue takes place. As much as possible funders must not influence outcomes of dialogues.

Discussion Board: Nuances in dialogues and mediation

A dialogue is intended to prevent unrests that can lead to conflict. If properly carried out, they become an inclusive process that capture voices and enhances democratic practices. Dialogues are no panaceas and may fail. They have advantages and disadvantages, and these depend largely on the levels of preparation and the way dialogues are carried out and above all, the extent to which institutions and structures are built to sustain the dialogues and their outcomes.

Dialogues are held at different periods but the most pressing moment is when a conflict is looming, for instance when an election is imminent. This period of tension is often preceded by apparent normalcy- a period during which key personalities may have acquired key assets. These soon become the reason for grave anxiety when conflict threatens, expectedly over the possibility of losing such assets. These 'owners' of assets soon build alliances for security.

In the event of a conflict there are people who are influential in prosecuting the conflict- those in the frontline, and others who are influential in shaping the conflict. The opinions of the latter are highly valued and determine the intensity of the conflict. As described above, their interest is carved out particularly as they have economic assets. Their supreme interest is to gain asset or power. They are not interested in burning down the town but prepared to go to the brink to get their interest.

Most traditional dialogue processes engage either the front- liners or those people who are directly influencing and shaping the conflict and pursuing an interest met.

The intriguing phenomenon is that there are often among them, a smaller set of individuals who have defied the hard lines of the different parties and are friends because of long standing relations. They often stay away from the dialogue unless they are called. They have cleavages in society. For example, in the Dabgon case in Northern Ghana, there are influential members of the two royal gates, the Abudu and Andani who were school mates, and some in the same professional or social fraternities. In most cases these individuals were only 'born into the conflict'. They are not active participants. They like to see themselves as 'neutral'. These groups are sometimes the ones who broker peace or facilitate a dialogue.

Before dialogue occurs it is important that we disaggregate the stakeholders and outline what each category brings to the table and how each person or group must be approached . The front-liners can be managed by law and order. The influencers (shapers) may bargain with their assets in mind. The core group, who are friends 'across carpets' can strike a deal without asking for dividends.

Sometimes the people who actually broker peace are not the ones at the dialogue table. They are usually the facilitators who are able to point out the 'vectors', that is the direction to take.

It is important to note that sometimes these processes, interactions and negotiations occur parallel to a dialogue process or as it were, 'feed the dialogue table'.

A Dialogue Process In Practice: The Jos Experience

In January 2012, WANEP in collaboration with the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) introduced a dialogue process in Jos in the Plateau State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to quell violent conflicts in the area. One of the remarkable strengths of this process is the consultative meeting held ahead of the dialogue. This brought together key stakeholders to contribute to the design of the dialogue including representatives of the State Governor, marginalised groups particularly women and children. Stakeholders were drawn from diverse state and non state actors which included the Director General of the IPCR, the President and Secretary General of J'ama Nasril Islam Plateau State, the Emir of Wase, the representative of the Governor of Plateau State, the Chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N.) Plateau State, the representative of ECOWAS, leaders of women group in Jos, the Chairman of the Plateau State Indigenes Association, the Executive Director of Yakubu Gowon Foundation, the personnel from WANEP regional office at Accra and Nigeria office, the Executive Director of CEPAN (serving as the Zonal Coordinator of WANEP-Nigeria North Central Zone), staff of IPCR, the Peace and Development Advisor of the UNDP and the Regional Conflict Prevention & Recovery Advisor of UNDP office in Johannesburg. The meeting was facilitated by the Program Director of WANEP. To encourage frank discussions, the IPCR office was chosen as a neutral ground to host this meeting. The meeting helped to identify issues in the conflict, the design for a dialogue, map out stakeholders, facilitators, venue and date for the meeting. The strength and value in this process was that stakeholders owned the process as they had the opportunity to make key decisions regarding the dialogue. This guaranteed a certain buy-in of the process and trust building between convenors/organisers and the stakeholders which led to a four-step approach to the dialogue: **Step one:** a request to the President to use his good offices to entreat 3 elderly statesmen to call for cease fire; **Step 2:** the State government to provide support to multi-level dialogue processes in Jos communities to mediate the underlying issues; **Step 3:** the federal government provides platform for state and non-state actors to promote peace and reconciliation and **Step 4:** that IPCR and WANEP convene the wider stakeholders to raise awareness on the issues identified in the consultation meeting. The participatory nature of the dialogue planning process paved the way for a successful dialogue.

5. Common Mistakes, Potential Barriers to Successful Dialogue and Mediation, and Frequently Asked Questions

A. How do you deal with disruptive participants?

- » Call attention to the agreed ground rules
- » Pay attention to seating arrangements
- » Ask parties close to the person to intervene
- » Give responsibilities to disruptive participants/organisations
- » Adjourn and have the whole group intervene
- » Have the respective organisation or party replace the individual at the dialogue

B. What happens when a party in a dialogue pulls out?

- » Facilitators ought to respect the decision of the party to pull out and assure them it is a legitimate action.
- » Go into caucus with the party that pulled out; this should be convened by people who have the clout and wherewithal to convene and must be respected by the defected party.
- » Re-evaluate the convenor or the facilitator to be sure he/she is still considered credible by the factions.
- » Re-evaluate the interest of the group, helping them appreciate the bigger picture of what peace means for their communities and encouraging a shift from 'a position' to an interest of peaceful co-existence and wellbeing.

C. How do you deal with emotional breakdown in a dialogue?

- » Allow space for the emotions to pass
- » Call for a break
- » Look for close friends or colleagues to the victim to console him or her
- » Refer to a psychologist/psychoanalyst or psychiatrist in difficult situations

A. How do you deal with disruptive participants?
B. What happens when a party in a dialogue pulls out?
C. How do you deal with emotional breakdown in a dialogue?
D. What are some of the gaps in recent political dialogues?

(Note: Beware of perception of bias to a particular party; show empathy not sympathy)

Scenarios

A community involved in a dialogue process may decide to pursue other interests in the course of the dialogue process. Similarly a new development in the country, a political utterance in the media or on a public platform could stall the dialogue process.

During WANEP's dialogue in the Upper East Region of Ghana, one group expressed the need to celebrate a festival. In the management of the process, this could be interpreted as disrupting the process of dialogue. On the other hand, it could mean festering further tensions which the dialogue was intended to address. Such challenges are normal in dialogue processes and need the skills to sustain the dialogue by focusing on the main issues but also creating room to addressing emerging needs from any of the parties. .

In the dialogue process, when one of the parties pulled out of the process because they felt their needs in the dialogue process were not being met, WANEP which was convening the dialogue and providing support engaged the Upper East caucus of Parliament from all political parties to be part of the dialogue process. The participation of the Members of Parliament provided an influential presence and leverage. At a particular point during the dialogue when there was a stalemate, the Members of Parliament met the various parties separately and helped the process to continue. The party that pulled out agreed to return to the Bawku Inter-Ethnic Committee.

Similarly, the credibility of the African Union was challenged as some analysts held the view that the body had taken a position on the Ivorian case, undermining its ability to manage the process. (It is important in this instant to differentiate how the AU was obliging compliance of the Constitutive Act of the African Union and how mediation for such compliance to be adhered to could lead to a more comprehensive outcome and settlement of the crisis.)

In the Niger Delta of Nigeria, a series of workshops were once violently disrupted as the facilitator was deemed unsuitable to convene dialogue, being accused of taking monies from donors on the part of the youth and exploiting the situation in the region.

D. What are some of the gaps in recent political dialogues?

- » Indiscriminate use of the press or over-publicising of dialogues
- » Mediators come with decided positions and are fixated with results within a defined period of time.

Suitability of facilitator—sometimes a convenor or mediator may be prominent and even respected in society but unsuitable to mediate in particular dialogues.

Scenarios

While Raila Odinga had 'good office' as Prime Minister of Kenya, he was not perceived as the most suitable mediator in the 2010 and 2011 post-election political crisis in La Cote d'Ivoire; having been a victim of disputed elections and a power-sharing government.



Appendix 1: A sample program for pre-dialogue consultations (WANEP)

Sample Of Dialogue Design

DAY ONE

Opening:

- » Welcome message
- » Goodwill message
- » Background and Objectives of the Consultation
- » Introduction of participants
- » Tea break/group photograph

Working Session

1st working session:

- i. Contextual issues driving the conflict
- ii. Presentation on Principles of Dialogue
- iii. Agreement on Date/ Venue of the Dialogue
- iv. Agreement on Participants (Mapping critical issues and inclusive participants)
 - » criteria for selection
 - » number of participants per community/ethnic group
 - » selection of participants
 - » External participants/ Observers/Media?
- v. Ground rules to guide the process
- vi. Agreement on Chair, Co-chair, Facilitator
- vii. Developing the agenda for the Dialogue (group work)

DAY TWO

- 1. Role of WANEP and IPCR in the Dialogue process
- 2. Detailed Implementation Plan for the Dialogue process (DIP)

Activity	Timeframe	Persons Responsible	Expected Outputs	Remarks

Closing

11:00am–1:00pm	Prioritization of the issues and Concrete next steps (Group Work and Consultations cntd.
1:00pm–2:30pm	Lunch
2:30–4:00 PM	Harmonization of Group works and Concrete Action Plan
4:00–4:30PM	Coffee break
4:30–5:00 PM	Closing remarks and end of consultation

Sample Of Dialogue Process

“Search for Lasting Peace in Jos Plateau – The Home of Peace and Tourism”

Draft Agenda
March 7–8, 2011

Day One:	
8:30am	Registration
9:00am–10:30am	Opening Ceremony <ul style="list-style-type: none">* Welcome Address* Opening Remarks* Goodwill Message* Keynote address and official opening
10:30am–11:00am	Coffee Break/ Group Photo
	CLOSED SESSION (NO PRESS ALLOWED)
11:00am–11:30am	Setting the Stage <ul style="list-style-type: none">* Introduction of Participants* Objectives of the Consultation* Process and Procedure of Dialogue* Ground Rules
11:30am –1:00pm	Efforts and Challenges at Coexistence and Promotion of Peace in Jos (Open and frank Discussions)
1:00pm–2:30pm	Lunch Break
2:30pm–4:00pm	Deepening the discussions on emerging issues
4:00pm–4:30pm	Coffee Break
4:30pm–5:00pm	Deepening the discussions on emerging issues
5:00pm	House Keeping
Day Two:	
9:00am–10:30am	Prioritization of the issues and Concrete next steps (Group Work and Consultations)
10:30am–11:00am	Coffee Break



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Note: