

Draft Introduction & Overview of the chapters

A constant focus of the Conference of INGO of the Council of Europe has been addressing the accumulation of social tensions due to the violation of human rights, discrimination, poverty and other negative factors, which are aggravated by current migration processes and increasing diversity in European society.

The most constructive approach to resolving these tensions is based on dialogue, a joint search for mutually acceptable solutions and on shared responsibility for their implementation.

So the Conference of INGOs has produced this Toolkit for Conducting Intercultural Dialogue. The idea is to create a practical, compact, user-friendly guide to conduct dialogues where they are most needed.

Chapter 1 *Aims of Dialogue,*

The first of the ten chapters of the Toolkit explains the proposed dialogue approach. It gives the background to the Toolkit definitions and concepts, such as “dialogue”, “culture”, and “honest conversation”.

The chapter describes the background to the document and notes that the Toolkit was conceived as a practical follow-on to the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* (May 2008) and to the Report by the Group of Eminent Persons on *Living together in 21st century Europe* (May 2011).

This Toolkit could become a unique contribution of the Council of Europe’s INGO Conference to the strengthening of the social cohesion and the human rights-based approach to diversity issues. It draws on the experience, knowledge and practise of NGO’s and in particular the discussions and the findings of the NGO Forum of 23-25 March 2011 in Istanbul *New multicultural challenges: how can NGOs play their part?*, and also the feedback from the participants of the Civil Society Forum on 13-14 November 2011 in Strasbourg.

Finally, chapter 1 points out that the Toolkit will contain a set of action points to be used in the situation where dialogues are being initiated.

Chapter 2, *Mapping of the situation in the societies concerned*

looks at the main challenges that societies are facing.

The issue of multiculturalism today is a lot more complex than simply relations between majorities and minorities. There is a “fractured mainstream society” meaning that there are now more sub-cultures and differences present in the so-called majority than ever before.

Rising unemployment and uncertainty fuelled by the financial crisis have given rise to populist trends, as people feel threatened and insecure in their own societies.

Populist “solutions” and xenophobic ideas that claim to address the problems rock the boat, sending some societies down a wrong and dangerous path. Different socio-economic circumstances and different levels of education keep people living in separate communities, even where they belong to the so-called majority, with no natural space for interaction. This only reinforces mutual false interpretations and perceptions. Parallel societies within nation states have become a reality.

The role of “identity” needs to be taken into account as one of the core issues when talking about the challenges of intercultural dialogue and the fact that identity questions can be instrumentalised and politicized.

The main difficulties of intercultural dialogue, as is confirmed by the responses to the questionnaire and other discussions, lie in the areas of immigrants and asylum seekers, ethnicity, religion and the Roma population.

The gender dimension was mentioned as well as other elements such as different perceptions of what freedom means, historical barriers, intergenerational barriers, lack of/misleading information.

Chapter 3 *Causes of conflict*

This chapter identifies the factors contributing to conflict in modern multicultural societies, in order to develop or adjust strategies to respond to them. These factors have been assembled in 12 domains.

There is range of responses concerning individual identity and group identities. An honest conversation with oneself often provides the key to a new way of looking at the other.

Ignoring existing and/or potential intercultural issues facing particular communities, towns and/or cities along with the pent up dissatisfaction, disillusionment and anger form the next set of components giving rise to conflicts.

Change itself can often be perceived as a source of conflict. It requires particular care in order to minimize the initial negative impact of changes and derive maximum benefit for all.

Global challenges, such as a clash of civilizations, cultures and ideologies, the again growing economic and social disparities between rich and vulnerable populations in Europe, the migration patterns and their driving causes, all require careful interpretation/reinterpretation in order to reach appropriate solutions that are implementable.

Racism in its various forms is a reality in today's societies. There is rising xenophobia, Islamophobia and recurring anti-Semitism.

The media sometimes aggravate conflicts, spreading prejudices and promoting stereotypes of certain ethnic and religious groups, migrants and asylum seekers. At the same time, taking the intercultural approach as a basis, rejecting sensationalism and myths, and striving towards more effective, sensitive and informed reporting, the media contributes to conflict resolution and maintaining social cohesion. The chapter provides a good example of a local newspaper in the city of Leicester, UK, the *Leicester Mercury*.

Chapter 4 *Who needs to be at the table?*

The chapter shows that a dialogue is a multivectoral and multidirectional continuous process that affects to some degree each and everyone either as individuals or as members of social groups, be it in their daily life or while performing public functions.

This chapter attempts to systematize the basic composition of participants in an intercultural dialogue, taking into account the factors mentioned above.

Starting with the fact that an Individual remains a key link in any dialogue, the authors analyze the role of educational institutions, be they formal or informal entities, and look at the role of a family.

Speaking of social groups, the authors mention the importance of young people as agents of change, and as well the role of the older generation who carry on the traditions ensuring continuity of social and cultural values as well as lessons learnt from the past.

The role of politics and politicians as well public administration has to be considered since societal trends largely depend on political influencing factors.

The role of civil society as a multifunctional, complex stakeholder is viewed through the prism of the key objectives and activities of NGOs as vital participants in intercultural dialogue.

It is noted that locally, implementation of intercultural dialogue often depends on the mood and active involvement of social groups and communities, be they institutionally organized associations or informal groups. The activities of religious communities and their leaders bring into focus the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. Then the authors look at the role of sports organizations and cultural associations and their spokespersons, as well as the part placed by intellectuals, academics and researchers in the preparation of a dialogue and sustaining it.

In today's mediatized society, a great deal depends on the quality and the quantity of information, and it is evident that the role of the media is crucial. This is also dealt with in this chapter.

Chapter 5 *Conditions and context (at the macro- and micro-level)*

A dialogue is possible and effective in the presence of a whole number of macro- and micro-level conditions, which are tightly interrelated and interdependent. The aim of this chapter is to formulate these conditions and to define the context that creates fertile ground for intercultural dialogue.

Starting from the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, macro-conditions include the following values and principles: Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law; equal dignity and mutual respect; gender equality; dismantling the barriers that prevent intercultural dialogue. The task today is not just to recognize, respect and cherish this diversity, but also to use it for the common good. Furthermore, it is a matter of shifting the mind-set of the public from polarization to solution-oriented dialogues. Hereby the initial basic conditions at the micro-level include motivation/intention and readiness to join and to conduct the dialogue, as well as open-mindedness of the participants. A willingness to engage in dialogue is influenced by conditions such as hospitality, affability and benevolence and also a specific expression of respect for the partner(s) in the dialogue as well as a signal of invitation to the other to join in the dialogue.

Wherever possible it is ideal to start the dialogue in a situation where all feel on an equal footing. This allows participants to further develop such qualities as listening skills, self-awareness and self-reflectiveness, which are tightly connected to the ability to think critically; the awareness of and knowledge about “the Other” and the others.

Chapter 6 looks at the role of facilitators in dialogue and compares it to other related roles and procedures, in particular to the role of a justice of the peace and the process of arbitration and mediation. Finally it mentions some of the skills required.

The following definition forms the basis of the Chapter: “A facilitator of dialogue helps a diverse group of participants to accept and appreciate each other; to evaluate all factors involved in overcoming difficulties; to own their share of responsibility to make a difference; to identify the group’s common objectives, and to assist them in planning how to achieve these objectives.”

One of the key principles for facilitation of dialogue, and therefore for the task of facilitators is maintaining the integrity of dialogue. Just as the midwife takes care of hygiene at the time of birth, so the facilitator cares for the integrity of the dialogue process. During the process, the facilitator needs to have in mind these elements of the dialogue, and he/she needs to ascertain the participants’ consent.

Planning and organization of the dialogue, as well as maintaining it, requires a continued assessment of the process, including an understanding of the hidden obstacles to dialogue, of possible dilemmas in approaching the dialogue, of “hot-button” words, etc.

Chapter 7 looks at the main obstacles to a genuine dialogue.

It is noted that the obstacles to intercultural dialogue are on all levels: national, regional and local.

They are caused by different factors, including the lack of political agenda for dialogue; the lack of public policies in combating discrimination. Specialized state institutions that focus only on the issue of discrimination seem to ignore the gaps in the corresponding legislation, (for example in the legislation on “racial” and ethnic discrimination and hate crimes). Other factors are false perceptions/ stereotypes/ prejudice, especially if the media distributes them in direct and indirect ways.

Some of the hidden obstacles to dialogue are also created because of no sense of belonging and the lack of human security for all, lack of support for NGOs involved in Intercultural Dialogue, no space available or offered for intercultural dialogues to happen. There are still a lot of inequalities regarding treatment and opportunities. Other factors that can block the dialogue concern education and the lack of schooling of immigrant children and other socially disadvantaged groups.

Among the issues which spur the most discussions are the ones related to migration (legal/illegal), religion, ethnical, cultural and religious racism and xenophobia, employment, social integration of minority groups and vulnerable groups, gender differences, the rights of the immigrants, cultural heritage etc.

It is not easy to address these problems. Some of the obstacles can be dissolved by openness, by recognizing the problems and showing willingness to overcome them. It requires time, effort, a long-term commitment and courage to push the “hot buttons”.

Chapter 8 *The design of a dialogue process*

Despite the fact that in each case the dialogue will have to have its own specificities there are some general guiding principles for any intercultural dialogue process. It is based on the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law; it seeks to promote unity in diversity; it is committed to honest conversations and trust-building; adhering to the principle of “what is right, not who is right” and to the prerequisite of having “all at the table”.

The chapter underlines essential elements of the dialogue process such as “learning from the past” - unpacking and tending to wounds of history; the collecting of good practices; the study and exchange of training experiences of Toolkit facilitators, etc. It includes the need for establishing a personal evaluation system for initiators of dialogues and for the participants, allowing people to reflect on the coherence and relevance of their involvement in the process as it relates to their daily life and work.

Chapter 9 points to the purpose of the dialogue, namely the democratic management of diversity and human rights based approach of social cohesion. Taking this road means developing a culture of participation.

This chapter also lists some items regarding the planning of dialogues, if they have not been covered in the preceding chapters.

It mentions again the need for evaluation of the dialogue process.

This evaluation can be initiated before the end of the dialogue and it gains in quality if it is completed by a retrospective evaluation.

Chapter 10 *References and Resources* offers a collection of literature for further reading as well as a number of Internet links with access to examples of best practice of intercultural dialogue.

In conclusion to this overview it is worth mentioning that the INGO Conference is developing a Dialogue implementation. This is to be the beginning of an ongoing Dialogue action programme.

The full text of the INGO Dialogue Toolkit is available here in English, French and Russian with reader software



www.dialoguetoolkit.net