



# Difficult Dialogues Program Evaluation Report

Submitted to



Submitted by



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## Executive Summary

Difficult Dialogues is an annual forum, organised in Goa, to examine the issues of contemporary relevance in India and South Asia. The theme of the forum changes every year. Each topic examined is approached from a broad-based perspective with the belief that social change is possible only by initiating a dialogue among different stakeholders of society. The dialogues are inclusive of the policies and laws related to the theme. The shared experiences of cross-sectoral stakeholders and audiences contribute to the process of building recommendations for influencing policy change and creating awareness. Recommendation papers are also published across partner websites and forums for public reference and policy influence.

Daring Debates also a part of Difficult Dialogues is a one-of-a-kind debate series with an initiative to promote students' participation in the overall process of policy ideation and formation and to ensure that their opinions reach various stakeholders in the gamut.

The Forum has successfully completed three annual chapters focusing on diverse yet related themes such as Global Finance and Civil Society (in 2016), Health (in 2017) and Gender Equality (in 2018). Overall, Daring Debates has so far reached out to 65 Indian universities across 10 cities in 9 states in three years. To take stock of the progress made so far in order to make course corrections for long-term sustainability and impact of the Forum, Difficult Dialogues contracted Change Alliance Private Limited as an independent agency to conduct an impact evaluation of the forum. The table below provides an insight on the overall three-year progress (since 2016) of the Difficult Dialogues forum.

<b>DIFFICULT DIALOGUES: THE JOURNEY SO FAR...</b>		
<b>GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE AND OUTREACH</b>		
9 states and 10 cities	Participation from 65 Indian universities	
<b>PANELLIST, PARTNERS, PARTICIPANTS FOOTFALL</b>		
900+ participants	200+ panellists	18+ partners
<b>KNOWLEDGE, FORUM AND MEDIA PARTNERS</b>		
UCL University College London, UK	Goa University	London School of Economics, UK
The International Centre Goa	National Health Mission, GoI	Brookings India
t/ve (Television For The Environment)	COEP, Pune Debate Society	The American Centre
NDTV 24x7	Indigo 91.9 fm	Inox
<b>STEPS FOR POLICY ADVOCACY AFTER CONFERENCE</b>		
A Dossier In The Making	9 Policy Recommendation Papers	
<b>NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE</b>		
165 articles in print media	253 articles in online media	PR value worth Rs. 10.31 Crore

*The study revealed several strengths of the forum. Some of these have been listed below:*

**Exclusivity in the selection of themes and agenda:** Respondents found the selection of themes and sessions as relevant and critical. As the platform correlates the policies around the theme of discussion, it was found to be relevant by the majority of the stakeholders.

In terms of relevance, most of the respondents found the forum either 'relevant' or 'very relevant'. It did have a scope for improvement, but it was still considered a safe space for respectful dialogues on matters that are hardly discussed. During the interview sessions with various CSOs, representatives from educational institutions, media houses and other experts, an agreement was found on its relevance. Participants and panellists found that the program was relevant in today's scenario and should be continued as it provided people to speak up their stories and concerns.

**Inclusivity:** The Forum's ability to include multi-sectoral stakeholders and dedication to connect with the grassroots level change makers was much appreciated. Respondents observed that there was an interesting and valuable pool of experienced personnel who were part of the forum. It provided them with an opportunity to engage with professionals from varied sectors.

The change in perception, attitude and behaviour was shared by some of the respondents during the interviews. For example, a professor from a renowned institute said that he had started to recognize the gender misbalance in his classroom after attending the Difficult Dialogues Summit on Gender in the year 2018.

While another panellist from a CSO shared that a student from Goa University followed up with him through an email to understand more on the thematic issue that was discussed at Difficult Dialogues. The interviews and surveys brought up many such anecdotes, which showcased that the forum was able to influence its audience through the Dialogues and to think and act towards understanding it further.

**Daring Debates:** This was seen as a key element to grab the attention of the university students. It was also seen as a valuable contribution towards building the capacity of future leaders and change-makers.

Participants, especially the youth who were part of the study, found the city-level events of Daring Debates and its finale in Goa as a great exposure to key concerns of India and South Asia. More than half of the youth who had participated in the events found them highly relevant to their education and future career growth.

Similarly, the general audience found that their expectations were met, and they looked forward to the next season. It was found through our detailed online surveys and interviews that though the forum was only three years old; it had started to get a steady fan following in terms of participants.

**Policy Papers:** The strategy to convert the dialogues into recommendations in the form of white papers and dossiers is certainly an aspect that adds value to the forum and makes it stand apart from other similar forums. The papers also hold credibility as they are prepared by knowledge partners and experts after rounds of dialogue.

**Partners:** National and International partnerships with credible stakeholders have guided the forum to build its brand and add value to its contributions. Long and short-term partnership models have worked well for the forum and increased its outreach across cities.

**Media Coverage:** National and International coverage through print and online media, in addition to television and radio partners, has started to come out as a strong element for dissemination of information and generating curiosity in the audience.

**Geographical Reach and Venue:** The Daring Debates series and the Difficult Dialogues Summit at Goa has witnessed a steady growth in its geographical reach. In three years, the forum has been able to reach out to 65 universities across 10 cities in 9 states through its partners.

*As for recommendations, the study could see the below areas which needed to be strengthened for making it robust and sustainable:*

**Operational Issues:** As an event, the aspects of planning, execution and logistics appeared to be an area which needed some bit of work.

**Dissemination and language of Information:** The outreach of policy papers and of information such as the talks, dialogues and key videos needed a little push to build the audience's curiosity and keep the momentum going even after the conference was over.

**Losing essence of the Dialogues:** The team needs to focus on curating the thematic area and selection of expertise and build partnerships that would focus on dissemination of the recommendations with various stakeholders.

**Existing and emerging platforms:** Stakeholders shared that competing with others might not be necessary but making the forum more robust and unique was required.

**Fund Raising:** The founder supports a substantial part of the forum while some of the elements are covered by partner organizations. This, however, does not ensure a long-term financial sustainability.

Building partnerships with corporates, movie production companies, television groups and media houses could support in improving long-term sustainability.

**Forging sustainable partnerships:** Every year the theme of the discussion changes, hence it is necessary to choose and maintain partnerships with stakeholders, especially at the ground level, as they would be able to provide rich insights from their experience on the field. Educational institutions and foundations within India should also be approached as it has the potential of engaging with the youth and professionals for influencing change at the level of policy awareness and perception.

**Note on Methodology:**

Change Alliance adopted a qualitative framework to assess the intervention with different stakeholders including professors, celebrities, media representatives, bureaucrats, partners and experts. Feedback from university students and others was also collected through online surveys and group discussions. In total, 92 people were interviewed through in-depth interviews or through online survey tools and discussions.