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Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners

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Description / Abstract

The collaborative effort of the four institutions sponsoring this Handbook—the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—is based on a common sense of the important role dialogue processes can play in advancing peace, human development and democratic governance. In 2003, they and 13 other organizations that are engaged in promoting and organizing dialogue processes came together to pool the numerous lessons learned in their collective experience, distil best practices, and offer some guidelines and options to practitioners. The objective was to produce a user-friendly methodological tool that would help the institutions and other dialogue practitioners carry out their work in a more systematized way.

This group of institutions adopted the term ‘democratic dialogue, already used in the Latin America and Caribbean region, to emphasize both the relevance of dialogue for strengthening democratic institutions and the democratic way in which dialogue works—by bringing a wide array of societal actors into conversations that lead to positive change. A broad understanding emerged that democratic dialogue consists of inclusive processes that are open, sustained and flexible enough to adapt to changing contexts. It can be used to achieve consensus or prevent conflict—a complement to, not a replacement for, democratic institutions such as legislatures, political parties and government bodies.

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