



DANISH INSTITUTE FOR  
PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY

## MMDP KNOWLEDGE BRIEF

**MYANMAR MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY PROGRAMME**  
QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON PARTY DEVELOPMENT

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### MULTIPARTY DIALOGUE

#### INTRODUCTION

In a multiparty democracy where more than two parties can claim significant political support, multiparty dialogue and coalition building will be the reality of politics for most political parties. In such circumstances, dialogue among parties can help parties build consensus in situations where their electoral or personal interests might otherwise conflict. Multiparty dialogue involves bringing political parties together to identify common issues of (national) interest and to improve understanding among the parties.

#### WHERE CAN MULTIPARTY DIALOGUE TAKE PLACE?

Multiparty dialogue can take place in parliaments, parliamentary commissions, caucuses, parliamentary committees, and other parliamentary bodies. It can also take place in political party liaison forums established by the electoral management body. Finally, it can take place in informal or formalized “multiparty platforms” established by the parties themselves and perhaps facilitated by third parties, which are neutral and impartial institutions.

Multiparty dialogue can take place in Parliaments and other government bodies if those are well-established locations for resolving disagreements. In some cases, however, parliamentary or government bodies cannot serve as locations for meaningful dialogue. Some parliaments are dominated by ruling parties with little incentive for dialogue. In other parliaments, the rules of the game encourage debate to distinguish one party from another rather than dialogue to encourage parties to generate consensus. Finally, some parties have a weak linkage with their Members of Parliament, making Parliament an arena in which parties’ views are not adequately represented by their MPs, and necessitating an alternative platform.

To provide a more private space for discussing contentious issues in which parties can participate on a more equitable footing, an institutionalized inter-party dialogue platform outside of Parliament may be more appropriate.

All political parties and political and members can forward queries or questions relating to the challenges of political parties to the Myanmar Multiparty Democracy Programme, and we will share information, manuals, training tools, guidelines, resource institutions and literature on the topics of interest.

**Send requests to Country Coordinator Khin Thazin Myint at email: [ktzm@dipd.dk](mailto:ktzm@dipd.dk)**

This knowledge facility is a living information resource for political parties in Myanmar. For more information visit the Myanmar page on [www.dipd.dk](http://www.dipd.dk) and [www.mynamarmultiparty.org](http://www.mynamarmultiparty.org)

## WHERE DO MULTIPARTY PLATFORMS EXIST?

In **Denmark**, the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy is a multiparty platform of parties established by Parliament in 2010 that includes all political parties in Parliament on the Board. Therefore DIPD is an example of how parties in government and opposition have come together for a common cause – and to learn to respect their differences of opinion.

DIPD stresses the importance of dialogue, because it is essential to the workings of our democracy at home in Denmark. A lot of legislation is agreed by broad coalitions, which improve the sustainability of the measures, and thereby the benefits for citizens and society. DIPD also stresses the importance of dialogue, because the principles of the organisation are inclusiveness (inviting all political parties); impartiality (taking a non-partisan approach); ownership (local political parties jointly set the priorities and agenda); and commitment to a long term engagement.

In many countries multiparty dialogue platforms or practices of multiparty dialogue have been developed and established. In Denmark political dialogue among competing parties is part of the political life. Several of the partners of DIPD globally are multiparty platforms.

The **Tanzania Centre for Democracy**, Tanzania, for example, was founded in 2005 by five Parliamentary parties. It is a membership organisation for political parties which is a non-partisan, non-religious and not-for-profit organisation. It has two categories of members: Full Members are all the parliamentary parties as of the latest elections in 2010. It also has nine Associate Members, which include political parties without parliamentary representation, but which have at least won one seat in the local elections.

The Board of the multiparty platform in Tanzania is called the Summit. It consists of National Chairpersons, Vice Chairpersons and Secretaries General of the member parties. Moreover there is a Secretariat, which is the operational arm of TCD. It is staffed by professional and politically neutral staff that serves the political parties.

The Mission of the multiparty platform in Tanzania is: To be a leading center for the promotion and consolidation of multiparty democracy and of a culture of constitutionalism in Tanzania. This mandate of TCD is laid down in its constitution and made operational by rolling strategic plans and annual plans, which currently are being supported by DIPD.

Currently the multiparty platform is playing a very important role in convening the parties on talks on the constitutional review and it has helped develop common positions which have been forwarded to the constitutional committee. Moreover, the platform has been invited for periodic talks with the president in an effort to ensure that the elections which take place next year will be peaceful and non-violent.

When the Speaker of Parliament last year had to break the session of the parliament due to conflicts among political parties, it was the Chair of the multiparty platform that called all the parties and negotiated an agreement which allowed the Parliament to resume its session the next day.

In Malawi there is a **Centre for Multiparty Democracy** (Malawi). The Centre was registered by the political parties as a trust in August, 2005. The mission of CMD is: "Promotion of a well-functioning multiparty political system and accountable political parties in Malawi".

CMD is guided by a Board that comprises Secretaries Generals from member political parties. Most recently all the parties in the multiparty platform have endorsed an action plan to enhance the participation of women in political parties and they are all involved in a capacity development and mentoring programme for women politicians.

In **Kenya** as well the political parties have joined together to establish a multi-party dialogue platform – the Center for Multiparty Democracy in Kenya. It is governed by the political parties and it works to serve the political parties in capacity development and in dialogue on important national issues.

When violent conflicts around the election management and election results broke out after the elections in 2007, it was the multi-party platform that played an important role in convening the parties and establish a process of “healing the wounds“. It has an effective secretariat that serves the political parties on technical issues, and provides briefs on key policy challenges in Kenya.

There is also an established Political Parties Liaison Committee established by the Electoral Commission which caters for the Electoral Commissions communication with the parties. The two forums provide complementary opportunities for the parties to engage in dialogue on electoral issues, on the one hand, and party building and development issues, on the other.

In **Nepal** a Multiparty Dialogue Platform JOMPOPS, Joint Mechanism for Political Party Support in Nepal, has been under development over time. It comprises political parties across the political spectrum and across ethnicities. After several talks and seminars, and with DIPD as a facilitator, the parties formed a joint Steering Committee was formed, undertook joint capacity development initiatives, and now, most recently, held joint discussions and developed joint positions on the constitutional development process.

In **Myanmar**, several political party alliances practice multiparty dialogue to develop joint positions on critical issues. The DIPD programme in Myanmar is seeking to facilitate the dialogue across existing alliances in an inclusive manner and also involve the parties that presently do not form part of a broader party network. Moreover, the programme facilitates the dialogue between political parties and the Electoral Commission. Finally, the programme serves as a knowledge and resource center for the political parties and provides technical briefs and trainings on a number of themes.

In **Bhutan** a Charter for Bhutan Democracy Dialogue (BDD) has recently been adopt-ed. The Charter has been signed by all the party presidents and establishes a code of conduct for the BDD. The Bhutan Democracy Dialogue (BDD) is an initiative conceptualized in 2014 jointly by all the registered Political Parties of Bhutan. It is a forum for facilitating, nurturing and strengthening of democracy in Bhutan. It functions under the guidance of a steering committee (SC) comprising of two representatives from each registered political parties and the election commission of Bhutan (ECB). The mission of the BDD is to promote a vibrant democracy, cooperation and interparty dialogue in Bhutan.

## WHAT DIFFERENT FORMATS CAN MULTIPARTY DIALOGUE MECHANISMS TAKE?

In cases where attempts to build coalitions or alliances are underway, direct talks between representatives of the party leadership of the parties, possibly with a neutral but politically influential moderator, can be very useful.

When the need is to resolve contentious issues related to democratic processes, electoral processes, and certain policy issues, a multi-party forum consisting of equal representation of parties, convened by a neutral organisation, may be the most appropriate format.

## WHO TAKES PART IN MULTIPARTY DIALOGUE?

Depending on the number of parties in a country, the number of parties in Parliament, the level of support of parties, and the distribution of parties across regions of the country, different options are possible. Whatever the case, it is a good idea for criteria for dialogue participation to be transparent and consistent to firmly establish the impartiality, inclusiveness and ownership of dialogue platforms. Engagement in inter-party dialogue should be a voluntary activity driven by the interest of the parties.

In countries with very large numbers of parties, constructive inter-party dialogue may be difficult if very many parties are represented at the table. Defining more limited criteria for participation or establishing multiple inter-party dialogue forums may be the solution in such cases.

Depending on the purpose of the dialogue, it may make sense to convene different groups of parties, but for the determination of political party law, dialogue organizers should consider inviting all political parties. When building consensus or reducing mistrust between parties it is particularly important to include parties that are the major vehicles behind certain positions or suggestions as well as making room for the parties that would like to develop a position.

It is also important to consider the inclusiveness of the dialogues taking place in terms of the involvement of women, youth, ethnic groups, etc.

### WHEN CAN DIALOGUES BE HELD?

A successful dialogue ideally anticipates what kinds of goals are possible given the timing of the dialogue, including its proximity to elections, levels of polarization between parties at the particular time, and ongoing constitutional, legal or electoral reform processes.

Dialogues are usually easier to establish at times of relative harmony but can also be useful to lower tensions during extremely competitive or conflictual periods. For instance it can be very useful to have dialogue in the preparatory period up toward the elections.

Case Study: In Ghana, inter-party dialogues in 2006 under the auspices of the Institute for Economic Affairs and the Ghana Political Parties Programme drafted a Democratic Consolidation Strategy Paper that proposed a set of political reforms to the country's democratic system. Their proposals led to the review of the Constitution and the passing of the Presidential Transition Bill.

### WHAT MAKES DIALOGUE PRODUCTIVE?

Dialogues that have a set of goals and an agenda, developed based on input from all the groups, for deliberation are likely to be most productive. However, in the beginning dialogues may be more informal and taking place in the margins of other activities such as joint trainings or capacity building initiatives. Dialogues often benefit having a set of jointly developed and agreed upon rules and values. Rules can concern areas like decision making, meeting procedures, governance procedures, management of funds, dispute resolution, and managing publicity and communications.

Case Study: In Malawi, its inter-party dialogue platform developed a consensus on the division of bilateral funds received from to provide for both equal accesses to resources and support that reflects the party's representation in Parliament. This compromise represented an agreement on the rules that accommodated the demands of parties with different levels of parliamentary support.

## CASE STUDIES AND RELATED RESOURCES ON INTER-PARTY DIALOGUE?

- <http://www.idea.int/publications/political-party-dialogue/index.cfm>
- [http://www.nimd.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/documents-E-evaluation\\_of\\_dutch\\_support\\_to\\_capacity\\_development\\_-\\_the\\_case\\_of\\_the\\_nimd.pdf](http://www.nimd.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/documents-E-evaluation_of_dutch_support_to_capacity_development_-_the_case_of_the_nimd.pdf)
- <http://carnegieendowment.org/2006/10/23/confronting-weakest-link-aiding-political-parties-in-new-democracies>

## RESOURCE INSTITUTIONS

Other international and regional institutions with expertise in inter-party dialogue include, but are not limited to:

IDEA – International Democracy and Electoral Assistance – [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

DIPD- Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy – [www.dipd.dk](http://www.dipd.dk)

NIMD—Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party Democracy— [www.nimd.org](http://www.nimd.org)

IEA—Institute for Economic Affairs, Ghana-- <http://ieagh.org/>

CMD—Centre for Multiparty Democracy, Kenya--<http://www.cmd-kenya.org/>

The Political Parties Liaison Committee in Kenya:

<http://www.iebc.or.ke/index.php/political-parties/political-parties-liaison-committeepplc>

The Case of Multiparty Dialogue in Ghana: <http://www.nimd.org/casestudy/1111>

Tanzania Centre for Democracy, TCD – [www.tcd.org.tz](http://www.tcd.org.tz)

Centre for Democracy Malawi, CMD – [www.cmdmalawi.com](http://www.cmdmalawi.com)