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Deliberative Dialogue Protocol

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This report has been produced by R.A.J. Borst on behalf of the Support-KT programme

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1. Introduction

This protocol for deliberative dialogues is part of the Support Knowledge Translation (Support-KT) programme. The Support-KT programme obtained funding from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) as part of their WOTRO Science for Using Research Evidence (SURe) programme (project id: W 08.117.103).

The Support-KT programme is a consortium of knowledge platforms, knowledge organisations, and academic organisations in Jordan, Cameroon, Nigeria, and the Netherlands. More information on the consortium can be found in its Programme of Work (POW) or through its website *supportkt.com*.

The protocol for deliberative dialogues will address the rationale behind deliberative dialogues for evidence-informed policymaking and the organisation and planning of deliberative dialogues. The protocol also provides an outline for research on deliberative dialogues and their evaluation. Lastly, the protocol provides a to-do list for organising deliberative dialogues.

1.1 What do we mean with evidence-informed policymaking?

The process of policymaking is affected by several elements. Elements that most are familiar with include public opinion, party politics, events (e.g. disasters), and lobbying. But over time, the role of research evidence in policymaking has become more important. Both international (intergovernmental) organisations and national interest groups are increasingly demanding that research evidence is considered when policies are made. Such groups propose the use of research evidence in all the different stages; ultimately to make policies more transparent and equitable. The wider movement that supports the use of evidence in the policy process is often called evidence-informed policymaking.

1.2 What are deliberative dialogues? Why do we use them?

One way to facilitate evidence-informed policymaking is by using so-called deliberative dialogues. These dialogues, or fora, are meetings in which the different stakeholders involved in a policy process can interact. This includes for instance researchers and policymakers. The dialogues support discussions in which research evidence can be assigned a role, alongside the tacit knowledges and experiences of the actors involved in the policymaking or affected by its implementation.

Deliberative dialogues differ on several key aspects from other types of discussion formats[1]. While discussions often take place in shape of a debate (i.e. focus on arguments, disagreement, opposition, strategy, critique, winning, and conclusions), deliberative dialogues emphasise a collaborative learning process. This process focusses on learning new perspectives, creating mutual understanding, achieving some agreement, listening, and most importantly: tends to be relatively open-ended. The dialogues do strive for some convergence, but do not have to be concluded with one clear answer. Of course, such conclusions are embraced if they are to be the product of a deliberative dialogue.

[1] Lavis JN, Boyko JA, Oxman AD, et al. SUPPORT Tools for evidence-informed health Policymaking (STP) 14: Organising and using policy dialogues to support evidence-informed policymaking. Health Res Policy Syst 2009; 7 Suppl 1: S14. https://www.doi.org/10.1186/1478-4505-7-S1-S14

Evaluations show that the combination of deliberative dialogues are highly regarded by policy makers and other stakeholders. Deliberative dialogues have shown to facilitate the use of research evidence in policymaking, but also improve anticipation of policy dynamics in conducting research. Besides, the dialogues often result in intentions to act upon new information (e.g. research evidence).

1.3 What precedes the deliberative dialogue?

The process of organising a deliberative dialogue starts long before the actual meeting. Prior to organising a deliberative dialogue, there is always a (national) research priority forum. These fora aim to create a list of evidence priorities regarding a specific theme in a certain country. After having conducted a rigorous scientific evidence synthesis on these priorities, a report on the international evidence is produced. This report is then translated to local environments. In concrete terms, this means that a local knowledge partner critically appraises the international evidence and seeks to improve this evidence based on local information. Usually, all the evidence is combined in a brief format that aligns with the needs of the stakeholders that are involved in the policymaking process.

1.4 Scenarios and deliberative dialogues

The next step is to further explicate how the deliberative dialogue is to contribute to the policy at stake. The Support-KT programme uses a unique approach in explicating this translation into action cycle. In this approach, scenarios of use play an important role. Such scenarios start with asking the relevant stakeholders how they think the evidence is going to play a role, and which actors need to be involved in what capacity. During the dialogue, these scenarios are further articulated and compared. Most importantly, the final session of the dialogue aims to assess what is necessary for these scenarios to be enacted or played out. After the dialogue, we will track the scenarios and in particular to what extent they were enacted. More on this scenario approach can be found in the separate chapter on evaluating deliberative dialogues.

2. How to organise and plan a deliberative dialogue

The planning and organisation of a deliberative dialogue is a process that could easily take six months and needs careful consideration at every step. Those that have previous experience in organising multi-stakeholder dialogues are at some advantage, but even in such cases it is good practice to review the guidelines specific to deliberative dialogues. The separate sections below zoom in on specific elements that are important for the success of a deliberative dialogue.

2.1 Identification and invitation of stakeholders

Ideally, the deliberative dialogue is embedded in a community of stakeholders that has already been identified before the priority setting dialogue. Of course, it is always recommended to review this list of stakeholders and to check (if applicable) with the steering committee whether any actors are currently missing. The benefit of building on a community of stakeholders that has been engaged with before, is that it is known from the literature that this increase the likelihood that research evidence is used in practice. Should it be impossible to engage with earlier engaged stakeholders, the first step is to conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise. More information on such exercises can be found elsewhere[2].

The invitation process itself should always be adapted to the circumstances of the country in which the dialogue will take place. In general, invitations should be sent at least six weeks in advance. In some cases, planning even further ahead may be preferred. This relates directly to when the dialogue is organised; it is of utmost importance that the selected date does not negatively affect the timing of other events or developments. Organising a dialogue that clearly relates to an issue currently on the agenda of the stakeholders may help in increasing participation.

Generally, stakeholders are invited through a (formal) letter sent by the organisation(s) organising the deliberative dialogue. It is important to make sure that the invitation is signed by the appropriate person within the organisation – in most environments this means that the invitation should be sent on behalf of an executive member. Regarding the invitation letter it is important to consider the following:

- Use a format that is professional and sufficiently (in)formal and appealing;
- Clarify the organisations that are organising the dialogue, possibly also by logo;
- Use an attractive title for the dialogue;
- Describe the process of the dialogue and its aim(s);
- Include the evidence brief, or describe that the brief will be shared later;
- Clarify how the stakeholders are to benefit from participating.

Depending on whether this is appropriate in the specific country, it could be required to invite the stakeholder through telephone or personal visit. This could also be a strategy to remind stakeholder when they did not respond on the written invitation.

[2] https://epoc.cochrane.org/sites/epoc.cochrane.org/files/public/uploads/SURE-Guides-v2.1/Collectedfiles/sure_guides.html

2.2 Evidence brief

A crucial part of every deliberative dialogue is the pre-circulation of an evidence brief. An evidence brief is a format that can be used to present research evidence on an earlier identified priority. Evidence briefs allow for presentation of both international and local evidence. Especially the local evidence will help in further contextualising the international evidence and the brief in general. There are several important aspects to consider when constructing an evidence brief, some key aspects are listed below.

In the construction of an evidence brief it is important to consider:

- The language of the brief (English only, bilingual?);
- The number of words (generally around 2 A4);
- The general lay out (use colour, logos, sufficient spacing);
- Printing the evidence brief on thicker paper;
- A clear problem description;
- An attractive and simple presentation of findings;
- A presentation of possible options in addressing the problem;
- Potential considerations for implementing interventions from the evidence.

In most cases it will be difficult to provide a wholesome overview of the evidence in a short format. An option might be to create an additional report for those that are interested in the complete information. It is important to add a footnote to the evidence brief should a full report be available – this allows the stakeholders to find and read the complete information.

Examples of evidence briefs can be found here:
https://www.who.int/evidence/resources/policy_briefs/en/

2.3 Venue

As with most round table meetings, the venue of the meeting and its accessibility is of key importance. An inappropriate venue will result in a less fruitful meeting. Obviously, the number of participants is a decisive factor in where to organise the meeting. A general rule is that the venue should be as neutral as possible. This means that it might be better to invite stakeholders to a congress venue instead of a venue that is directly linked to one of the organisers. The meeting room itself should have sufficient privacy and space to walk around; deliberative dialogues may require the group to split up in subgroups and thus small rooms with fixed table or chair settings do not work well. In addition, rooms with natural lightning and a comfortable (adjustable) temperature reduce stress and exhaustion levels. Beside the physical set-up, arrangements should be made for sufficient water, coffee, tea, lunch, etc.

2.4 Facilitation

While the planning and organisation of the dialogue may be conducted by the organising parties, its facilitation may better be left to someone not directly involved with the organisation. The facilitation of the dialogue can be done by one person (i.e. the facilitator) who basically guides the stakeholders through the day and thus offers a familiar face throughout all sessions. When selecting a facilitator, it is important to consider the profile of the person and how that interacts with the stakeholders that will be present.

The following characteristics of a facilitator should always be reflected upon:

- Gender
- Age
- Nationality
- Executive status (generally the same as invited stakeholders)
- Political affiliation (generally not explicit, unless for the benefit of the dialogue)
- Language (including dialects)
- Previous experience as facilitator

An excellent guide into facilitation of deliberative dialogues can be found here:
https://tinyurl.com/dialoguechecklist

2.5 Agenda

Deliberative dialogues never stick to one standard agenda. Rather, their agendas are adjusted to the local situation and the preferences of the organisers and steering committee (if applicable). There are two important things to consider when preparing an agenda:

> 1) the meetings are about **deliberation** and **dialogue**; thus, it is best to keep the presentation time to an absolute minimum. Instead of lengthy monologues by the organisers, consider doing short pitches of 5 to 10 minutes. Presentations by the invited stakeholders are not preferred, as they could contribute to a feeling of hierarchy among the stakeholders (especially if only a selected few present).
>
> 2) there should be **sufficient time for both relaxation and collective discussion**. Make sure to include several short coffee breaks and ensure that bathrooms are nearby the room. Bear in mind that working in subgroups increases active participation, but reduces collective synthesis. Consider asking for volunteer rapporteurs within the subgroups (if applicable).

The agendas that follow are meant as examples and source of inspiration. Bear in mind that some dialogues may be spread over more than one day – this depends among other things on the customs in the country where the dialogue is organised.

Example agenda 1	
8 am	Coffee
8.30am	Welcome and introduction
9.30am	Short presentation: what is knowledge translation?
9.40am	Short presentation: this project and questions from the stakeholders
10am	Coffee break
10.30am	Presentation on different priorities
10.45am	Instructions for the dialogue
11.00am	Deliberation on the problem
12.30am	Lunch
2pm	Welcome back by the facilitator and summary
2.15pm	Deliberation on potential solutions in subgroups
3.15pm	Report on deliberation in subgroups
4pm	Deliberation on next steps
4.45pm	Collective synthesis and recommendations
5.45pm	Closing the day and future actions
6.30pm	Dinner or social event

Example agenda 2	
8.45am	Coffee
9am	Welcome and introduction
10am	Short presentation: what is knowledge translation?
10.10am	Short presentation: this project and questions from the stakeholders
10.30am	Coffee break
10.40am	Discuss evidence brief in subgroups
11.15am	Deliberation on the problem
12.30am	Lunch
2pm	Welcome back by the facilitator and summary
2.15pm	Deliberation on potential solutions in subgroups
4 pm	Report on deliberation in subgroups
4.20pm	Collective synthesis
5.20pm	Recommendations and action plan

2.6 Dialogue report

Part of the deliberative dialogue process is a careful registration of the discussions. During the dialogue, rapporteurs can keep notes of the discussions and their essence. It is important that these notes are anonymous, see also the section on ethical considerations. After the deliberative dialogue has been conducted, a dialogue report needs to be prepared. The dialogue report is a tangible document that clearly describes what has been discussed and what the scenarios for action at the end of the dialogue were. Partly, the production of this report is what the dialogue aims for: the report should thus show how – according to the stakeholders that were present at the dialogue – the evidence will be translated into action. It is important to share this report with the stakeholders as soon as possible, preferably within two to four weeks.

2.7 Photo and video material

It is advised to hire a professional photographer that – with the verbal permission of the dialogue participants – makes a visual log of the entire meeting. The photos and videos can then be used for reports on the dialogue.

3. Researching and evaluating deliberative dialogues

The international literature on knowledge translation presents deliberative dialogues as key mechanism in improving the use of research evidence in policy and practice. The dialogues often result in intentions to act on the sides of stakeholders. While these intensions are seen as stepping stone for translation into action, little is known about how deliberative dialogues actually contribute to the use of evidence in practice. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to carefully track what happens before, during, and after the organisation of deliberative dialogues. Within the Support-KT programme we use a scenario-mapping approach to assess what role deliberative dialogues play in translation of evidence into action.

3.1 Scenario approach

A unique element of how deliberative dialogues are evaluated within the Support-KT programme is the emphasis on so-called actor-scenarios, or scenarios of use. This approach starts with the idea that stakeholders often have implicit or explicit ideas about who or what will play a role in the use of evidence. These ideas about potential key users of evidence or the context in which the evidence may be used for instance, are often not clearly articulated and mapped. By exploring how stakeholders think about the use of evidence before, during, and after a deliberative dialogue, a map can be produced of who may be considered potential key users and what is required for the evidence to be used.

In practice, actor-scenario mapping results in rich accounts of how stakeholders think about use of particular evidence. The scenarios include descriptions of roles, responsibilities and enabling or constraining elements of context (e.g. legislations or environmental circumstances specific to the country). All the different scenarios together provide an overview of how stakeholders think about use of the particular evidence. This information can be used to facilitate discussions during the dialogue and in the preparation of the dialogue report. An example of how actor-scenarios can be used can be found in the international literature.[3]

3.2 Data collection

The Support-KT approach for studying and evaluating deliberative dialogues requires several data collection methods. Before the actual dialogue, three to five semi-structured interviews with prospective participants will be conducted. The objective of these interviews is twofold: on the one hand, the interviews will inform the dialogue and its content, on the other hand they will provide a first map of how the stakeholders think about the use of the particular evidence in their practices.

During the dialogue, their will be several observers who will produce written reports of the interactions. They will also make anonymous audio recordings of the entire dialogue (unless explicitly instructed by the facilitator that the session will be off the record). Additionally, several questionnaires will be used during the dialogue. In order to prepare the participants for these activities, it is important to give a verbal and brief presentation on these activities. After the presentation, the participants will be asked to sign an informed consent form.

[3] Kok MO, Gyapong JO, Wolffers I, et al. Which health research gets used and why? An empirical analysis of 30 cases. Health Res Policy Syst 2016; 14: 36. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-016-0107-2

After the participants have signed the consent form, they will be asked to **fill out a so-called ‘thermometer’**. The thermometer asks three short questions on the use of the evidence brief. Please have the participants fill out one thermometer each on paper. The papers will then be collected by an organising member. In the afternoon, before the collective synthesis, the stakeholders will be asked to complete **a short questionnaire.** The questionnaire focusses on potential key users and the climate for research use in the country. Please ask each participant to complete one hard-copy questionnaire and make sure to collect them shortly after. The final data collection exercise will be before the end of the dialogue, where the participants will be asked to reflect on the thermometer and **complete a second (follow-up) thermometer**. Follow the same procedures as before.

3.2 Data policies

The deliberative dialogues adhere to the common academic code of conduct for data collection and storage, as described in local policies and laws. In the Netherlands, these requirements are described in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice. All interviews and observations are registered. Notes that are taken during interviews and/or as part of observations should be written out in Word. All data that is collected and kept on portable drives, must be stored on password protected and encrypted drives only. The recordings, transcripts and notes should be transferred to the protected Surfdrive folder made available by Erasmus University team directly after collection. At Erasmus University Rotterdam, all data must be stored for at least 10 years. All data will be anonymised according to the regulations set out in the EU General Data Protection Act.

3.3 Ethical considerations

The deliberative dialogues organised through the Support-KT programme are generally based on the Chatham House Rule, which reads:

> *“When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.”*

There is one exception that relates to the affiliation of the speaker. For research purposes, it may be required to refer to the affiliation of a speaker when writing a report or manuscript. To make sure that all participants agree with this procedure, explicit written informed consent is sought before the meeting. Participants are free to withdraw their consent at any time without stating their reasons.

4. To-do list for deliberative dialogues[4]

Task	Who is responsible	Target date	Comments
Agree on the team that will plan the dialogue			
Decide on the objectives of the dialogue			
Decide when the dialogue will be			
Decide on who to invite to the dialogue			
Decide on who will facilitate the discussion			
Decide on how the dialogue will be organised			
Draft invitation			
Draft agenda			
Secure a venue			
Send out invitations			
Follow-up by telephone if needed			
Manage travel arrangements for participants			
Ensure a suitable seating arrangement			
Make sure that the meeting room is easy to find			

[4] Derived and adapted from the SURE Guides for Preparing and Using Evidence-Based Policy Briefs. Version 2.1 (updated November 2011)

Task	**Who is responsible**	**Target date**	**Comments**
Arrange refreshments			
Prepare name tags			
Arrange for writing materials			
Arrange for translation if needed			
Prepare and disseminate a report			
Follow-up on next steps			
Follow-up on other dissemination activities			
Follow-up on evaluating the deliberative dialogue			
Follow-up on evaluating the guide			

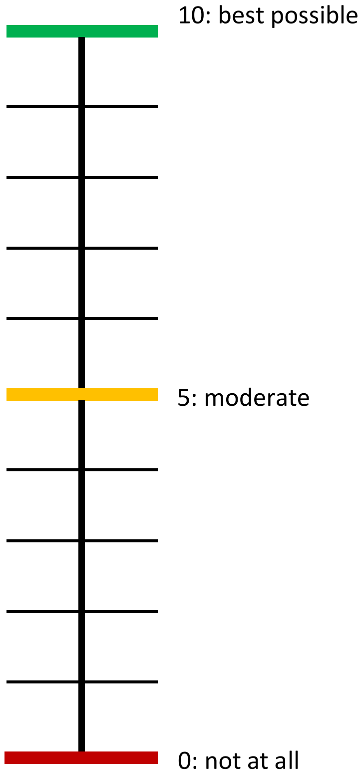
Annexes

Annex 1. Thermometer

1. Name: ____

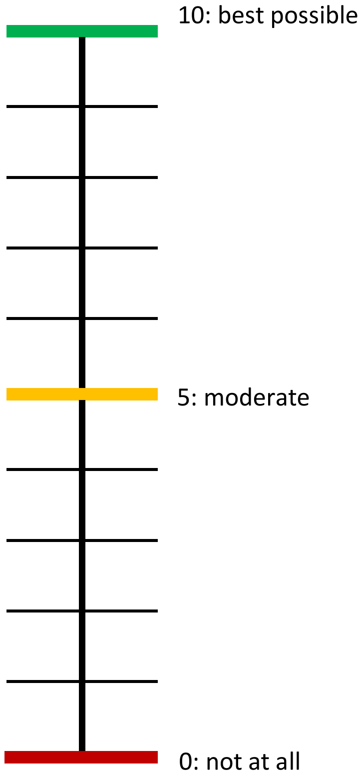
2. Question:

To what extent is the evidence brief useful for addressing the local problem?



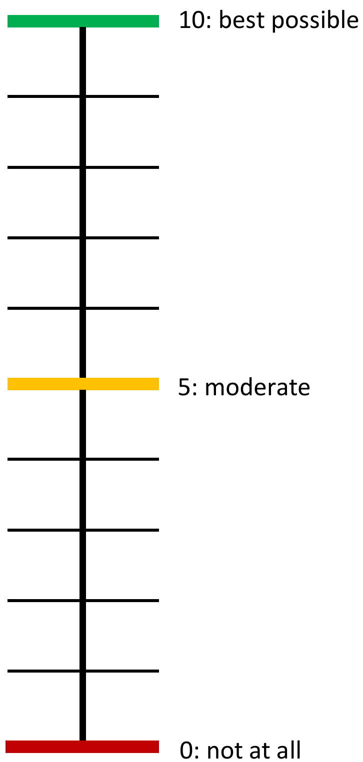
3. Question:

To what extent is it clear how the evidence in the brief will contribute to policy and practice?



4. Question:

To what extent is it clear who will use the evidence as presented in the brief?



Annex 2. Consent form

The Deliberative Dialogue

The deliberative dialogue is organised to support the use of research evidence in policy and practice. The dialogue does not focus on agreement, but seeks to enable you to deliberate on the issue at hand in an open way.

Participation in the deliberative dialogue and the collection of data

- I have been provided with the information on the dialogue and know what is expected from me. I was also able to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I had enough time to decide whether to participate.
- I know that participation in the dialogue is voluntary. I know that I may decide at any time not to participate after all or to withdraw from the dialogue and the data collection. I do not need to give a reason for this.
- I know that the deliberative dialogue will be observed by researchers.
- I give permission for the collection and use of data to evaluate this deliberative dialogue.
- I know that all data collected during the dialogue will not be traceable to me without my explicit permission
- I give explicit permission for audio recording of the sessions.
- I know that the recording will be transcribed and only stored in anonymized format.
- I want to participate in this deliberative dialogue.

FILLED OUT BY PARTICIPANT

Name of participant:____

Signature: **Date:**_______________________

FILLED OUT BY RESEARCHER

I hereby declare that I have fully informed the person above.

If information comes to light during the course of the evaluation that could affect the person's consent, I will inform him/her of this in a timely fashion.

Name of researcher:

Signature: **Date:**

Annex 3. Questionnaire

Before we reach the end of the formal agenda, we would like to ask you a few short questions.
Please answer them below:

Name:

Male/female

Age:

1. **How would you describe the context for research use in your country? (one answer)**
   - ☐ 1 = excellent
   - ☐ 2 = good
   - ☐ 3 = moderate
   - ☐ 4 = poor
   - ☐ 5 = very poor

2. **What kind of things enable the use of research in your country? (multiple answers)**
   - ☐ 1 = research funding
   - ☐ 2 = political climate
   - ☐ 3 = professional networks
   - ☐ 4 = interest groups
   - ☐ 5 = other:____

3. **What kind of things constrain the use of research in your country? (multiple answers)**
   - ☐ 1 = research funding
   - ☐ 2 = political climate
   - ☐ 3 = professional networks
   - ☐ 4 = interest groups
   - ☐ 5 = other:____

4. **How should the knowledge from the evidence brief be used in policy and practice? (open answer)**

5. **Who or what plays a role in using the knowledge from the evidence brief? (open answer)**