A resource for community engagement to foster listening and learning for effective social development.

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Produced as part of the Seeds of Karuna project
COMMUNITY DIALOGUE HANDBOOK

A resource for community engagement to foster listening and learning for effective social development.

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook gives an overview of community dialogue as a structured conversation that allows all voices to be heard. It is a style of informal dialogue that brings people together to express their opinions and, more importantly, learn about each other and find common ground to deal with issues they are facing. Albert Einstein said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." Dialogue gives us a process that can help clarify misunderstandings, share information, and develop new ideas.

These tools can be used at home, with friends, with colleagues or any social group you belong to. Examples include:

1. Discussing options as a family for a large purchase such as a car, education, or new equipment for the family business;

2. Working through a misunderstanding with a friend or co-worker to clear the air and maintain the relationship;

3. A community meeting to discuss changes that will result from a new development project or new government rules; or

4. Getting community input and feedback for a community-building project your CSO would like to do.
KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND VALUES FOR DIALOGUE

In this handbook we will cover the following knowledge, skills and values in support of good community dialogue facilitation:

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WHAT IS DIALOGUE?

Dialogue, in English, literally means “through speaking”, which means to come to a better understanding through speaking. Dialogue is the opposite of monologue, which means, “one speaking”. Examples of monologue include speeches, sermons, preaching, and lecturing. The goal of monologue is for one person to share their knowledge and opinions. In dialogue, the goal is to listen and learn from one another, in addition to sharing individual thoughts and ideas. We often assume we know what others are thinking, but we can only know when they share with us, and speak for themselves.

On a political level, dialogue is a process used to resolve, and hopefully transform, complex multi-party social conflicts. Dialogue processes are usually customized for each situation.

The main objective of dialogue is to strengthen relationships through mutual and deep understanding of motivations, interests and communication styles of all participants. Decision-making is a secondary purpose of dialogue that may
come if, and when, participants reach a point where they are willing and able to move forward into a deliberative consensus-making process. Other common goals of dialogue may include:

- share information;
- establish relationships of respect and trust;
- identify and clarify issues and shared values;
- share perspectives, histories, beliefs and opinions in a safe and constructive environment;
- develop ideas and options; and/or
- develop recommendations.

Dialogue avoids:

- Predictable debates on contentious issues
- The polarization and hardening of fixed positions
- Premature solutions

Dialogue invites:

- Genuine inquiry
- Developing the discipline to hear other perspectives that may at first appear to threaten one’s own
- Expanding one’s capacity for tolerance
- Participants to be changed by the process

Dialogue develops:

- A deepening of human relationships
- New insights and understanding through the creative tension of tolerating difference
- New and unexpected responses to complex problems
PRINCIPLES OF DIALOGUE

Why Dialogue?

The following list of principles comes from KAICIID’s Dialogue for Peace, and provides good reminders for successful dialogue:

- Establish **safe space**.
- Agree that the main purpose of **dialogue is learning**.
- Use **appropriate communication** skills.
- Set the proper **ground rules**.
- Take **risks**, surface **feelings** and confront **perceptions** with honesty.
- The **relationship** comes first.
- **Gradually address** the hard questions, and **gradually depart** them.
- **Do not quit** or avoid difficult issues.
- After participating in dialogue, **expect to be changed**.
- **Bring changes to others**.

Implied in these principles is the value of talking for the sake of learning, rather than talking to solve problems. This is a common misunderstanding about dialogue – that we only talk to come up with solutions and solve problems right away. But if we look at issues such as hate speech or rumors, these are symptoms of misperceptions that lie under the surface. In cultures where there are strong hierarchies and rules...
about who may speak, dialogue can provide a way to learn about others that you would normally not hear from. And from these conversations, when we learn more about others, and why they do what they do, we develop greater understanding and empathy for them.

Another important aspect of dialogue is that it should be voluntary. No one should be forced to participate in dialogue. This presents a challenge in settings where people have not yet experienced dialogue, and may therefore be reluctant to participate in something they don’t understand. “Why should we bother talking if we’re not going to come up with solutions? What is the point?” These are common, and very valid, questions. The reason is because we often make decisions without having all the necessary information. In our rush to ‘do something’, we can easily make bad decisions that can work against us by creating greater mistrust and misunderstandings. For example, a local CSO wants to offer a youth training at a monastery, but both the monks and local residents try to block them from having the training. Without dialogue, the CSO might assume that the monk heard rumors about them, or doesn’t support the topics they want to cover. However, through dialogue they might learn that the monastery had a bad experience with a group last year, and has concerns about noise from the training because local residents complained. Once the CSO understands the true issues and concerns, they can find ways to address the noise issue.

Harmonious communities share one thing in common: there is good communication, and therefore good relationships. Dialogue is an important tool to develop the relationships and communication needed to find common goals, and work together.
The dialogue process is about practicing a new way of speaking and a new way of listening. The two most important things to learn to participate fully are:

1. **Active Listening**: Hearing and understanding the truth of the experience of others
   - Give the speaker your full and undivided attention
   - Listen to learn, not to verify existing assumptions or expectations
   - Listen with empathy, to see the problem from the other person’s point of view, to walk in their shoes
   - Ask question to clarify or expand your understanding, not to challenge or engage in debate

2. **Authentic Speaking**: Telling the truth of your own experience
   - Speak for yourself, not for a group or position
   - Speak to communicate your own experience, not to persuade others
   - Distinguish your opinion or belief from fact or ‘truth’
   - Acknowledge the experiences and assumptions that have shaped your views and opinion
   - Speak from your heart
Constructing the boundaries of the conversation—the limited context and manner in which it will take place—is a big part of what allows it to open and deepen into new awareness. Establishing ground rules by group consensus involves the whole group in creating optimal conditions for freedom of expression and exploration. The ground rules express the spirit of the discussion, which is based on listening respectfully and without argument while discussing issues that may tempt us to argue. The ground rules provide a container that encourages everyone to take an active part, even those who tend to hold back.

The group creates the ground rules; the facilitator makes sure that there is agreement, that the list is complete, and the rules are followed.

Basic ground rules include:

- Honor confidentiality
- Respect differences
  - Speak in the first person and from individual experience, not as a representative of a group
- Describe experiences, not opinions
- Do not try to persuade or change others
- Listen openly and without interruption
- Respect air time; be aware of those who are more quiet, or have a language barrier
- Avoid cross talk and side conversations

PRACTICE: Active Listening and Authentic Speaking

- Find a friend to practice with you, and take turns in the roles of listener and speaker.
- Speaker talks for 5 minutes; listener listens intently and then repeats what was said. Speaker indicates whether listener repeated accurately. Reverse.
- Alternative: Find two friends and practice as a group of three: a listener, a speaker, and an observer who gives feedback after someone has shared.
PRACTICE: Getting Buy-in for Ground Rules

Nearly every workshop has ground rules, but creating those guidelines is only part of what’s needed. What do you do when someone breaks the ground rules? What are the consequences when people disregard the agreements? Here are some tips:

• Have a participatory process to create the ground rules because people are more likely to follow agreements that they helped create.

• If the group doesn’t come up with all of the above ground rules, as the facilitator you can add more, taking time to discuss why you think a particular ground rule will support better dialogue, and ask if people agree.

• Ask the group what the consequences should be if someone breaks the ground rules. This helps people think about accountability, and lets them know you are serious about adhering to the guidelines. Consequences can be funny (the person has to dance in the middle of the circle), or serious (their phone taken away, or asked to leave the dialogue). But if there are no consequences, people will no longer take the ground rules, or the process, seriously and this can greatly compromise the feeling of safety.

• Once you go through the steps listed above, when someone breaks a ground rule, you have already agreed on the consequences. It is also a good opportunity to review their commitment to the process. You can say, “Now, you all agreed that being on time was important. Is this a rule you want to keep, or a rule you don’t want to keep? If not, why not?” It is important for participants to understand that THEY created the ground rules, that this is THEIR process, and that you expect them to feel ownership of that.

Debate Versus Dialogue

Often people will listen to respond, rather than listen to understand. This is when we are already thinking of what we want to say before someone is finished talking. When this happens we have stopped listening, and our goal is to make our point. We cannot learn more about someone when we are not listening to them. This often becomes debate, where we want to “win” an argument and prove that our point of view is the right point of view.

But dialogue is different. In dialogue the goal is to learn more and expand our own perspective. And the only way to do this is to listen deeply, not just the words someone is saying, but to what’s underneath the words – what is their tone of voice? How is their body language? In dialogue both sides “win” by having the time and space, and structure, to express themselves – to hear and be heard.
### Debate vs. Dialogue

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<tr>
<td>• Goal is to win</td>
<td>• Goal is to discover common ground</td>
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<td>• Involves listening to find the opponent’s weak</td>
<td>• Involves listening to understand points</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Involves criticizing other points of view</td>
<td>• Involves openly considering all points of view</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assumes one right answer to a question or problem</td>
<td>• Assumes that many different ideas can contribute problem to a fuller solution</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Comes from a position which one defends</td>
<td>• Expresses feelings, concerns, fears, and uncertainties</td>
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<td>• Exposes faults in the positions of others</td>
<td>• Demonstrates strengths on all sides of an issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Looks to strengthen a predetermined position</td>
<td>• Uncovers brand new possibilities and opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Further polarizes antagonistic positions</td>
<td>• Builds bridges of understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promotes competition</td>
<td>• Promotes collaboration</td>
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### Cultural Norms And Dialogue

In some cultures, speaking is power. The longer we can speak uninterrupted, the more power we think we have. This is found most often in societies with strong hierarchies related to age, position and level of education. In dialogue, it is assumed that everyone has something valuable to express, regardless of their standing, education, gender, ethnicity or background. Dialogue is not about maintaining power through control, but rather power through understanding and belief that a better solution can be found when all points of view are uncovered. This is a different kind of power when we look for “win-win” solutions that allow everyone’s needs to be met.

### REFLECTION: Cultural Norms and Roles

Here are some questions to ask yourself to reflect on cultural norms and dialogue:

- What, if anything, in our culture supports dialogue?
- What, if anything, in our culture makes dialogue difficult?
- What can we do to help people become more willing to participate in dialogue rather than debate?
There are different ways to have dialogue. Most people think of dialogue as a political activity done with high-level leaders in a very formal setting. But this is only one kind of dialogue. Dialogue can also be sitting around the kitchen table and talking about current events. Watching a documentary and then having a discussion about it is also dialogue. A community meeting to discuss building a school is dialogue. Wherever two or more people are sharing their thoughts and opinions, this is dialogue.

These are some of the ways dialogue is commonly used:

- **Reflective Dialogue:** Shared personal reflection can help a group explore commonalities and differences. With sustained sharing of perspectives over time, we can get at the root of different perspectives, and build a better understanding of how we can “agree to disagree”. This approach requires a safe environment, not only for physical safety, but to assure participants that their views and what they share will be heard and respected and kept confidential.

- **Looking for Strengths:** We so often focus on the negative, so by taking the time to focus on strengths we can identify what worked best in the past to provide insight for the future. What we focus on increases, so by focusing on previous successes we are more likely to create more of them.

- **Inter-group Discovery:** Open conversation can bring people together that don’t normally communicate with each other: youth and elders, different faith groups, religious leaders and lay people, men and women, etc. With structured listening so that everyone has a chance to share their perspective, everyone learns something new and must challenge their own assumptions about the “other” group.
ROLES IN DIALOGUE

There are 4 main roles in a community conversation:

1. **Convener**: this is the person who brings the people together for a community conversation. The convener organizes the meeting, finds a meeting space, invites and welcomes attendees, and summarizes the conversation using the summary template, sends the results of the discussion to participants.

2. **Facilitator**: the facilitator’s job is to keep the conversation on topic, and make sure that all voices are heard by giving everyone a chance to speak, and that no one person takes over the discussion by using a dialogue model or process that is appropriate for the group. The facilitator should keep track of time and move the dialogue along. And lastly, the facilitator should remain neutral and refrain from sharing personal views.
   
   (a) Note: sometimes the convener is the same as the facilitator, but it can be helpful for these roles to be separate if a convener has the necessary relationships, but not the experience facilitating.

3. **Note taker**: A note taker’s job is to document the main points of the discussion to share with participants after the conversation is over. They do not need to write down everything that is said or identify who said what, but should note the key points that came up, and any decisions or next steps agreed on during the conversation. Not all conversations will result in decisions or next steps – it is OK to simply talk and learn from each other.

4. **Participant**: participants come to share knowledge, experience, and opinions on issues relating to the theme of the conversation. Participants should be willing to follow ground rules, and be willing to listen to other’s opinion respectfully.
FACILITATION SKILLS NEEDED

These are the necessary skills to facilitate dialogue:

- **Neutrality** – the ability to see all sides of a situation and support everyone to be heard, regardless of their opinion.

- **Trust building** – whether you’re part of the group you’re facilitating, or an outsider brought in to help, it’s important to create a situation where participants trust your ability to manage the conversation.

- **Facilitation** – a dialogue facilitator’s job is to support a process of discovery for participants, to help them understand each other and find their own solutions. You are not there solve their problems or offer advice.

- **Developing questions** – a dialogue facilitator must come prepared with questions, and be able to come up with questions in the moment, and to recognize opportunities to take the conversation deeper.

- **Good at conversation** – building rapport is important, knowing how to make people feel welcome and comfortable will make you a better listener

No one person has all of these skills, and some people are lucky enough to be born with a natural ability to facilitate dialogue. What is important is to learn what aspects of our personality might need more support to overcome, and what skills we need to learn to compensate for the areas where we are weak.

REFLECTION: Personal Skill Assessment

- See page 34: Dialogue Facilitation Self-Assessment.

- "Fill the survey out...", and then score your answers.

- Reflect on your results, and think about a plan for building on your strengths, and improving the areas that are challenging for you.
We all have opinions – that is normal and natural. But knowing when and how to express those opinions can make a big difference in whether or not we achieve our goals. Since the goal of community dialogue is uncover what people are thinking and feeling, it is important for the facilitator to create an atmosphere of acceptance and non-judgment. By remaining neutral, and avoiding expressing her/his own opinions, the facilitator establishes herself/himself as holding space for everyone. To encourage trust from different sides, and for people to engage in open and honest conversation, it is important to assure people that their views are validated and that the facilitator will not take sides during the dialogue. Neutrality helps create and strengthen a sense of “safe space”, and encourages participants to speak with sincerity and authenticity.

REFLECTION: Maintaining Neutrality

Staying neutral in a situation when you have strong opinions about the topic being discussed can be quite challenging. Read the following comments, and reflect on your reactions to them.

• If you feel the urge to express your own opinion, ask yourself, “Do I know everything I need to know? Have I heard everything this person has to say?” Can you develop curiosity to learn more before expressing your own views?

• If the goal is to hear ALL voices in a dialogue, if you, as the facilitator, express an opinion, how do you think that affects those who disagree with you? Do you think they will still feel comfortable sharing their perspective if they know you disagree with them?

• What do you think is the connection between a facilitator who remains neutral, and creating a sense of safe space where participants can speak freely?
Responsibilities of the Facilitator

The dialogue facilitator’s role is to create, protect, and maintain a safe space for open communication throughout the phases of the dialogue. This requires skills such as:

- group management;
- staying calm and centered;
- being observant of people’s moods and emotions and knowing how best to respond to keep the conversation moving in a positive direction;
- being comfortable with disagreement and strong emotions, and to hold space for people to express themselves;
- building trust with shy people so they will speak up; and
- building trust and buy-in with dominant people so they willingly step aside to allow quieter voices to be heard.

Strong facilitation skills allow you to do the following effectively:

1. **Clarify purpose of dialogue**
   - Listen and speak about difficult topics with openness and respect
   - Increase the ability to see a problem from other participants’ points of view
   - Practice the honest expression of one’s own experience without attempting to persuade or change others

2. **Establish and monitor ground rules**
   - Help the group to develop and follow the ground rules
   - Model observance of ground rules through own behavior

3. Model effective group behavior and communication
   - Respect all perspectives
   - Provide verbal and non-verbal support
   - Listen actively and empathetically
   - Learn and use participants’ names
   - Encourage shy members to speak
   - Work smoothly with co-facilitator (when needed)

4. **Oversee Process**
   - Manage the time, monitoring individual speaking time and overall schedule
   - Keep group focused on the topic
• Encourage full participation
• Attend to stages of group process and what is needed in each stage
• Monitor emotional tone; challenge if too safe/protect if too intense
• Watch for power dynamics within group; prevent dominance of a single view or faction

PRACTICE: Understanding Inclusive Dialogue

• Get three or more friends together (the more people, the better your practice will be), and choose a topic to discuss. It can be anything – what’s your favorite food? where do you like to go on holiday?
• Practice guiding the conversation so that everyone gets a chance to share equally. Summarize what one person said, which helps you gain control of the process, and then turn to someone else and ask them the question.
• Practice being neutral – if someone asks you for your opinion, tell them you are practicing your facilitation skills, and that this process is about their sharing and return the focus to them.
• This is just for practice, so have fun with it!

Developing Questions for Dialogue

The middle, core phase of a dialogue is usually launched with a question. The nature of the question and how it is phrased will profoundly affect the tone and shape of the rest of the dialogue.

A question designed for a debate helps to sharpen and differentiate positions. A question designed for a dialogue will allow for difference, but also helps uncover common ground participants may not know they have. A good dialogue question:

• Is open-ended and cannot be answered with a yes or no, I agree or disagree response
• Takes participants deeper than the level of opinion or position
• Encourages participants to delve into their experience and to explore their thinking in a fresh manner
• Allows for ambiguity or ambivalence
• Calls forth new, unrehearsed responses
Learning to ask good dialogue questions is one of the most important skills a facilitator can develop. A well-crafted question can set the course for a constructive dialogue process, while a poorly crafted question can create confusion or defensiveness. This is true for questions posed by both the facilitators and the participants. Learning to ask questions that promote dialogue is a skill that develops with practice. This skill is useful for both the facilitator and the participants as they learn to engage with each other.

- Ask questions that show interest or curiosity
- Avoid questions that contain judgment about anything being right or wrong
- Make sure your questions are understood; repeat them if necessary.
- Be willing to ask questions in a different way if they seem to miss your goal.

**Ask open ended questions such as:**

- What has been your experience with _____________?
- Can you share what you believe about _____________?
- What does _____________ mean to you?
- How has your life been impacted by _____________?

**Ask clarifying or probing questions such as:**

- I’m not sure I understand; can you explain further?
- Can you say more about that?
- Can you share more about your experience?
- Can you share what has contributed to your belief/feeling/perception/idea about _____________?

**Ask group process questions such as:**

- Can you share what you are feeling about _____________?
- What was it like for you to hear _____________?
- Can you take a moment to reflect on _____________?
- What are you noticing about the group right now?

**Ask yourself:**

- What is the goal of my question?
- Is there a hidden meaning?
- Am I trying to persuade or convince with my question?
- How is this question likely to be received?
- What is the tone or feeling associated with my question?
Be aware of:

- Built-in assumptions
- Personal biases
- Drawing conclusions about what participants say without probing more deeply
- Hidden or shared judgments
- Leading or persuading
- Too much focus on “facts” rather than experience
- Too much focus on either past or future
- Re-circulating arguments
- Questions that begin with “Don’t you think”

REFLECTION: Curiosity and Deep Listening

There are many situations in Myanmar where showing curiosity can be seen as rude or disrespectful. The following questions can help you reflect on how to address this issue, and find ways to learn more about each other.

- Can community dialogue be a process where we step away from tradition to learn new skills?
- How can I truly know what someone else thinks or feels if they have no opportunity to express themselves in daily life?
- Am I more curious about some groups of people, but not others? Why?
- Am I able to listen deeply to someone else, without feeling the need to quickly express myself? Why, or why not?
- How do I feel when I know someone has listened deeply to me, and I have felt they really understood me? Am I willing to give that gift to someone else?

PRACTICE: Question Cards

The above questions can be found in page 37 and can be used as follows:

- Print out each sheet on different colored paper, and then cut into cards
- Keep the stack of cards with you – at work meetings, or community meetings, or wherever there is discussion.
- Use any of these opportunities to practice asking one or two of these questions, especially when you feel the conversation is unproductive and people are repeating themselves.
- Practice with friends or colleagues and take turns asking questions.
Developing Emotional Intelligence

The definition of “emotional intelligence” is knowledge of self and others. It is when we know ourselves, our triggers and motivations, combined with an understanding of what motivates and triggers others, that we arrive at a kind of intelligence that allows us to find the balance between being engaged, and maintaining enough distance to have a good perspective.

All behavior is someone’s best attempt, given what they know and have experienced in life, to get their needs met. Sometimes we never learn healthy ways of getting our needs met, so we try to manipulate people or the situation to get what we want. When we know better, learn better skills and have more information, we can more easily get our needs met in ways that are healthy and promote strong relationships. The following diagram shows Karpman’s Drama Triangle is a model that shows the common roles people play in their lives in trying to get their needs met.

For ideas of how to handle challenging situations, see page 47 for Responses to Typical Facilitation Challenges.
Karpman's Drama Triangle

**PERSECUTOR** (The Bully)
- blames others for all problems
- criticizes
- dominating
- puts others down
- angry, resentful
- rule oriented
- has all rights while others have none

**RESCUER** (The Martyr)
- gains self-esteem by “helping” others
- tries to be considerate and selfless
- feels the need to fix problems
- often feels like a failure when the other person complains

Situation determines position on the triangle and can even change positions in a toxic dance.

Each person switches positions as needed to get their needs met.

**VICTIM** (Helpless)
- feels hopeless, trapped, ashamed, guilty, powerless
- seeks others to solve their problems, and to give them validation
- refuses to make decisions, solve problems or seek professional help
- dependent
The Persecutor (or Bully)

- Blames others for all problems
- Criticizes
- Dominating
- Puts others down
- Angry, resentful
- Rule-oriented
- Has all rights, while others have none

The Rescuer (or Martyr)

- Gains self-esteem by “helping” others
- Tries to be considerate and selfless
- Feels the need to fix problems
- Often feels like a failure when the other person complains

The Victim (or Helpless)

- Feels hopeless, trapped, ashamed, guilty, powerless
- Seeks others to solve their problems, and to give them validation
- Refuses to make decisions, solve problems or seek professional help
- Dependent
REFLECTION: Where Am I in the Drama Triangle?

Take time to look at the “Drama Triangle” and ask yourself:

• When have I been the rescuer?
• When have I been the victim?
• When have I been the persecutor?
• What other choices could I have made? What other role could I have played, and how would that have changed the situation?

Unconscious Bias and Partisan Perceptions

We all have biases and opinions that we are not even aware that we have. Our parents, our teachers, our friends, our society, the media – we take in information and form opinions without realizing we are doing it. These can become part of our unconscious and cause us to act and react in ways that become automatic. Through self-reflection we can become more aware of these, in order to more clearly see ourselves and how we relate to others.

A result of these unconscious biases is “partisan perception”, which is a psychological phenomenon that causes us to perceive “truth” with a build-in bias that favors their own point of view.

Learning and understanding deeply about ourselves and others is an important part of dialogue so that we can make meaning out of our experiences, and connect with our own feelings and the feelings of others. Understanding and being conscious on the causes of partisan perceptions helps us become aware of how:

• memories are formed and given importance;
• we select data that validates our assumption and ignores other data; and
• our skewed biases are strengthened when there is a lack of critical thinking and open-mindedness.
Causes of partisan perceptions:

- We experience and observe different data
- We are interested in different things
- We collect evidence to support prior views
- We ignore or dismiss nonconforming data
- We selectively filter incoming data
- We selectively remember what we want to
- We selectively recall what we remember
- We revise our memories to fit our preferences
- Our memories form the basis for new, confirming perceptions

REFLECTION: What Are My Unconscious Biases?

Think about how have come to believe what you know to be true.

- What did my parents teach me about what is right and wrong?
- What did my religion teach me about how the world works?
- What did I learn from my friends about “the other”?
- What does the media show me about people are just like me? People who are very different from me? Do I really agree with that?
- What do I choose to believe now?
CHALLENGES IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Dr. Tatsushi Arai has developed a critical analysis of the existing practices in interreligious dialogue and relationship-building in Myanmar. He suggests there are three sets of challenges that must be overcome to effectively promote interreligious peace.

Challenge 1: Isolation of interfaith exchange participants
Challenge 2: Intra-religious division
Challenge 3: Absence of direct communication
Challenge 1: Isolation Of Interfaith Exchange Participants From Their Own Religious Communities

Those who work closely with members of a different religious community tend to be isolated from, and even actively denounced by, other members of their own religious community. Isolation occurs when a religiously-divided society views active participants in interreligious exchange as unimportant and irrelevant to mainstream religious discussions that take place among more “genuine” religious leaders. As a result, the participants in interfaith exchange find it extremely difficult to generate a broader scope of social impact designed to transcend their own inner circle of interfaith collaboration.

Questions for reflection on Challenge 1:

• How can proponents of interfaith exchange establish greater public trust and social impact?

• What capacities and skills do they need to build such trust and impact?
Challenge 2: Intra-Religious Divide

Many of the active participants in interfaith exchange lack close working relationships with members of their own religious community whom these participants view as conservatives or “hardliners.” Those whom they call conservatives often categorically reject interfaith exchange, consider such an exercise not only unnecessary but also contrary to their devotion to faith, and take an uncompromising position to defend their faith against non-believers and opponents. The division between these two extremes of people sharing the same religious tradition can be as deep and destructive as an interreligious conflict to which their faith community is a party.

Questions for reflection on Challenge 2:

- How can the participants in an interfaith exchange establish functional working relationships with those whom they view as conservatives within their own religious community?
- What capacities and skills do these interfaith exchange practitioners – as well as interested in-group members and “conservatives” opposed to interfaith exchange – need to acquire in order for them to build mutually respectful and functional relationships within their own religious community?
  - Note that constructive intra-communal relationships are necessary and important for the general purpose of social harmony and peace, regardless of whether the parties concerned all agree on the desirability of interfaith exchange.
The leaders and members of one religious community opposed to another may choose to take decisive actions to defend themselves against the opposing group. Under extraordinary circumstances of perceived injustices or attacks, these actions may include the use of force. One of the frequently-encountered challenges in interfaith exchange is that its proponents have little to no direct influence on the leaders and members of their own religious community exercising forceful means that generate violent conflict. Despite the significant amount of time, energy, and effort that interfaith exchange practitioners dedicate to preventing and overcoming interfaith violence, therefore, they cannot always find an effective means to influence the most influential leaders of their own religious community who can initiate or suspend interreligious violence. Moreover, it is often the most “conservative” members of each of the religious communities that can generate the greatest amount of publicity and take the most forceful action against the “conservative” members of the opposing community. This means that the interfaith violence that proponents of interfaith exchange seek to prevent often occurs because of the actions taken by their respective in-group leaders who, unlike these proponents, categorically refuse to communicate across deepening religious divides.
Questions for reflection on Challenge 3:

- Assuming that the leaders of the opposing sides of the interreligious conflict will not seek mutual understanding anytime soon, what practical arrangements for violence prevention and control should concerned members of the affected society take with respect to these leaders’ intentions and actions?

- Who can take the lead in establishing such arrangements? Who can communicate with the leaders of each community on the usefulness of such arrangements with sufficient credibility?

- What roles, if any, can the practitioners of interfaith exchange play in support of this process? What capacities and skills do they need to develop in order to work effectively in the process?
PHASES OF DIALOGUE

There are many different models of dialogue, and different perspectives on the phases of dialogue. What we can learn from these different models is that dialogue is a journey, one that requires a careful beginning, and a thoughtful ending.

1. Opening Phase

Goal: Build trust and safety

- Establish ground rules
- Find common ground
- Surface expectations
- Practice communication skills
- Explore what a dialogue is and is not

Challenges: Inadequate trust may lead to

- Superficiality
- Reverting to debate, argument, or problem solving

2. Heart of the Dialogue

Goal: Reach new understanding of self and other in relation to the conflict

- Encourage expression of personal feeling and experience
- Allow participants to tell relevant aspects of own story
• Cultivate the kind of listening that enables participants to develop new understandings of different perspectives

• Provide opportunity for personal reflection

Challenges: Incomplete shifts in understanding may lead to

• Dominance by single perspective or faction/"silencing" of minority views

• Pressure to conform to group norms/ discomfort with differences

• Moving toward debate, problem-solving, or action to avoid difficult issues or emotions

3. Closing Phase

Goal: Consolidate learning and experience; develop plans for action

• Engage head, heart, and hand in integrating experience of dialogue

• Articulate new vision and insight, understand impacts

• Plan how to put new learning into action

• Evaluation of dialogue process

• Prepare for re-entry into own community

Challenges: Incomplete consolidation may lead to

• Pressure to conform to group decisions

• Moving toward actions that are unrealistic or premature

• Too many ideas/loss of focus
Proper planning is very important. Taking the time to think through the necessary steps help you, as the facilitator, be prepared and ready to manage the conversation. Good planning also builds trust because it communicates to participants that this is something different, an opportunity to interact in new ways and have their voices be heard in a space where their views will be respected.

There are several steps needed to plan and prepare for a community conversation. But the very first question you need to answer is, why is dialogue needed? Go back to the section titled, Reasons for Having Community Dialogue (page 11) and clarify for yourself which reason applies to your situation. Write you goal down – this will help you make decisions along the way, when you need to remind yourself of the original intention.

Once you are clear about why you want to host a community dialogue, follow these planning steps:

1. Outreach: preparing the invitation to bring people together, and selecting participants
2. Safe Space: choosing the location and the setting
3. Design the Dialogue: select the dialogue style you want to use, and gather materials and resources as needed
4. Follow Up: allow time to take care of any additional activities needed after the dialogue

OUTREACH
- Who will you invite?
- How will you invite them?

SAFE SPACE
- Where will you hold the dialogue?
- What will you do to make the space feel warm and welcoming?
- How will you ensure that the dialogue will not be interrupted?

DESIGN THE DIALOGUE
- What topics do you want discussed?
- What style of dialogue do you want to use?
- How many people do you expect will be there?
- Come up with three initial questions you want to ask:
  1. 
  2. 
  3. 

MATERIALS NEEDED
- What materials will you need?

RESOURCES NEEDED
- Who will facilitate the dialogue?
- Who will take notes?
- Who will do the follow-up of sharing the notes?

FOLLOW-UP PLAN
- Are there next steps needed? Another dialogue? Or action plan?
- Document decisions made after the dialogue, and share with participants.
This section contains resources to help you facilitate community dialogue. In this section you will find:

- Dialogue Facilitation Self Assessment
- Question Cards
- Responses to Typical Facilitation Challenges
Dialogue Facilitation Self-Assessment

Complete the following survey as honestly as possible. The more honest you are, the better you can see what skills you need to improve, and where your strengths lie.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 = most of the time</th>
<th>2 = some of the time</th>
<th>3 = not very often</th>
<th>4 = not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I usually agree with one side of an argument and have difficulty being open to other opinions and ideas.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Others trust me easily, and I do not share gossip or rumors.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I tend to want to solve other people's problems, and try to always give advice.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>It is easy for me to ask questions, and I am a naturally curious person.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I am sometimes shy and have difficulties speaking with people I don't know very well.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I like to explore all sides of an issue, and am curious about why people see things so differently.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>It takes a long time for me to trust others enough to share my opinions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>It is easy for me to be patient and wait for others to figure out their own problems, even if I think I have the answer, or know of a solution.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>It is hard for me to think of questions to ask people, and feels impolite to ask questions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>It is easy for me to speak with stranger, and I enjoy having conversations and learning new things.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Self-Assessment Scoring

Enter the number of your score, and then add below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLUMN 1</th>
<th>COLUMN 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I usually agree with one side of an argument and have difficulty being open to other opinions and ideas.</td>
<td>Others trust me easily, and I do not share gossip or rumors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1: _________</td>
<td>Q2: _________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to want to solve other people’s problems, and try to always give advice.</td>
<td>It is easy for me to ask questions, and I am a naturally curious person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3: _________</td>
<td>Q4: _________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am sometimes shy and have difficulties speaking with people I don’t know very well.</td>
<td>I like to explore all sides of an issue, and am curious about why people see things so differently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5: _________</td>
<td>Q6: _________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It takes a long time for me to trust others enough to share my opinions.</td>
<td>It is easy for me to be patient and wait for others to figure out their own problems, even if I think I have the answer, or know of a solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7: _________</td>
<td>Q8: _________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is hard for me to think of questions to ask people, and feels impolite to ask questions.</td>
<td>It is easy for me to speak with stranger, and I enjoy having conversations and learning new things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9: _________</td>
<td>Q10: _________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTALS:** _________ _________
Understanding your score

COLUMN 1

- Column 1 represents challenges to becoming a dialogue facilitator. A LOW score means you selected “all of the time = 1” or “some of the time = 2” for many of these. These traits represent areas for improvement to effectively facilitate dialogue, for example:
  - seeing only one side of an argument;
  - wanting to solve other people’s problems with your own ideas;
  - being shy and having difficulty speaking with people;
  - difficulty in building trust with others; and
  - difficulty in thinking of questions to ask.

COLUMN 2

- Column 2 represents strengths to becoming a dialogue facilitator. A LOW score means you selected “all of the time = 1” or “some of the time = 2” for many of these. These are the desired traits to become an effective dialogue facilitator:
  - others trust you and you do not share gossip;
  - natural curious and it is easy to think of questions;
  - willing to explore all sides of an issue;
  - patient and willing to help others solve their own problems in their own way;
  - conversation comes easily to you, even with people you do not know well.

We all have strengths and challenges, and this feedback is intended to show you what things you can work on to improve your facilitation skills. The illustration below shows how you can visualize your score.
Question Cards

These cards give you the opportunity to practice asking questions during different parts of the dialogue, and to see which questions work for you, and which do not. Once you have some experience seeing how people react to these questions, you can modify them or create your own. While these questions work in most situations, you will need to experiment to see what works for you and your community. There are blank cards provided for you to use with new questions that you develop.

Print these sheets, laminate and cut them to use like a deck of cards. You can print them in different colors if you want to have open-ended questions in one color, clarifying questions in another, etc.

Facilitation Reminder Card

These points can be helpful to have with you to refer to while you’re learning to facilitate dialogue.

BE AWARE OF

- Built-in assumptions
- Personal biases
- Drawing conclusions about what participants say without probing more deeply
- Hidden or shared judgments
- Leading or persuading
- Too much focus on “facts” rather than experience
- Too much focus on either past or future
- Re-circulating arguments
- Questions that begin with “Don’t you think”
Open-Ended Questions: These are good for starting a dialogue, to get the conversation going.

- What has been your experience with ______?
- Can you share what you believe about ______?
- What does ______ mean to you?
- How has your life been impacted by ______?
- What about ______ is important to you?
- What about ______ would you like to know more about?
Clarifying/Probing Questions: These questions are good for helping people open up and share more.

- I’m not sure I understand; can you explain further?
- Can you say more about that?
- Can you share more about your experience?
- Can you share what has contributed to your belief/feeling/perception/idea about ______?
- What I am hearing you say is _______ is that correct?
- When you said _______, what did you mean?
Group Process Questions: These questions are good for helping the group connect to each other.

- Can you share what you are feeling about ______?
- What was it like for you to hear ______?
- Can you take a moment to reflect on ______?
- What are you noticing about the group right now?
- What is your interpretation of what s/he just said?
- How do you feel about this process? About what is being said right now?
“Ask Yourself” Questions: These reflective questions can help you, as a facilitator, develop good questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ask Yourself</th>
<th>Ask Yourself</th>
<th>Ask Yourself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the goal of my question?</td>
<td>Is there a hidden meaning?</td>
<td>Am I trying to persuade or convince with my question?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask Yourself</td>
<td>Ask Yourself</td>
<td>Ask Yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is this question likely to be received?</td>
<td>What is the tone or feeling associated with my question?</td>
<td>Am I letting my opinions prevent me from letting everyone speak?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask Yourself</td>
<td>Ask Yourself</td>
<td>Ask Yourself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responses To Typical Facilitation Challenges

Most dialogue circles go smoothly because participants are there voluntarily and care about the conversation. But there are challenges in any group process. Here are some common challenging situations, along with some possible ways to deal with them.

**Situation:** Certain participants don’t say anything, seem shy.

**Possible Responses:** Try to draw out quiet participants, but don’t put them on the spot. Make eye contact – it reminds them that you’d like to hear from them. Look for nonverbal cues that indicate participants are ready to speak. Consider using more icebreakers and warm-up exercises, in pairs or small groups, to help people feel more at ease.

Sometimes people feel more comfortable after a few meetings and will begin to participate. When someone speaks up after staying in the background for a while, encourage them by showing interest and asking for more information. Make a point of talking informally with group members before and after sessions, to help everyone feel more at ease.

**Situation:** An aggressive or talkative person dominates the discussion.

**Possible Responses:** As the facilitator, it is your responsibility to handle domineering participants. Once it becomes clear what this person is doing, you must intervene and set limits. Start by limiting your eye contact with the speaker. Remind the group that everyone is invited to participate. Use the ground rules to reinforce the message. You might say, “Let’s hear from some people who haven’t had a chance to speak yet.” If necessary, you can speak to the person by name. “U Kyaw Win, we’ve heard from you; now let’s hear what Sayama Mi Mi has to say.”

Pay attention to your comments and tone of voice – you are trying to make a point without offending the speaker. If necessary, speak to the person privately and ask them to make room for others to join the conversation.

You might also say, “I notice that some people are doing most of the talking. Do we need to modify our ground rules, to make sure everyone has a chance to speak?” Ultimately, your responsibility as facilitator is to the whole group, and if one or two people are taking over the group, you need to intervene and try to rebalance the conversation.

**Situation:** Lack of focus, not moving forward, participants wander off the topic.

**Possible Responses:** Responding to this takes judgment and intuition. It is the facilitator’s role to help move the discussion along. But it is not always clear which way it is going. Keep an eye on the participants to see how engaged they are, and if you are in doubt, check it out with the group. “We’re a little off the topic right now. Would you like to stay with this, or move on to the next question?” If a participant goes into a lengthy
digression, you may have to say: “We are wandering off the subject, and I’d like to invite others to speak.”

Refer to the suggested times in the discussion materials to keep the conversation moving along. Or, when a topic comes up that seems off the subject, write it down on a piece of newsprint marked “Parking Lot.” You can explain to the group that you will “park” this idea, and revisit the topic at a later time. Be sure to come back to it later.

**Situation:** Someone puts forth information that you know is false. Or, participants get hung up in a dispute about facts, but no one knows the answer.

**Possible Responses:** Ask, “Has anyone heard other information about this?” If no one offers a correction, you might raise one. Be careful not to present the information in a way that makes it sound like your opinion.

If the point is not essential put it aside and move on. If the point is central to the discussion, encourage members to look up the information and bring it to the next meeting. Remind the group that experts often disagree.

**Situation:** There is tension or open conflict in the group. Two participants are stubborn and argue. Or, one participant gets angry and confronts another.

**Possible Responses:** If there is tension, address it directly. Remind participants that airing different ideas is what a dialogue is all about. Explain that, for conflict to be productive, it must be focused on the issue. It is OK to challenge someone’s ideas, but attacking the person is not acceptable. You must interrupt personal attacks, name-calling, or put-downs as soon as they occur. You will be better able to do so if you have established ground rules that discourage such behaviors and encourage tolerance for all views.

Don’t hesitate to appeal to the group for help; if group members have bought into the ground rules, they will support you. You might ask the group, “What seems to be at the root of this dispute?” This question shifts the focus from the people to their ideas. As a last resort, consider taking a break to change the energy in the room. You can take the opportunity to talk one-on-one with the participants in question.

**Situation:** Participant is upset by the conversation. The person withdraws or begins to cry.

**Possible Responses:** The best approach is to talk about this possibility at the beginning when you are developing the ground rules. Remind the group that some issues are difficult to talk about and people may become upset. Ask the group how it wants to handle such a situation, should it arise. Many groups use the ground rule, “If you are offended or upset, say so and say why.”

If someone becomes emotional, it is important to acknowledge the situation. Showing appreciation for someone’s story, especially when it is difficult, can be affirming for
the speaker and important for the other participants. In most cases, the group will offer support to anyone who is having difficulty.

Ask members if they would like to take a short break to allow everyone to regroup. Check in with the person privately. Ask them if they are ready to proceed. When the group reconvenes, it is usually a good idea to talk a little about what has happened, and then the group will be better able to move on.

**Situation: Lack of interest, no excitement, no one wants to talk, only a few people participating.**

**Possible Responses:** This rarely happens, but it may occur if the facilitator talks too much or does not give participants enough time to respond to questions. People need time to think, reflect, and get ready to speak up. It may help to pose a question and go around the circle asking everyone to respond. Or, pair people up for a few minutes, and ask them to talk about a particular point. Then bring everyone together again.

Occasionally, you might have a lack of excitement in the discussion because the group seems to be in agreement and doesn’t appreciate the complexity of the issue. In this case, your job is to try to bring other views into the discussion, especially if no one in the group holds them. Try something like, “Do you know people who hold other views? What would they say about our conversation?”