Social Integration:
A Global Societal Learning and Change Perspective

Presentation to:

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Expert Group Meeting on
Dialogue in the Social Integration Process:
Building peaceful social relations by, for and with people

New York
21 - 23 November 2005

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1) Introduction

Social integration is a complicated concept and goal even for a modest-sized community. At the global level, it may seem unfathomable. However, global networks are emerging to address specific critical global issues, and in the process they are working toward and achieving a degree of social integration globally. Indeed, they are addressing the challenge to make globalization work for all.

This paper first presents two frameworks--societal learning and change, and generative dialogue-- as vehicles to look at these networks. It identifies strategies that these networks are developing to build social integration globally. Finally, it identifies some key challenges to the networks' success as agents of social integration.

Extracts from two works are the basis of this paper. For one of these the author of this paper was co-author, and sole author of the other. One of these was written for the Generative Dialogue Project (GDP), an initiative to build a community of practice in dialogic change processes.[1]

2) Core Concepts

a) Societal Learning and Change (SLC)

In a seminal article on "revolutionary" change, Connie Gersick looks at theories of what causes transformation in stable systems across six different disciplines—individual adult development; organizational development; the history of science; evolutionary biology; and the study of self-organizing systems. The defining characteristic of transformative change in any realm, Gersick shows, is that it occurs at the level of "deep structure," which she defines as "the set of fundamental 'choices' a system has made of (1) the basic parts into which its units will be organized and (2) the basic activity patterns that will maintain its existence."

Waddell connects the work of Gersick and other analysts of systemic change to examples of change around the world to construct a concept of "societal learning and change."[2] He points out that the kind of transformation that occurred in South Africa is sometimes called "third-order" change, a term that derives from theories and observations of single-, double- and triple-loop learning.[3] Single-loop learning, or first-order change, involves adaptation within the current rules of the game. For example, addressing declining fish populations by changing the quantities in a fishing quota system describes a single-loop learning model of change. Actors in the system do not question the quota system or the method for establishing quotas. Double-loop learning, or second-order change, involves redefining the rules of the game. In the fishing example, this might involve applying quotas to a wider variety of fish in order to avert over-fishing before it happens. Participants in the system have acted to improve and adapt it to changing realities, but still without examining its underlying assumptions or the roles they play in sustaining it.

SLC is about changing relationships in profound ways and producing innovation to address chronic problems and develop new opportunities. These are not just inter-personal relationships, but relationships between big sections of society. Both the depth and breadth of the learning and change that SLC encompasses are unusual. SLC initiatives develop the capacity of a society to do something that it could not do before; they do the same thing for participating organizations.

In the fish example, this would involve transcending quotas and a specific fish species as the critical concept for a new core concept; in fisheries this is exemplified by collaborative approaches between stakeholders to steward the health of marine eco-regions.

For those who are working toward SLC, the critical question is how to bring about third-order change. The criteria presented in Table 1 provide a framework for addressing this question, and we have used it in analyzing the activities of the networks we studied.

Table 1: Criteria for Distinguishing Orders of Change in Problem Solving Initiatives			
Criteria	**First Order Change**	**Second Order Change**	**Third Order Change**
Desired Outcome	"More (or less) of the same."	Reform	Transformation
Purpose	To improve the performance of the established system.	To change the system to address shortcomings and respond to the needs of stakeholders	To address problems from a whole-system perspective
Participation	Replicates the established decision making group and power relationships	Brings relevant stakeholders into the problem solving conversation in ways that enable them to influence the decision making process	Creates a microcosm of the problem system, with all participants coming in on an equal footing as issue owners and decision makers
Process	Confirms existing rules. Preserves the established power structure and relationships among actors in the system	Opens existing rules to revision. Suspends established power relationships; promotes authentic interactions; creates a space for genuine reform of the system	Opens issue to creation of entirely new ways of thinking about the issue. Promotes transformation of relationships toward whole-system awareness and identity; promotes examination of the deep structures that sustain the system; creates a space for fundamental system change

As Table 1 implies, SLC realignment involves changing relationships between the core systems of society—economic, political and social represented respectively by business, government and civil society. The goals of the organizations involved are varied: increasing profits, addressing environmental degradation, increasing equity, developing new products and markets, community development. But SLC always involves bridging the differences between business, government and community-based organizations (CBOs). By working together voluntarily, each participating organization achieves its own goals by changing its relationship with others to coordinate their actions and create synergies. The changes are driven both by each groups' goal, and a vision about how to build society's capacity to achieve a jointly valued societal goal.

To create a racially integrated South Africa requires substantial change in not just the racial complexion of business, but the ways business works with non-whites as employees and customers. Similar to the end of slavery in the U.S., ending apartheid restructured the economics of production. For government the end of apartheid meant substantial change in policing and justice systems, and rewriting of the basic governing document—the constitution. And for civil society the change meant shifting from a position of adversary to partner with other parts of society. With all this change, the society becomes more closely aligned with the desires of its citizens and its potential for improving their welfare substantially enhanced.

The SLC framework builds on individual, group, and organizational learning and change approaches. In fact, SLC requires individual, group and organizational learning processes, since SLC success involves development of new individual and organizational capacity. These learning and change traditions are deep and rich, and provide a good strategic base and tool kit for SLC. However, with SLC there is the important additional level of society and this level has its own unique challenges and requires distinctive tools, knowledge and action.

The SLC framework also builds upon the idea that there are basically three different types of individuals and organizations in the world, and these form three different types of organizational sectors and societal sub-systems. Together, these create the SLC Change Challenge Matrix presented in Table 2. To produce SLC requires successful action at all the levels from individual to societal, and in two or most often three of the systems. The challenges that deep interaction between these systems give rise to are key to generating the deep and broad type of change that is distinctive of SLC. Those challenges help reveal unrecognized assumptions and allow combining unusual resources from the distinct systems in innovative ways.

Table 2 The Societal Learning and Change Challenge Matrix			
Societal	Political Systems	Economic Systems	Social Systems
Sectoral	The State Sector	The Market Sector	The Social Sector
Organizational	Government agencies	Businesses	Community-based Orgs.
Individual	Mentally centered	Physically centered	Emotionally centered

Regardless of the change target—community, industry, infrastructure, or global structures—SLC involves working with many individuals and dozens to literally thousands of organizations that do not have historic connections. This is because of the maxim that successful change efforts engage those who will be part of the change rather than act on them. In the case of SLC, this means significant change with organizations in at least two of the three societal sub-systems and the way they relate to one another. The political sub-system comprises government and its agencies that focus upon setting the rules of the game and enforcing them; another is the economic subsystem, which is made up of businesses focusing upon wealth creation; and a third is civil society and its organizations, which focus upon promotion of their sense of justice and community good. Participants in SLC initiatives must understand their relative positions within the societal systems—and their core logics—to be able to work together effectively.
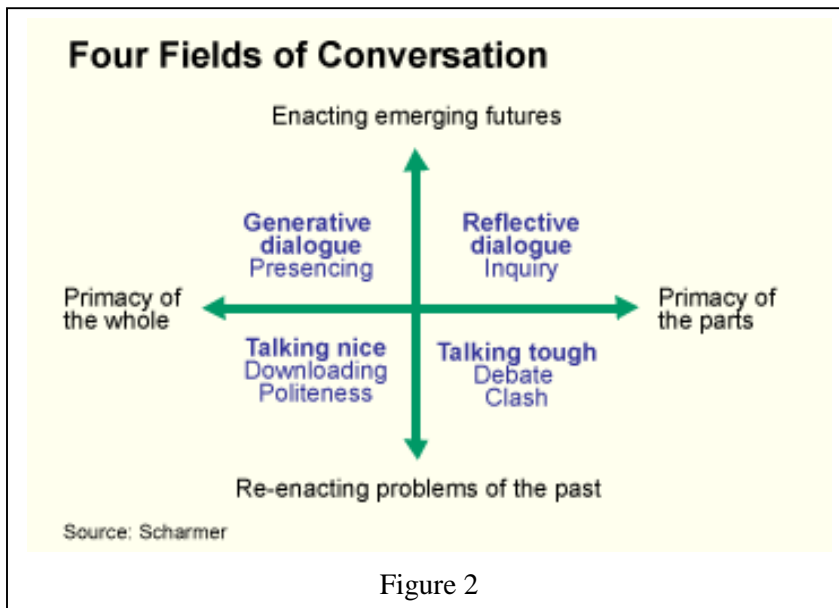
b) Generative Dialogue

Figure 2

Dialogue is critical in developing these new connections. There is a large body of practice and a large literature on the subject of dialogue[4] and people are pursuing dialogic approaches with different definitions of dialogue. This means, for example, that what some refer to as "dialogue", others refer to as "consultation" where other stakeholders are solicited for their input, but remain outside the core decision-making process. The Four Fields of Conversation diagram presented in Figure 2 helps connect dialogue to third order change. In this framework, developed by Otto Scharmer, the four fields of conversation

move from the least authentic and open, in the lower left-hand quadrant, counterclockwise to the most authentic, open, and creative in the upper left.[5] The upper left is where third order societal learning and change occur.

- **Talking nice:** This quadrant represents the most common form of conversation and communication. Scharmer defines this kind of interaction as "rule repeating." We say what we're expected to say in a specific situation: "how are you? I am fine."[6] The kind of listening that corresponds to this is not listening at all, but just playing the tape in our heads.

- **Talking tough:** The rule-repeating game of talking nice might be interrupted when the conversation moves into a debate. In debate we say what we're really thinking, so, in that sense, it is progress toward greater authenticity. It creates energy in the conversational field, though it doesn't really produce anything new. A debate is about making a point and winning. We listen to what confirms or disconfirms our point of view.

- **Reflective dialogue:** Often, however, debate can lead to reflective dialogue, since it allows its participants to be authentic and to confront reality. In a reflective dialogue, as participants in the conversation, we begin to see the other person's perspective. We might not necessarily agree with what the other person has to say but we begin to understand where he or she is coming from. At the same time, in a reflective dialogue we begin to reflect on our own perspectives. We start observing ourselves while we are talking and listening. And our listening begins to be empathetic—we are not just listening to others' ideas to decide whether we agree or not, but also to try to understand where they are coming from. In his work on dialogue, Bill Isaacs identifies four capacities people exhibit when they engage in this kind of conversation: *voicing*—speaking the truth of one's own perspective; *listening* without resistance; *respecting*—demonstrating awareness of the impossibility of fully understanding others' positions; and *suspending*—letting go of assumptions, judgments, certainty.[7]

- **Generative dialogue:** In a generative dialogue our perception as participants shifts again. This time it moves from seeing the other person's perspective towards seeing the "whole." John Paul Lederach calls this shift into awareness of the whole the emergence of "moral imagination."[8] The interaction becomes more intense, the boundaries between participants become blurred, our perception of time slows down. Scharmer describes this deeper form of dialogue as "presencing," which is a creative experience of bringing forth that sense of the whole that is trying to come forward.[9] The Generative Dialogue Project's definition of generative dialogue is grounded in our understanding of this quadrant of the conversation matrix: *generative dialogue is conversation that brings forth creative energy and collective intelligence out of a personal sense of connection to the whole.*

3) Global Action Networks (GANs): Emerging vehicles for global social integration

a) GANs as a Distinct Organizational Type

Even the definition of what constitutes a global issue is complicated by global-local distinctions. Jean-Francois Rischard's widely cited list of twenty global challenges distinguishes among three types of global issues: those that concern the planet's environmental commons; those that concern our common humanity; and those that require a global regulatory approach.[10] Within these categories, there are some issues that clearly transcend geography, such as climate, and others that clearly require global coordination for success, such as trade and epidemics. More often, however, when people use "global" they really mean "multi-local"—issues grounded in geographic-specific conditions but also replicated in many communities around the world. They

are global largely by virtue of globalization, which has provided the communication and transportation technologies that make a global response possible and at the same time made the success of local actions increasingly dependent on global organizations and policy frameworks.

The emergence of multi-stakeholder networks—including ones that explicitly exclude government participation—is a central feature of new change initiatives addressing these issues. They are part of the "governance without government" phenomenon, noted in the 1990s,[11] and the "government as networks" phenomenon,[12] noted more recently. From a political science perspective, Reinicke refers to these multi-stakeholder networks as "global public policy networks."[13] From a global problem perspective, Rischard labels them "global issue networks."[14] And, from focus on societal learning and change, Waddell describes them as global action networks (GANs: www.gan-net.net).[15]

GANs are distinguished from traditional NGOs and intergovernmental and business organizations because they are formed by diverse stakeholders who are interested in a common issue, and who agree to work together to achieve extraordinary results. GANs are defined by five key characteristics. GANs are:

- Global
- Focused on issues for the public good (not profit-seeking)
- System-building enabling agents that foster linkages among diverse organizations and projects that share common goals
- Boundary-crossing — North/South, rich/poor, policy makers, techno-scientists, funders, global institutions, professional disciplines, and cultures
- Intersectoral structures that promote fundamental changes and innovation in society by engaging business, government, and civil society organizations

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development Programme of Action specified that "the aim of social integration is to create 'a society for all'."[16] As a set, these characteristics mean GANs are instruments of social integration at the global level organized around specific issues. GANs are working to make globalization work for all by combining players across sectors, knowledge disciplines, and geographies to address urgent global problems that cannot be addressed adequately by conventional institutions. There are a few dozen GANs addressing a range of issues, including:

- Corruption: Transparency International
- Provision of water: Global Water Partnership
- Climate change: Greenhouse Gas Protocol
- Corporate reporting and performance standards: Global Reporting Initiative
- Corporate impact: Global Compact
- Poverty: Microcredit Enterprise Campaign
- Sustainable fishing: Marine Stewardship Council
- Sustainable forestry: Forest Stewardship Council
- Youth employment: Youth Employment Summit Campaign

The presence of a GAN in an issue domain signals a significant development stage has been reached in a global public issue. In terms of the social integration development stages described by UN-DESA,[17] the forming of a GAN represents graduation from three formational stages (fragmentation-exclusion-polarization) and movement to the expansive stages with coexistence between at least a subset of the diverse players and collaboration amongst them with the task of cohesion pending.

b) GANs as an Array of Strategies and Actions

Although joined by the five characteristics noted, GANs are often confusing because they have diverse strategies that are also reflected in diverse structures. Table 3 provides an overview of six strategies and associated activities that the GDP found looking at a group of GANs.

Table 3: Strategies and Activities	
Strategies	**Activities**
Bridging	Dialogues; reports; public events
Brokering	Projects (Requests for Proposals, funding, coordination); learning events; meetings
Building Learning Communities	Action research; issue dialogues; reports on best practices
Consensus Building	Development of standards through research; multi-stakeholder dialogues; expert meetings; evaluation of adherence to standards
Promoting Cross-sector Collaboration	Participation as a partner in projects; building and dissemination of knowledge, and capacity development in how to do partnerships; promotion of corporate social responsibility; initiation and/or support of national-level partnership projects
Strengthening Actors	Capacity development training; research; public advocacy; dialogue; networking
System Organizing	Dialogues, meetings, and forums at local, regional, and global levels; publication of reports, newsletters; creation of member databases; creation and coordination of issue networks; drafting and circulation of documents; coordination of projects by network members

With the exception of *Brokering,* all seemed to produce to some extent third order change and SLC within a global strategy. One point that emerges clearly from this overview is that while "dialogue" as a formal activity is part of most strategies, it is nested within a broad range of other activities. Many of them such as meetings forums training and networking are—in Oran Young's framework—"social practice" activities. These are the kinds of activities that by bringing people together can provide experiments that may change their sense of themselves and their relationships to others-"social learning." [18]

We have defined third-order change processes as those which open issues to rethinking, promote transformation of relationships toward whole-system awareness and identity, and create a space for fundamental system change by stimulating examination of the deep structures that sustain the system. (See Table 1.) By this definition, all of these social practice activities, including dialogue, hold the potential for third-order change. Many GDP informants noted the significant changes that occur simply by virtue of bringing people together across geographical, sectoral, or other boundaries to think, work, and learn together. Daniel Zimmer of the World Water Council commented:

> *"For me, at least, it is very clear that going to the [World Water] Forum and meeting people—people from Amazonia, for example—is very rich. You get to meet a great variety of people and see what the human experiences are in our whole world. Anyone attending the World Water Fora has this perception of the diversity of human experience. And this exposure changes your perspective and how you relate to the group of people you work with back home."*[19]

Ken Caplan of Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation succinctly states the assumption underlying this widely shared sense of value in activities that promote societal

learning: "Change happens through exposure to new ideas, and generally in face-to-face interactions."[20] In other words, to use our analytical framework, the activities that promote those kinds of interactions are those that create the possibility for third-order change.

4) Core Challenges to Moving Ahead

a) The Relationship Between Orders of Change

Many of the activities of the GANs are not third order in and of themselves—they also involve first and second order change. The interaction between these different orders of change and how as a set they can produce third order change requires more investigation.

b) From Problem Solving to Change

Problem-solving as an approach has three limitations. It focuses upon what is wrong, which is not very inspiring or energizing. Second, it looks at issues by pulling them apart with the idea that addressing the parts will result in the whole being addressed. It thinks in linear terms of "root causes" rather than in terms of complex systemic relationships that characterize most social issues. In shifting out of the reductionist mode of problem solving, it is useful to think more explicitly about vision-driven change in complex systems.

c) From Consultation to Generative Dialogue

The GDP revealed considerable skepticism about the potential of "dialogue" for change, particularly among Southern NGOs, with reference to "dialogue fatigue". However, this resulted from processes of *consultation* rather than generative dialogue as defined here. There was not meaningful engagement in decision-making or structuring of a dialogue process by the stakeholders—the global elites assumed that they would remain the decision-makers. This suggests that the global elites open to the idea of fundamental restructuring. The emergence of GANs suggests that there have been unreasonable expectations of current global institutions, and that the restructuring is well under-way.

d) Creating Global Intersectoral Change Strategies

There are typically two "holes" globally in the GAN change strategies: China and the Middle East where the governments dominate and civil society is weak. How to make the strategies work in these locations is particularly problematic.

e) Doing Work "Glocally"

There is no top and bottom in the emerging generative dialogic change systems world-view. Rather, there is a complex interaction between different actors in any global issue system. Management and coordination in these systems are surpassed by the sense of "coherence"— creating movement of a whole system in a specific direction. This emerging reality is still hampered by traditional views about organizing with central bodies such as secretariats for GANs and issues about creating fluid exchanges between the different parts.

f) Vastly Increasing Participation

We must use media and technology to vastly increase the opportunities to participate in global dialogic change processes. There are numerous emerging methodologies to do this. For example, among all of Transparency International's activities, it is perhaps best known for development of its Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks countries by levels of corruption as perceived by teams of experts. To make the index creation a third order change process would require substantially broadening participation and on-going ownership of development of the

index. This is, in fact, reflected in a proposal for the Ecuador chapter of Transparency that incorporates cooperative inquiry, community of practice, and systems thinking methodologies.21 This proposal, scheduled to commence in 2006, will create a national dialogue on the meaning of corruption, how it impacts people, what can be done to address corruption, and eventually implementation of those ideas.

We can see how this restructuring of the index development process reflects the elements critical to third order change that are listed in Table 1:

- **Desired Outcome:** It aims for a transformation in relationships and understanding about the issue;
- **Purpose:** It is building a whole systems perspective;
- **Participation:** It is based in creating microcosms of the problem system through a national and numerous local groupings;
- **Process:** It promotes transformational relationships—people will get together who have not traditionally done so, to delve into many issues that include many traditional "undiscussables" in terms of deep structures.

5) Summary

Global Action Networks are developing to address issues of social integration globally and making globalization work for all. The effectiveness of their work can be strengthened by using frameworks and tools arising from change and dialogue knowledge arenas. Several tools and methodologies emerge from applying these knowledge arenas to GANs, including the concepts of orders of change; SLC; generative dialogue with its four stages of development and dialogic change strategies. Even the very act of naming these concepts is a powerful action to clarify distinctions so that people engaged in this work can think and talk with greater clarity about what they are doing and how it is working—both to do the work better and communicate more effectively about it. Both assessing effectiveness and achieving it, however, first require agreement upon objectives. To that end, there is particularly significant value in making more explicit the goal of deep change and the strategic options for pursuing it; the differences among first-, second-, and third-order change activities; and the role of dialogic conversation in change strategies.

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