



Conducting a Policy Dialogue to Achieve Results

Introduction to Policy Dialogues¹

What Is a Policy Dialogue?

A policy dialogue involves people from different interest groups sitting together to focus on an issue in which they have a mutual, but not necessarily common, interest. It assumes that people in different positions and circumstances will have different perspectives on the same problem and that they may have access to different information and ideas about the issue. For example:

- A person providing a service may have more information about the services that are delivered than an informal worker seeking the service.
- A woman worker with children may have different health needs, and more difficulty accessing health services, than an administrator realizes.
- A street vendor and a city official may not agree on how public space should be used.
- A home-based worker may have different ideas about improving municipal services than those designing the services.
- A waste recycler may see the right to accessing public waste differently than a waste site official does.

A policy dialogue helps people to see problems from each other's perspectives. This can lead to a better understanding and bring about meaningful improvements to policies or a programme.

When done well, policy dialogues can be powerful advocacy platforms for informal workers— and valuable sources of information and solutions for officials, too.

Power Differences

Within groups and between groups, there are always power differences. City officials, for example, can generally be said to have more power than informal workers. Policy dialogues fully acknowledge these power differences, but seek to identify areas where it is in the best interest of all to make improvements and reforms.

Informal workers bring a valuable resource to the policy table: the insight into their work, their lives, and the realities of the city that they experience.

A Policy Dialogue is **NOT**...

- a mass meeting
- an event controlled by only one interest group
- an event dominated by formalities and protocols
- a seminar or lecture
- an event for sharing research results with the general public
- an occasion to present pre-prepared resolutions or deliver an ultimatum
- a spur of the moment meeting

¹ This material is adapted from a presentation given by Francie Lund, Director of WIEGO's Social Protection Programme, at an Inclusive Cities Annual Learning Meeting in Chiang Rai, Thailand, held from 7-12 February 2013.

How Does a Policy Dialogue Work Best?

There is no single, ideal model for a policy dialogue. The best version, usually, is one where the dialogue is closed (open only to those who are invited), where the group is relatively small, and where there is little emphasis on formal protocol. However, a successful Health Policy Dialogue in Ghana, detailed on page 6, had a large number of people.

A policy dialogue should be well-structured so all parties have a chance to contribute. It should also focus on a limited selection of issues that can realistically be addressed.

A successful policy dialogue will conclude with a set of commitments to action by all parties.

Planning a Policy Dialogue

What Do You Want to Achieve?

Clear, focused objectives are crucial. The clearer the objective, the more likely you will get the right people in the room.

Focused objectives will bring the common positions and the different positions to the surface.

It is important to have at least one objective that you know can be achieved without big additional resources, or without a change in a law. This will let you counter the common defences: “But there is no money for this” and “This is against the law.”

Who Should Participate?

- A small number of participants with focused purposes is best.
- The event should be open only to those invited.
- Think strategically about who should be present on the workers’ side, what interests they will present, and what role each will play. Ideally, participants should be active, influential, thoughtful and vocal leaders.
- Restrict the numbers of interest groups involved. Allies are great, but bringing too many allies with slightly different agendas together can threaten your specific objectives and focus. It may present a problem with managing diverse issues, which wastes valuable time.
- Invite those officials or programme representatives who have the ability to offer valuable information and/or the authority to make the commitments you want to achieve.
- Identify the exact departments/divisions in local authority that deal with the issues to be addressed. This may take some research. Then identify the “right people” – such as an ally from within the department (someone whose work suggests they will help advocate for your cause). Sometimes, it is advisable to involve a person who is actually responsible for doing the kind of work you need. They can bring “on the ground” information that the more senior officials may not have.

Who Will Facilitate and Keep the Policy Dialogue on Track?

Engage a mutually agreed-upon external facilitator who has experience in these sorts of dialogues— a person who is knowledgeable about, and sympathetic to, the issues.

How Is a Successful Policy Dialogue Structured?

When and Where Should the Event Be Held?

Consider the best timing for you and your partners, but be flexible about what will work best for all participants.

Choose a date that is far enough in the future to allow you to be fully prepared, and to get on people's schedules or in their diaries.

Extend an invitation to participants that provides complete information (the location, date, start and end time) as well as including information about this opportunity. (For example: "This is to discuss and find resolutions to our shared concerns about [name the specific problem.]")

Reserve a space that is a suitable size—large enough to be comfortable for everyone, small enough to allow for dialogue, and private enough that it is not interrupted.

Seating is most important. Ideally, the room should be set up without a podium (to prevent an "up there/down here" environment). It is best if everyone can sit around a table—preferably not a long, narrow table that makes it hard for everyone to see and hear the other participants clearly.

Setting up the Programme

Decide on a reasonable amount of time that will allow everyone to participate, but without getting so long that people will become frustrated, restless or agitated. A dialogue with local government around a specific issue such as fire hazards, could fit into a three to four hour meeting; a dialogue that aims to discuss and plan for reform of policies such as health services may take much longer and require a full day.

Co-design the programme, or offer to draft it yourselves. The programme should allow the following:

- Fair allocation of time is important. Each group must have a chance to speak. A representative on each side should be given a time slot in which to share the group's issues—10-15 minutes is a good limit for single issue dialogues.
- After each group has had a chance to present, a period for questions and clarifications should be included.
- A period for general discussion should be allowed. This is the heart of the dialogue, and must not be cut short because the speakers went on for too long.
- The agenda should include a clear time slot when commitments to solutions will be made.

Write into the programme:

- the clear and focused objectives of the policy dialogue
- agreements about what will be discussed, who will speak, and the timeframes
- agreements about what will NOT be discussed at this policy dialogue

The programme should be agreed on and circulated well in advance.

Preparing for Policy Dialogues

- Do your homework in advance. The dialogue—and especially the inputs by the informal workers—should be based on reliable data whenever possible. Reliable data can be used to deal with stereotypes, myths, and irrational policy positions. It can create the common ground you are seeking.
- Analyze what is wrong with the data used by the different interest groups (including your own). Anticipate arguments against your case and how you will respond.
- Some groups of informal workers have found pre-event preparation sessions crucial to their success. Meeting with all the workers in advance of the dialogue can help formulate an effective strategy.
- Rehearsals, preferably run by an experienced presenter, can help ensure each presentation is concise, clear and effective. It will also help participants share information and get the facts straight. And it will build confidence.

Keeping the Record

- Insist that a record of the meeting is kept. Designate a record keeper before the event. Good record-keeping requires skill. Don't rely on a tape-recording or digital recording as a substitute.
- Keep control of writing the record or insist on the right to review and comment on the draft.

Running a Policy Dialogue

The facilitator should be clear about who is present and why: what the different interests in the issues are and what role each participant plays. Introductions should be made.

From the outset:

- Acknowledge objectives and common concerns.
- Acknowledge differing perspectives.
- Acknowledge unequal power relations.
- Make it clear that each interest group may be expected to give ground, and gain ground.

Getting the Commitments

Usually, but not always, a Policy Dialogue is seeking to get commitments from the more powerful participants to help the less powerful interest groups, such as informal workers.

Identify and articulate what you believe they might gain from finding a solution. These could be one or more of these:

- appreciation from peers and bosses for solving difficult issues
- a cleaner, more productive, better run city
- public gratitude for better public health and sanitation
- fewer enforcement headaches and costs
- actual poverty alleviation
- recognition as national or even international leaders in innovative municipal governance

If “the other side” offers commitments that are not feasible—that you know cannot reasonably be achieved—negotiate them *down* to things that can be achieved. Otherwise nothing may be accomplished.

Work towards commitment to take *concrete* actions:

- within a defined time, and
- with clear roles and responsibilities for different parties.

Ensure that all commitments are written down in detail (include the what, when and who).

What if things get contentious?

- Do not preach to officials or adopt a confrontational approach. Remember that you are all there to learn about each others' perspectives.
- Remind everyone that the purpose of the policy dialogue is to find some mutually beneficial solutions to common issues.
- The officials may preach at you, or adopt a confrontational approach. Try asking them what they do not understand about your position. Offer to answer any questions for them.

If the dialogue is carried out in the spirit of mutual benefit, the outcome is more likely to be positive.

Six Lessons to Bring to the Table

1. Find an issue that is easy to solve.

Have at least one demand that is good for the working poor—and does not hurt anyone else or cost a fortune. This will be hard to say no to.

2. A change of policy or practice can affect different groups differently.

Evaluate the likely impact on ALL groups. Be ready to discuss how different groups might be affected, positively or negatively. Explore solutions to the negative outcomes.

3. Think about the cost-benefit calculation of any change in policy or practice that you might recommend.

Introducing new policies and practices can cost money. But it can also save money somewhere else. Think strategically about all the costs and benefits on all sides.

4. Find an effective solution.

Policymakers and officials don't want to be told that they have to improve working conditions for informal workers—they want to be told *HOW* they can change things. Wherever possible, offer detailed, concrete solutions.

5. Put your message across clearly and concisely.

Think very carefully about *how* to best put your message across so the ears on the other side of the room receive it. Rehearsing is advisable—especially if you have a listener who can pretend to hear what you're saying from the other side.

If you are going to provide a written document, give them a short summary that captures the most important issue and information.

Remember that they will have to pass the message on to their seniors, so they need to understand it.

6. Direct them to resources that back up and expand on your claims.

Are there studies that back up your claims or offer additional information? Has what you are suggesting been successfully implemented somewhere else? It is useful to have evidence that something will have a positive outcome.

Source: Adapted from a presentation made by Imraan Valodia, Research Director for the (Inclusive Cities) Informal Economy Monitoring Study, at an Inclusive Cities Annual Learning Meeting in Chiang Rai, Thailand, held from 7-12 February 2013.

Following Up After the Event

- Send a thank you letter to each person or group who attended. In the letter of thanks, note the commitments that were made.
- Involve the public media, if possible, to tell the story of what was achieved. This will build public support, and will help ensure commitments are met.

Example of a Successful Policy Dialogue

A Health Policy Dialogue held in Accra, Ghana in July 2012 helped more than 2,000 informal workers gain access to health care services through the Ghanaian National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Most of those who benefitted were headload porters known as *kayayei*.

The Accra dialogue was organized after a Health Policy Dialogue organized by WIEGO and Home-Net Thailand in Bangkok in 2012 featured a case study that showed the *kayayei*—most of whom are very poor migrant women from northern Ghana—could not easily access health services. Many were not registered with the NHIS because the premium was too expensive. The few who could afford to join complained they were mistreated or ignored when they tried to use health services. Also, information on programmes such as free care for pregnant women was not reaching the *kayayei*. As a result, *kayayei* often paid for health services they were legally entitled to receive for free.

About 100 *kayayei* attended the three-hour Accra Health Policy Dialogue. They shared their experiences and asked direct questions of 12 key officials and advisers from the Ministry of Health and NHIS. According to Dorcas Ansah, who coordinates WIEGO's activities in Accra, although the

women workers' anger about health services was strongly expressed, the *kayayei* amazed the officials with their confidence and their ability to pose critical questions.

Two important commitments emerged. First, NHIS officials asked for WIEGO's assistance in registering associations of *kayayei* with the scheme; a significantly lower annual premium was negotiated. The NHIS then held a special registration in September, at which over 1,000 *kayayei* were registered. Other community members demanded to be allowed to register under the same deal, so the NHIS agreed, once the *kayayei* were done, to register 500 additional people. A second registration was held four months later, when about 800 more *kayayei* were registered.

The second commitment coming out of the dialogue was from the Ministry of Health, which agreed to enter into discussions with the *kayayei* associations and WIEGO on the poor quality of care received by the women. One suggestion, put forward by Ministry officials, was that clinics and hospitals in areas where *kayayei* live and work would give a special mandate to certain doctors and nurses to look after these workers' needs.

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ABOUT WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research-policy-action network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO draws its membership from membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy.

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