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## **Participatory Dialogue:**

Towards a Stable, Safe  
and Just Society for All



UNITED NATIONS

# DESA

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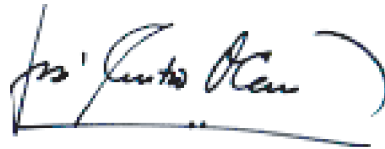
More than ten years ago, leaders of the world, gathered at the World Summit for Social Development, agreed to address emerging economic and social challenges on a global scale. The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action established a new consensus on placing people at the centre of our concerns for development. Social integration was identified as one of the three overriding objectives of development, together with poverty eradication and employment creation. However, so far, in relation to the other two themes, this concept has not yet gained sufficient attentions it deserves.

Member States made a commitment to promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe, just and tolerant, and that respect diversity. Such an inclusive society—a society for all—is one in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. **A society for all** must be equipped with appropriate mechanisms that enable their citizens to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, and ultimately shape their common future. Participatory dialogue is an important policy tool that can offer a range of practical means, and, therefore, should be considered as part of building more cohesive societies, as well as building peace, including in post-conflict societies.

The present publication offers an overview of social integration and related concepts, explores the role and principles of participatory dialogue in creating more socially cohesive societies, and provides practical examples of dialogue use and dialogic tools. It also reviews global trends influencing social integration dynamics, and examines what elements are essential to creating societies that are resilient with respect to social tensions/disintegration.

In its efforts to follow-up on the commitments made at the Social Summit, the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat has undertaken a series of activities, including exploring the potential of dialogue as a means to resolve conflict non-violently and transform societies so as to make them more inclusive and participatory, and by extension to further social cohesion and the creation of a “stable, safe and just society for all”. Towards this end, the Division has hosted activities, including an Expert Group Meeting and electronic dialogues, designed to engage a range of stakeholders and experts in sharing experiences and building collective knowledge.

This publication is not meant to deliver a final verdict on how to build socially integrative societies, but rather, to serve as a device for robust discussion and for returning social integration to the foreground of discourse on peace and development. Further, it is our hope that a wide range of actors, spanning, inter alia, policymakers, arbitrators, facilitators, peace activists, civil society representatives and others will be able to mine this document for insights, tools and ideas that will inspire, guide and enhance their initiatives towards creating a society for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'José Antonio Ocampo', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

José Antonio Ocampo  
Under-Secretary-General for Economic  
and Social Affairs

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**T**he present report is the outcome of part of the work that the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat has been undertaking to explore the potential role of participatory dialogue as a tool for facilitating social integration processes. It offers an overview of social integration and related concepts, explores the role and principles of participatory dialogue in creating more socially cohesive societies, and provides practical examples of dialogue use and dialogic tools.

Thus, the report covers a range of approaches to the subject of participatory dialogue for social integration, and is meant to satisfy a variety of readers' interests, ranging from conceptual explorations through normative thinking to practical tools and methodologies.

The World Summit for Social Development (the Social Summit) was held at Copenhagen in 1995 to forge agreement on social challenges and responses to them. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development established a new consensus on placing people at the centre of our concerns for sustainable development (see box for a synopsis of all relevant United Nations mandates). Member States committed themselves to promoting social integration to create “a society for all”, through fostering inclusive societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all people, including disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable groups and persons.

A society for all is one in which people play an active role in peace and development, engaging in socially integrative processes that are guided by the fundamental principles of seeking unity within diversity with social justice. Participatory dialogue is a key catalytic mechanism in such processes and should be part and parcel of building more cohesive societies.

Introducing the thinking behind social integration and its linkages to participatory dialogue includes clarifying terms and concepts that help to explain social integration as a process relevant to all societies. This process is highly complex, as it is multidimensional and dynamic and includes a wide range of diverse stakeholders. Social transformation processes spiral, continuously moving through different stages while building on previous stages. Social relations are in constant flux—from fragmentation, exclusion and polarization (formative stages) to coexistence, collaboration and cohesion (expansive stages).

It is argued that inclusion, participation and justice form the main ingredients of social integration, ideally bringing forth the active engagement of all citizens in building their common future. Dialogue is among the interventions necessary to bring about engagement and represents the shape that such engagement needs to take. In other words, dialogue processes should be an integral part of a compre-

hensive strategy of interventions towards social integration, and dialogue should be the method of interaction used in relation to other interventions such as healing, reconciliation, mediation, education, and policies and mechanisms for equality and equity, etc. It is evident that all stakeholders need to be included and need to take active and complementary roles in building more cohesive societies—government, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and so on, with a particular emphasis on the participation of marginalized groups whose voices have not, or have hardly, been heard.

While measuring social integration is a complex and difficult undertaking, it can serve as a powerful tool in the process of building more cohesive societies, and preliminary thinking in this regard is presented, including consideration of developing a social integration index.

The report includes a number of examples of dialogic practices from around the world, illustrating the arguments made, and demonstrating global trends towards increased use of dialogue at local, national and international levels.

Conceptual thinking and analysis of both case examples and global trends form the basis of emerging principles of participatory dialogue for social integration. The report argues that such principles should be upheld in order for dialogue processes to be effective but that this has to be done in a highly flexible manner, ensuring that dialogue practices are appropriate to the context in which they are used and that all stakeholders assume ownership of the process.

The report also presents a range of practical tools and methodologies that fall under the broad umbrella of “participatory dialogue”, serving purposes ranging from increasing mutual understanding through facilitating to create collective visions of the future to joint decision-making and collaborative action, as well as building skills and capacities. These tools represent merely a small number of examples from among the plethora of practices being used around the world, encompassing the traditional and modern as well as many hybrid forms.

The report finally offers conclusions and recommendations for actions, aiming to increase our understanding of participatory dialogue processes as well as to promote and support them, to be considered by United Nations entities, Member States, international donors and stakeholders within civil society and the private sector.

It is hoped that the report besides offering these explicit recommendations, will encourage readers to learn more about dialogue and explore ways to apply dialogic practices to building inclusive societies and fostering the active engagement of all in building a society for all. It is also meant to inspire innovation and experimentation in the various related programmes and projects in which readers are engaged at the local, national and international levels.

## RELEVANT UNITED NATIONS MANDATES: A SYNOPSIS

- To live together in peace with one another as good neighbours (*Charter of the United Nations, signed on 26 June 1945*).
- To promote human rights (*the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on 10 December 1948*).
- To promote social integration, employment and poverty alleviation as interrelated objectives. In 1995, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development established a new consensus on placing people at the centre of sustainable development efforts. The Member States committed themselves to promoting social integration to create “a society for all”, through fostering inclusive societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.<sup>a</sup>
- To promote a culture of peace (*General Assembly resolutions A and B 53/243, of 13 September 1999*): In 1999, the General Assembly resolved that “peace not only is the absence of conflict, but also requires a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation”.<sup>b</sup>
- In 2000, in its five-year review of the Social Summit, the General Assembly, at its twenty-fourth special session, adopted resolution S-24/2 of 1 July 2000 on further initiatives for social development and resolved to further its commitment to promote social integration by strengthening mechanisms for the participation of all people, promoting cooperation and dialogue among all levels of government and civil society, strengthening the effectiveness of organizations and mechanisms working for the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts, and increasing the capability of United Nations bodies to promoting social integration in post conflict situations.<sup>c</sup>
- To reduce poverty (*the Millennium Development Goals, 2000 and ongoing*).
- In 2004, The World Urban Forum declared that “the current visible shift away from marginalization to consultation to participation, and the concurrent trend of promoting partnerships are positive developments which must be encouraged”.
- To devise a strategy for change: a collective response to current opportunities and threats facing humanity.<sup>d</sup>
- To take action to promote a culture of peace and dialogue at the local, national, regional and international levels: On 16 September 2005, Member States, in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, reaffirmed their commitments to working towards a security consensus based on the recognition that many threats are interlinked, that development, peace and security, and human rights are all interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and that no State can best protect itself by acting entirely alone.<sup>e</sup> At the same time, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to creating a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic world and to undertaking concrete measures to continue finding ways to implement the outcome of the Millennium Summit and the other major United Nations conferences and summits, so as to provide multilateral solutions to problems in four areas: development; peace and collective security; human rights and the rule of law; and strengthening of the United Nations.<sup>f</sup>

- In 2005, regarding the *development agenda*, the Secretary-General in his annual report on the work of the organization, acknowledged that “the concept of social integration has yet to be fully incorporated” and that the “challenge is to ensure that the concept of social integration is at the centre of all (development) policies and to find practical ways and means of achieving a ‘society for all’”.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Copenhagen Declaration sect. C, commitment 4.

<sup>b</sup> Resolution 53/243 A, entitled “Declaration on a Culture of Peace”, fourth perambulate para.

<sup>c</sup> See resolution S-24/2, annex, sect. III, commitment 4.

<sup>d</sup> See report of the Secretary-General of 21 March 2005 entitled “In large freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all” (A/59/2005 and Add. 1-3).

<sup>e</sup> See General Assembly resolution 60/1, para.72.

<sup>f</sup> Ibid, para. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Official Records of the GA, Sixtieth Session, Supplement No. 1 (A/60/1), para. 103.

In this report, *dialogue* is explored as a central mechanism within the social integration process. In turn, *social integration* is seen as central within the broad endeavours of peace, development and human rights, as outlined by consensus at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March 1995.

The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (United Nations, 1996), a key outcome of the Social Summit, contain a specific commitment to advancing social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe, just and tolerant and that respect diversity. As noted by the Secretary-General in his annual report on the work of the Organization in 2005, the Millennium Declaration also subsumes social integration in its synthesis of peace, security, development and human rights. While some progress has been made in such areas as accession to legal instruments, gaps still remain in addressing some important elements, such as *overcoming exclusion, promoting inclusive institutions and promoting participation*. These are among the key elements of social integration processes. The challenge is to ensure that the concept of social integration is at the centre of all policies and to find practical means of achieving a society for all.<sup>1</sup>

Participatory dialogue is an important policy tool that can offer a range of practical means. It should become part and parcel of building more cohesive societies and building peace, including in post-conflict interventions. Such dialogue is based on and advances inclusion, participation, and justice, and enables the active engagement of all citizens in shaping their common future.

Dialogue is not a panacea: It does not replace justice, equity policies, inclusive education or any other key interventions towards social integration. Rather, it should be understood, and used, as one component of a comprehensive strategy towards inclusive and just societies. Within a social integration strategy, dialogue complements, enables, and enhances other interventions. It helps to weave a stronger fabric of social relations, thus building social capital.

The present focus on participatory dialogue is guided by current United Nations efforts to build a more comprehensive, integrated approach to peace-building, development and human rights. Within that wider effort, the current report is the result of several activities that the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations has been undertaking through the convening of a wide range of stakeholders and experts to complement its own desktop research activities.

All societies may experience disruption and conflict, and all societies have developed tools and mechanisms to resolve conflict and (re-)build unity. Hence, we find examples and traditions of social integration, both spontaneous

and deliberate in all cultures throughout human history. The present report contains examples of such traditions and experiences, including pertinent mechanisms and tools, from all over the world. These are meant to serve as inspiration toward building on and enhancing one's own traditional tools and mechanisms, through adapting and tailoring those that have developed in other cultures, or in more recent years.

### ***The costs of inaction***

The present report argues that investing in social integration processes can yield a number of important societal benefits. In contrast, a lack of investment in social integration processes implies risks and missed opportunities in terms of economic development, peace and security. Risks may include:

- Growing tensions and violent conflict due to rapid socio-economic transitions with growing inequities
- Increasing public expenditure due to lack of solidarity among private networks and low levels of voluntary engagement
- A decrease of status in the international community

Missed opportunities may include:

- Underuse of human resources in the labour market due to social exclusion
- Less creative societal problem-solving when new development challenges are being faced

Socially more cohesive societies that develop a democratic culture of dialogue are more resilient to challenges and more likely to develop peacefully and equitably.

### ***Contents of this report***

This report offers an overview of social integration and related concepts, explores the role of participatory dialogue in creating more socially cohesive societies and provides practical examples of dialogue and dialogic tools.

**Chapter 1** aims to introduce the concept of social integration and its linkages to participatory dialogue. It presents relevant terms and concepts and offers frameworks for thinking about social integration and social relations and their development. It also considers three main building blocks of social integration: inclusion, participation and justice as main ingredients; useful interventions that can form a comprehensive strategy for transforming societies into more peaceful, stable and just ones; and the wide range of stakeholders who need to play their parts in that transformation. The chapter also discusses the linkages of social integration with peace and development, and offers suggestions regarding the measurement of social integration.

**Chapter 2** looks more closely at the linkages between participatory dialogue and social integration and tracks global trends that show an increase in the use of dialogue in various contexts. The main goal of the chapter is to outline the principles on which participatory dialogue processes need to be based in order to successfully contribute to building more peaceful, stable and just societies.

**Chapter 3** turns to the practical tools and methodologies that fall under the broad umbrella of “participatory dialogue” which encompass the traditional and the modern as well as many hybrid forms. The chapter discusses the different purposes that participatory dialogue may serve, from increasing mutual understanding through facilitating collective visions of the future to joint decision-making and collaborative action, as well as capacity-building within communities at different levels. The chapter also offers a number of examples of tools and methodologies that can be copied, adapted and used flexibly in accordance with the basic principles of participatory dialogue.

**Chapter 4** provides conclusions and offers recommendations for United Nations entities, Member States, international donors and stakeholders within civil society and the private sector. The recommendations are meant to offer ideas for possible action that could increase our understanding of dialogue, promote its use and support its practice at all levels.

The **Annexes** provide further materials, including a checklist for designers of multi-stakeholder processes (annex I), overviews of methodologies and tools for participatory dialogue (annex II), a glossary of key terms (annex III), and detailed references and resources (annex IV).

Altogether, the present report covers a range of approaches to promoting social integration through participatory dialogue by elaborating on: conceptualizations of the main elements of social integration, its interventions and stakeholders; social relations and their development; normative thinking about principles underpinning successful dialogue processes; and practical tools and methodologies. Different readers may be interested in particular approaches to understanding and practising dialogue, and may focus on individual chapters. For example, those familiar with the conceptual thinking behind social integration and the principles of participatory dialogue may turn their attention to the description of practical tools (chap. 3) and may, it is hoped, inspire others to experiment with one or more methodologies in the development of practical action.

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<sup>1</sup> See United Nations (2005), para. 103.