

Kettering Foundation

# CONNECTIONS

Summer/Fall 2005



## June Board Summary

**A**t the Kettering Foundation's spring board meeting this past June, trustees and staff explored different options for Kettering's international research, listening to the remarks of three longtime research partners about the challenges of exporting democracy. They were Daniel Yankelovich, founder of Public Agenda and former Kettering board member; Ramon Daubon, Vice President for Programs at the Inter-American Foundation; and Randa Slim, the executive director of the Institute for Sustained Dialogue.

Debate over the current U.S. policy of imposing democratic reform by force in places like Iraq has divided not only politicians and policymakers in Washington, Yankelovich noted in his opening remarks, but also citizens in much of the rest of the country. Elections alone, he cautioned, are not a cure-all for political instability or social injustice. Hitler, he pointed out, was democratically elected in Germany, while more recent elections in the Arab World in places like Algeria and southern Lebanon have brought hard-line fundamentalists to power—hardly the result U.S. or European interests had hoped for.

Current efforts to promote the spread of democracy, however, have created a number of interesting opportunities for both exploring insights from the foundation's past work and focusing the direction of future research: 1) that elections alone do not make a democracy; 2) that true democracy requires the work of both officials and citizens; 3) that public deliberation can help get citizens from *me* to *we*; 4) and finally, that we must find ways to translate citizen deliberation into action.

While Yankelovich's comments focused on the importance of citizen work to creating an effective democracy, Daubon's remarks addressed the link between democratic life and economic growth.

For the past 35 years, the Inter-American Foundation has been working on the issue in Latin America. "What we've come to learn, is that without an undergirth of a democratic way of concertation, of learning to talk and make decisions together, economics doesn't work," Daubon said. Democracy he suggested, is really a capacity to talk, identify what's important, consider alternatives, and make decisions. It is done in many places, he added, but seldom in Latin America where there is both a rigid



class structure and a strong tradition of authoritarian rule.

"The culture cannot be taught. It has to be learned, and it is learned by experiencing it," Daubon explained. Working in small, often poor communities, Daubon's foundation has been in the business of engaging citizens in defining economic goals and projects. The idea has been enthusiastically embraced not only by grass-

roots organizations, but also by an unexpected ally—business interests who see it as a powerful economic tool. To date, some 53 corporate sponsors have been involved. They see the work as not only improving the region's economy, but also its political stability. Kettering's research in civil economics, Daubon pointed out, laid the groundwork for this new approach.

Business interests, interestingly enough, also played a role in Randa Slim's discussion of political reform efforts in the Middle East. Since 9/11, she noted, a host of foundations and government agencies, ranging from USAID to the United Nations, have tried to promote the spread of democracy in the Middle East, but have met with little, if any, success. Most have little, if any, understanding of Islam, she said. As a result they are seen as trying to import something entirely alien to the region. Secondly, their efforts are largely mechanistic: they focus on voting and multiparty elections and the like.

Locals are interested in a far more fundamental conversation. Broad-based coalitions of Islamicists, nationalists, civic activists, and business interests have emerged in places like Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, Slim explained, and they are engaged in a dialogue about both citizenship and public life. Business interests are critical, she added, because they can provide a moderating influence to help resolve conflicts between the old and new. They also have a great deal of credibility—something most governments in the region and outside interests lack.

Kettering Foundation president David Mathews concluded the meeting by noting that the Kettering Foundation's understanding of democracy as a culture rather than a process could be valuable in a wider study of these kinds of problems. At the same time, research with international partners could provide valuable insights into a number of other areas of Kettering's research about the role of both citizens and institutions in a democracy.

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# SUSTAINED DIALOGUE: A Product of Experience

By Harold H. Saunders

**S**ustained Dialogue is a systematic process for political, social, and economic change. Its distinguishing characteristic is that it focuses on transforming the relationships that block collaboration. Sustained Dialogue is best suited to those situations not ready for formal mediation and negotiation; it is so, because it addresses the strained relationships that prevent people from talking in the reasoned ways mediation and negotiation require.

Sustained Dialogue conceptualizes three decades of experience with adversaries and what they do when they sit down repeatedly to address what divides them. Sustained Dialogue has its roots in my experience as a U.S. diplomat in the Arab-Israeli peace process after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. The first lesson of that experience is that a continuous process has the power to transform seemingly intractable relationships—as demonstrated in the grueling work that produced

five Arab-Israeli agreements from 1974 to 1979. The second lesson is the importance of engaging the human dimension of conflict, which in the Arab-Israeli setting included Israelis who had survived the Holocaust and Palestinians who had lost their homes to Israeli military action in 1948.

After leaving government service in 1981, I became associated with the Kettering Foundation's Dartmouth Conference, the longest continuous bilateral dialogue between American and Soviet citizens, which started in 1960. After the November 1981 gathering, I was asked to be the U.S. co-chair of the newly established Regional Conflicts Task Force (RCTF). Its purpose was to improve understanding of the overall Soviet-U.S. relationship by probing interactions between the countries in regions where the superpowers competed through local proxies.

This task force met 18 times in the 1980s. We learned that bringing the same group together regularly created four opportunities: (1) It built a cumulative agenda—questions left unanswered in one meeting could be placed on the agenda for the next. (2) It built a common body of knowledge, both about each other's analysis and about each superpower's interest in these distant conflicts. (3) We gradually learned to talk analytically rather than engage in polemics. (4) Ultimately, we learned to work together.

As experience with unofficial dialogue accumulated, two concepts emerged:

First, relationship was defined by five components:

- (1) *Identity*, the life experience that has brought a person or group to the present.
- (2) *Interests*, both concrete and psychological, that bring people to a sense of their dependence on one another to achieve their goals.
- (3) *Power*, defined not only as "control over superior resources and the actions of others" but as "the capacity of citizens acting together to influence the course of events without great material resources."
- (4) *Perceptions, misperceptions, and stereotypes*.
- (5) *Patterns of interaction*, including respect for certain limits on behavior.



Second, we recognized from our semiannual meetings over a decade that, when people come together repeatedly in dialogue over time, one can discern a pattern in the evolution of their relationships.

From that insight came the conceptualization of Sustained Dialogue as a five-stage process—an analytical and working framework to permit moderators and participants alike to understand the progression of relationships as they grow together in dialogue.

*Stage One:* People in conflict decide to engage in dialogue—often with great difficulty—because they feel compelled to build a relationship to resolve problems.

*Stage Two:* Together they map and name the elements of those problems and the relationships responsible for creating and responding to them. At first, they vent their grievances and anger with each other. This venting provides both the ingredients for an ultimate agenda and an opportunity for moderators to analyze the dynamics of the relationships. This stage ends when someone says, “What we really need to focus on is . . .”

*Stage Three:* In much more analytical exchanges, participants probe the specific problem they have identified: (1) to name that problem in a way that reflects the concerns of all those affected by it; (2) to probe the dynamics of the relationships underlying that problem; (3) to broadly lay out possible ways to enter into those relationships in order to change them; (4) to weigh those possible approaches and to come to a sense of direction to guide the next steps; (5) to weigh the consequences of moving in that direction against the consequences of inaction; and (6) to decide whether to try designing such change.

*Stage Four:* Together they design a scenario of steps to be taken to change troublesome relationships and to precipitate practical actions. They sequence those steps so that they interact—one building on another, generating participation and momentum.

*Stage Five:* They devise ways to put that scenario into the hands of those who can act on it.

When the Soviet Union dissolved, RCTF members made three decisions: (1) They would focus on the new Russian-U.S.

relationship. (2) They would complete the conceptualization of the process of dialogue they had learned together. (3) They would test that conceptualization by applying the process to one of the conflicts that had broken out in the territory of the former Soviet Union. They chose the Republic of Tajikistan, where a vicious civil war had broken out shortly after independence. The first meeting took place in March 1993.

In the 12 years since, Sustained Dialogue in Tajikistan has moved from peacemaking to peacebuilding.

Tajikistani participants named themselves the “Inter-Tajik Dialogue in the Framework of the Dartmouth Conference.” In its first year, when Sustained Dialogue was the only channel between the government and the opposition, it helped begin a negotiation. In the next three years, they worked on a nonofficial track parallel to the formal UN-mediated negotiations. They injected important ideas that were incorporated in the Peace Agreement of 1997. That agreement established the National Reconciliation Commission to implement the Peace Agreement, with five Dialogue participants as members. In 2000, Dialogue participants formed their own NGO, the Public Committee for Democratic Processes.

In the summer of 2002, David Mathews, Kettering’s president, proposed moving Sustained Dialogue from the Kettering program to a space of its own to allow for fuller development. As Mathews said, the deliberative process is Kettering’s answer for strengthening peaceful communities; Sustained Dialogue is an answer to 9/11.

As a result, the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue was incorporated in the fall of 2002. It works on five tracks: (1) It continues with its partners in the Dartmouth Regional Conflicts Task Force and independently to conduct dialogues on its own. The Tajiks are conducting

dialogues in seven regions of their country, and there is prospect of a revival of the Inter-Tajik Dialogue itself. We are also conducting a dialogue among inhabitants of Armenia-Azerbaijan-Nagorno Karabakh, where a conflict has been stalemated for more than a decade. We are conducting a dialogue with individuals from the Muslim-Arab heartland, Western Europe, and the United States. (2) We are working with established NGOs in South Africa, New Zealand, and the Western Hemisphere to help them incorporate

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## Sustained Dialogue is a systematic process for political, social, and economic change. Its distinguishing characteristic is that it focuses on transforming the relationships that block collaboration.

Sustained Dialogue in their programs. (3) In April 2005, our second annual collegiate conference drew 130 participants from 18 universities and high schools to learn how they as citizens can help heal relationships that block democratic collaboration. (4) Through a collaboration between Kettering and the Fielding Graduate Institute, we co-teach with Fielding faculty a course in dialogue, deliberation, and public engagement. (5) We are exploring the opportunities for transforming working relationships in the corporate world.

We are engaged in developing the substantive base for our work through practice and experiment and systematizing our knowledge in publications and training manuals. As with any unendowed organization, we are struggling to regularize a long-term financial foundation.

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The Kettering Foundation, chartered in 1927, is a research foundation—not a grant-giving foundation—rooted in the American tradition of inventive research. Its founder, Charles F. Kettering, holder of more than 200 patents, is best known for his invention of the automobile self-starter. He was interested, above all, in seeking practical answers to “the problems behind the problems.”

The foundation today continues in that tradition. The objective of the research now is to study what helps democracy work as it should. Six major Kettering programs are designed to shed light on what is required to strengthen public life.

Kettering is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research corporation supported by a \$250 million endowment. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation’s Web site at [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

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