

## **A GLOBAL DIALOGUE ON FEDERALISM**

### *Description of Overall Process and Goals*

*A Global Dialogue on Federalism* is an innovative program of the Forum of Federations and the International Association of Centers for Federal Studies (IACFS). Its goal is to engage participants in a comparative dialogue about core themes on federalism, with the aims of learning from each other and building an international network. This goal is achieved through a series of country and international roundtables. The knowledge and ideas generated from the dialogue are captured in publications on each theme, fostering future learning opportunities.

In a world that today is experiencing economic, social and political change at an unprecedented rate, federal systems are undergoing continuous transformation. Federations are faced with the need to learn and adapt in order to cope with the challenges they face. In such a context, it is valuable to exchange experience about various ways of tackling common problems. Federal countries can benefit by learning from both the successes and failures of other federations.

There is, of course, no simple prescription for achieving a successful federal system. Whatever the value of sharing knowledge and expertise internationally, the experiences of one federation cannot be automatically applied to another. The Global Dialogue program is structured with this important principle in mind.

It is clear from its name that the Global Dialogue program utilizes dialogue, a method of communication where all participants are open to learning from each other. A successful dialogue depends to a great extent on the way participants are selected. First, all participants must be knowledgeable in their field and willing to learn. In addition, as a group, participants must be representative of diverse interests and viewpoints, to ensure that a broad picture of the subject is presented. Using these criteria allows the participants to come to the most inclusive and insightful conclusions.

An image that we have chosen to use as the conceptual basis of the Global Dialogue program is that of a Knowledge Spiral comprised of the following four stages: dissemination, internalization, externalization and transformation. These stages and how they correspond to the Global Dialogue program are described below.

During the first stage of the process, referred to as the Dissemination Stage, the information on the theme is selected and distributed to the participants. This allows equal access to the most current and relevant research. A cornerstone of the background information for the Global Dialogue program is the Theme Template. This document is produced by a leading expert on the theme referred to as the Theme Coordinator. She or he researches the current information on the theme and assesses which federal countries will be the most appropriate to ensure that the theme is explored from many perspectives. The Theme Template is comprised of a set of cross-cutting analytical questions as well as

an internationally comprehensive set of questions covering institutional provisions and how it works in practice. The Theme Template guides the dialogue and the theme book.

The purpose of the second stage, the Internalization Stage, is for participants to reflect on their own experience in light of the questions they received in the previous stage. For the Global Dialogue program, this takes place at country-specific roundtables held in each featured country. The selected participants gather to share their expertise on the theme, providing diverse viewpoints within the context of their country.

During the Externalization Stage, participants review their reflections and identify patterns and new insights from the prior stage of introspection. The goal of this stage is for individuals to become more receptive to new ideas and points of view and to enable them to see and interpret their own social and political reality in new ways. In the Global Dialogue program, this stage is achieved at an international roundtable which features key questions of international importance from each country roundtable. The participants are selected based on their knowledge related to their country's question. In this way, the participants share knowledge gained from the country roundtables and go through a process of finding patterns and differences and seeking new insights. The diversity of the countries and viewpoints offer participants a broad understanding of the theme for a truly comparative dialogue.

To ensure that the knowledge gained at the roundtables does not end with only those who were able to participate in them, the knowledge spiral proceeds to the Transformation Stage. It integrates the reflections from the country roundtables and new insights from the international roundtable into a comparative whole, thus building on the progress already made and creating opportunities to use the material for the next twist of the spiral. One example of this is the use of the Global Dialogue theme publications as the basis for future international conferences on federalism.

The publications include a theme booklet and book. The booklet, intended to be accessible, widely distributed and to provide an entry point to the book, highlights the key insights and issues raised at the country roundtables. The book, on the other hand, is intended to provide an in-depth analysis, a thorough review of the theme in relation to each country, and comparative conclusions reflecting the learning from the International Roundtable.

The four stages of the Global Dialogue's theme-based learning process are highlighted in the table below.

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION / PURPOSE
<i>Stage 1</i> Selecting & Distributing Background Information	<p>??Theme Coordinator identifies approximately ten relevant federal countries and one expert in each country to serve as Country Coordinator</p> <p>??Theme Coordinator prepares Theme Template</p> <p>??Contracts signed between Forum and Country Coordinators</p> <p>??Background information packages distributed to Country Coordinators</p>

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION / PURPOSE
<i>Stage 2</i> Country Roundtables	1-day, Country Roundtable of 10-20 participants representing diverse perspectives related to the theme in their country Participants engage in dialogue guided by Theme Template Participants identify key questions of international relevance for examination at International Roundtable Country Coordinators prepare first draft of chapters reflecting dialogue of their roundtables guided by the Theme Template
<i>Stage 3</i> International Roundtable	2-day, international event of Country Coordinators and representatives from each Country Roundtable Participants engage in comparative dialogue about questions emanating from Country Roundtables
<i>Stage 4</i> Publications	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Theme Booklet</b></p> Country Coordinators record key insights and issues from Country Roundtables Theme Coordinator writes brief chapter on comparative outcomes <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Theme Book</b></p> Country Coordinators finalize country chapters adding insights from International Roundtable Theme Coordinator writes final in-depth chapter of comparative conclusions Book undergoes scholarly review process