



The Institutionalization of Mediation Support

Are Mediation Support Entities there yet?

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1 Introduction

Mediation support aims at providing long-term support and institutional memory by addressing some of the systemic gaps in the international peacemaking system, as well as providing on-demand operational support to peace processes. Additionally, the complexity of contemporary conflicts requires a political-methodological perspective, including aspects of process design, actor analysis, political analysis, and micro-skill capacities, just to mention a few.

Against the background of increasing complexity of conflicts, the rising demands on the mediator, and the rapid evolvement of a diverse range of mediation support entities (MSEs), it is time to take stock and reflect.

This article's objective is to give an overview and analysis of the emerging field of mediation support by looking at different portfolios of MSEs. It examines the actual significance and operationalization of MSEs in peace processes, and accordingly, its sufficiency for mediators. It also takes a closer look at MSEs' self-perception. The article draws from qualitative interviews with mediation support staff between 2016 and 2017.

The analytical coverage of mediation support and MSEs is still not significant. It seems to be a rather young and underestimated topic for research and analysis. Looking at the academic landscape of articles on mediation support, only a handful of articles are particularly prominent, e.g. by Whitfield (2015), Lehmann-Larsen (2014), and Fugufugosh (2008).

This article is structured to make it useful not only for academics, but also to mediation support staff, policy makers and mediators themselves, reflecting on their collaboration with MSEs.

2 Taking stock of Mediation Support Entities: What is out there and how are they designed?

2.1 Types of MSEs

Since the 1990s, mediation has addressed or settled a broad range of conflicts. In 2011, the United Nations (UN) recognized the use of mediation "as a promising and cost-effective tool in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution" (United Nations 2011, 2). Mediation support has probably existed as long as there has been mediation. Nevertheless, MSEs are a rather young phenomenon. MSEs explicitly recognize the need for a more professional approach to mediation. MSEs can be defined as a systematized capacity of operational support for individual peacemakers, mediators and peace processes. Here, operational support means secretarial and managerial support as well as expertise on both thematic and practical issues throughout the process (Lehmann-Larsen 2014). MSEs are the formalized and institutionalized refining of the approach of building mediation teams around a mediator.

One of the first MSEs, at least the most influential one concerning the initiation of further MSEs, is the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) within the Policy and Mediation Division (PMD) of the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA). It also established a standby team of mediation experts. The MSU itself was created in 2006 as an outcome of the 2005 World Summit, which included a call for the expansion of the UN's conflict prevention and resolution capacity. In June 2017, the UN Secretary-General Guterres presented a report "UN Activities in Support of Mediation" (United Nations Secretary-General 2017) concluding five elements of mediation support and reconfirming mediation as an important tool for conflict prevention, management and

resolution. One of the report’s direct recommendations was the creation of a High-level Mediation Advisory Board, which was implemented immediately afterwards.

The institutionalization of a mediation support capacity within the UN provoked the creation of European equivalents:

- ≡ The OSCE created in a “copy-paste” approach of the UN MSU – the Mediation Support Team (MST) – located within the Operations Service (OS) of the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) in Vienna.
- ≡ The set-up of the UN DPA MSU, between 2006 and 2008, also served as a forerunner for the establishment of the Mediation Support Team (MST) of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The latter started activities in late 2011, similar to the OSCE CPC/OS-MST. The European Union (EU) itself refers internally to its own mediation support capability, the European Resources for Mediation Support (ERMES) under the Instrument for Stability.
- ≡ Taking a look at the African continent, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has set up its own Mediation Support Unit.
- ≡ The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as well as the African Union (AU), namely the AU Mediation Support Project, supported by ACCORD, the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), and the Conflict Management Division within the AU have created MSEs within their own organizations.
- ≡ Furthermore, non-governmental and partly governmental institutions, such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre), Switzerland’s Mediation Support Project (Center for Security Studies and swisspeace), and forums for co-operation such as the Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland (IMSD) or the Mediation Support Network (MSN) have also been installed to advance mediation and mediation support capacities.

The above shows the different types of MSEs possible regarding their institutional embedment. In particular, five different types can be defined, as follows.

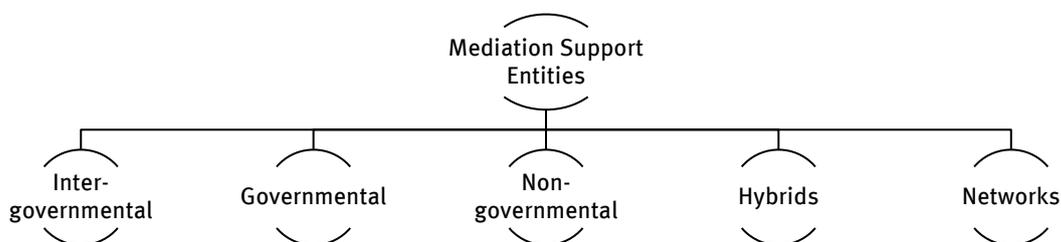


Figure 1: Forms of Mediation Support Entities

The first type belongs to MSEs within international or regional organizations, which have received clear legitimacy through official decisions aiming at systematizing the organization’s efforts in providing professional, cross-cutting support to “good offices” activities. These include preventive diplomacy and mediation aspects along all phases of the so-called ‘conflict cycle’, as well as providing a flexible – sometimes rapid reaction – mediation support capacity (United Nations 2009; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2011). Before the creation of a dedicated MSE, mediation support was provided by single focal points within other units. The processes in the different institutions took over six years in some cases, starting from preliminary discussions and mandate development, to a pilot phase, and finally the consolidation leading to the establishment of a dedicated MSE.

Secondly, Foreign Ministries accommodate their own mediation support capacities. Here, the German, Swedish and Finnish Ministries of Foreign Affairs can be mentioned as prominent examples.

The largest group of MSEs are, thirdly, non-governmental organizations. There is a considerable number of NGOs acting in the field of mediation, probably even actually providing mediation support, but only a few among them conduct mediation support through a dedicated entity as such. Here, the most prominent independent organizations carrying out institutionalized mediation support are the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre), Conciliation Resources, InterMediate, Mediateur, the Berghof Foundation, and the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI).

Fourthly, there are also so-called hybrid organizations or institutions that are joint ventures or formalized partnerships between a governmental and non-governmental body. For example, the Mediation Support Project (MSP) was founded in 2005 as a joint venture between swisspeace and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) ETH Zurich. The Swiss Foreign Office (FDFA) was the initiator and main partner of MSP. The MSP supports the Swiss FDFA in providing durable and comprehensive support in five to eight specific mediation cases.¹ MSP provides mediation support services in a responsive manner, e.g. in cases where there is a comparative advantage for the Swiss FDFA, or there is a clear demand from an actor the FDFA wants to support.

The fifth kind of MSEs are networks. Several organizations, as well as smaller networks themselves, have collaborated in network form. The youngest network is currently the Initiative Mediation Support Germany (IMSD)² that also holds a strong partnership with the German Federal Foreign Office, albeit independently, and as such is not defined here under the category of hybrids. The IMSD consists of a consortium of five organizations working in the area of peace mediation and mediation support. The network aims at making the existing knowledge on peace mediation and mediation support accessible to representatives of the German Federal Foreign Office and central decision-makers, whereas the Mediation Support Network³ is a global network aiming at contributing to the exchange of persons and institutions working on peace mediation and mediation support of their own member organizations. Finally, yet importantly, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers⁴ brings together actors globally to provide local peace mediation support for grassroots to international peace and peacebuilding efforts.

2.2 Funding

All MSEs are funded either by interested states through extra-budgetary projects, or are based on a service contract, and fully financed by unified or statutory budgets. Smaller MSEs are funded by public and private sources. Funding for MSEs is decreasing, although in the coming years, MSEs expect steady organizational growth and are working to build a broader funding base, although this is an optimistic perspective as discussed below. Private foundations and societies are increasingly important sources of funding for projects. A broad funding base ensures that non-governmental MSEs can remain independent and impartial, and build a solid foundation for future work.

2.3 Clients

MSEs provide support to third parties in mediation processes who ask for it, i.e. Special Representatives and Envoys, Secretary Generals and Under Secretaries of State, heads of field operations and institutions, and interested leadership staff in general, such as diplomats, Foreign Office employees, etc.

¹ www.peacemediation.ch/mediation-support-project.

² www.peace-mediation-germany.de/imsd.html.

³ www.mediationsupportnetwork.net.

⁴ www.peacemakersnetwork.org.

Mediation support is also given to inter-governmental and governmental organizations as institutions, and key individuals in order to be better equipped to undertake mediation endeavours. MSEs provide support to local civil societies to a lesser extent. In a few cases MSE also work with the conflict parties themselves, in order to prepare them better for peace processes.

2.4 Conflicts

MSEs are basically contributing by providing mediation support to all kinds of international, regional and (trans-) national conflicts (in the European and African continents, e.g. CAR, Mali, South Sudan, which have the possibility to spill over to other parts of the region). Furthermore, mediation support provides assistance to conflicts in Syria, Libya, Mali, Philippines, Myanmar, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and in the MENA and Central Asian regions, but there is more involvement in providing mediation support to some of the conflicts than others. They provide mediation support to actors in protracted conflicts (in Europe, e.g. Transnistria, Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh), political crises (e.g. Western Balkans), and localized conflicts (e.g. Central Asia), as well as in electoral cycle-related conflicts (Burundi, Uganda, Madagascar). This list is not exclusive and just touches on the major conflicts that mediation support works on.

2.5 Rationale and staffing

The acknowledgment for more consistent and professional mediation support has led to the above-mentioned internal mediation support structures and mechanisms, namely institutionalized and formalized MSEs. No matter in which category of organizational arrangement the MSE falls, all MSEs are a response to a call for more professionalization in mediation support and thus, mediation processes. The intention is to provide, *inter alia*, a normative capacity and framework for mediation support: managing institutional memory, reducing workload and increasing effectiveness so as to cope with the growing complexity of conflicts, fostering tools and their application, and thus, promoting mediation itself. This collection of original intentions and reasons for the originating of MSEs can only meet the actual outcomes in part, as discussed later in this article.

The MSEs are repositories of fairly similar assistance that can help mediators and negotiators in gaining skills and techniques for mediation processes and their negotiations. The assistance often consists of operational support, capacity building, knowledge management and operational guidance, as well as networking and outreach to partners. Therefore, they also function as a clearinghouse for lessons learned and best practices. Depending on the category of an MSE, it may also be able to provide backchannel communications. In situations where face-to-face negotiations are impossible or inadvisable, the MSE can act as an intermediary, using backchannels to facilitate communications between groups.

The structure of staff is quite similar among MSEs but is diverse in expertise, seniority, and nationality. The composition ranges between three and fourteen staff members, whereby teams of just three to five mediation support officers are the majority. They rank from mid-level to senior positions throughout all types of MSEs, except for non-governmental ones, which consist of significantly junior positions. Normally, a MSE is also staffed with a project or administrative assistance position. Finland, Germany, Switzerland, France, Sweden and Italy seem to be among the main funders of staff secondments or organizational funding within the western MSEs. AU and ECOWAS, for example, consist of staff largely of African nationalities. Within the international and regional organizations, deployment or secondment of staff members remains political.

However, the secondment or contracting of mediation support staff is not the only type of expertise. MSEs hold a range of recruitment mechanisms for expertise that cannot be (completely) fulfilled internally.

Without implying any order or hierarchy of mobilization, the logic of calling upon and respectively deploying expertise, is as follows: The mediator, may it be an individual, organization, or state, is the point of

departure. The mediator does well by examining her/his own expertise alongside the four need dimensions of personal, technical, thematic, and time-related capacities. This might be complemented directly by surrounding teams, for example the team of a Special Representative, partly brought along from previous assignments. MSEs often support these specific mediation teams in their mandated efforts.

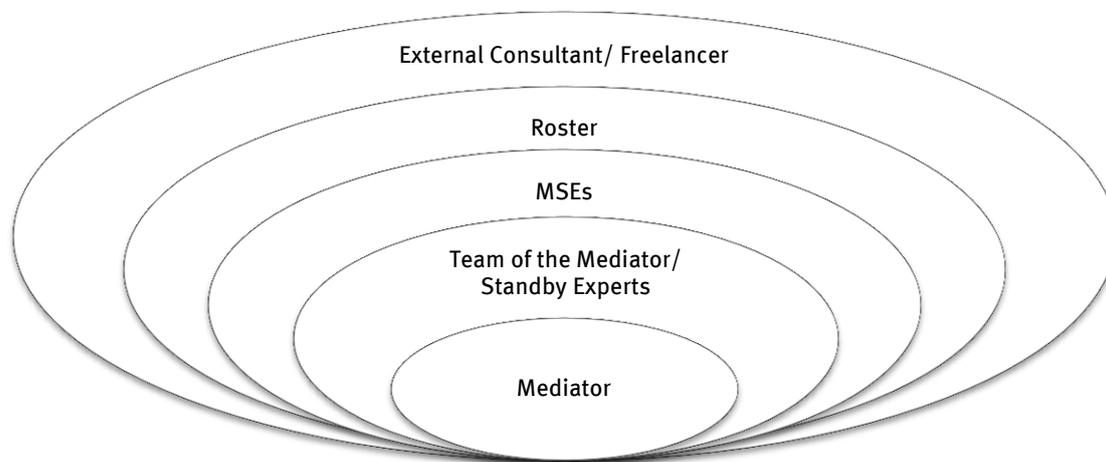


Figure 2: Staffing of mediation and mediation support

If special expertise beyond the capacity of direct teams is in need, such as on ceasefire mediation, constitutional reform, or mine action, MSEs have in most cases the possibility to request mediation support from high-level experts, often (former) mediators. The most noticeable example is the UN Standby Team of Mediation Experts, which is the standby capacity at the DPA MSU, and provides a form of ad hoc recruitment.

MSEs provide substantial resources for expertise themselves (see below), such as in process strategy planning, capacity building for mediation and process-design, logistical support, establishment of procedures for clear decision-making and co-ordination, thematic briefings and tailor-made, process-specific research, as well as conflict analyses.

If additional expertise and capacity is needed, most of the MSEs revert to a pool of experts, respectively their own mediation expert rosters. Experts are either used to implement the MSEs' activities (in which case there is close guidance and co-facilitation with the MSE staff members), or are put at the disposal of senior mediators (in which case there is often less MSE staff involvement). Experts on the rosters range from 30 to 100. Sometimes the MSE does not maintain a roster itself, but is provided a consortium composed of organizations, each of which has a roster of experts that can be contracted and deployed. Here, each expert is contracted by one member organization of the consortium.

A shortcoming of this approach is that the organizations do a lot of work for free as they search and provide support, but do not receive payment if their expert is not selected. In case there is no expert available on the roster with the needed expertise, MSEs are able to recruit external experts known from previous collaborations.

This demonstrates the two-fold nature of rosters. On the one hand, rosters are an easy-to-maintain way to gather a broad range of expertise that is officially pre-selected based on specific required criteria. Otherwise, the ad hoc availability of the roster members is often limited because they are generally contracted elsewhere. MSEs also have a slight tendency towards the recruitment of experts with whom they or the mediators already have worked effectively, since the success of the collaboration – especially short-term assignments – depends largely on the degree of confidence and complementarity within the teams. Some MSEs also face challenges with regard to the predictability of financing in the case of using on-demand external experts which requires

extra budgetary funding. Funding as such remains a challenge throughout mediation support structures, as will be discussed below. Of course, there are also MSEs which have no external experts (yet), but are developing an approach in this regard.

2.6 Co-ordination, co-operation and coherence with other MSEs

MSEs often establish long-term partnerships to respond to the aforementioned challenges regarding mediation expert rosters and the availability of on-demand, thematically specific resources. They also intensively pursue peer-to-peer co-operation, since effective mediation support requires strong co-operation, co-ordination and coherence in the respective approaches. Therefore, the inter-governmental MSEs agreed on joint work plans, regular exchanges, and co-hosting a series of meetings.

The networks principally provide forums for enhancing co-operation and co-ordination among actors in the field of peace mediation.

Despite the existing formats, the need to further strengthen collaboration and exchange remains strong. Collaboration and co-ordination are perceived as a key pillar of MSEs' work and needs to be further enhanced in order to align various efforts towards peace. This necessitates a clear understanding of MSEs' own comparative advantages and a careful division of labour, which is unfortunately not always the case.

2.7 Conclusions

Generally, mediation support via MSEs is very expert-driven, and mainly aims at providing support to Track 1 mediators as individuals or institutions. Only a few MSEs have diverted from Track 1 mediation support approaches since, within their scope of work, the classical traditional mediation process appears less and less.

Inter-governmental as well as governmental organizations respond to the challenge of roster management with an increasing investment in long-term partnerships. It is still an on-demand collaboration, but is based on a smaller number of experts often coming from specific organizations. This way the experts also have a strong familiarity with the structures of inter-governmental or governmental MSEs. The partnership implies trust that enables both to take full advantage of the complementarity in roles and capacities in a peace processes. For example, non-governmental partners are much more able to link unofficial dialogue to official peace process efforts. Yet, long-term partnerships may impede natural competition among NGOs and hinder the emergence of new MSEs.

Moreover, besides providing a dedicated mediation support capacity – thematically and technically – MSEs take on the role of a facilitator between the different levels of expert resources. They are able to function as a hub for enabling the most effective collaboration with the expertise available.

As shown above in figure 2, not all mediation support actors feature the same vicinity to their client or the peace processes itself. The team or envoy of the mediator is accompanying the mediator the closest, whereas the standby-team experts are also with the mediators (if not even the mediators themselves), but only for a period of time. MSEs are still often located at headquarters and secretariats, from where most of the support to their client is delivered, though – as in the case of the OSCE MST – more and more participation in peace process negotiations takes place in order to professionalize advice based on immediate observation. Mediation Experts from rosters and freelance consultants work from distance and only upon demand.

MSEs are often not aware of their own, specific mental model or assumption that underpins their mediation approach. It may even differ among the mediation support staff members themselves, coming from different schools, experiences, cultures, etc. The only common ground refers to an interest-oriented, transformative mediation approach that partly aims at re-conceptualizing identities in conflict. While being

able to name their own approach retrospectively, there is yet a lack of awareness and crystallization needed for proactively applying these principles. This leads to a core challenge of co-operation, co-ordination and coherence between MSEs and thus, their effectiveness towards the supported bodies.

3 Assessing Mediation Support Entities: How do they work best and what is still needed?

The following assessment mirrors the founding ideas (rationale) of MSEs emerging out of needs identified in peace processes and the success of their established portfolios.

3.1 Success indicators

Defining indicators of success remains challenging for mediation processes as well as for mediation support approaches. Such success factors and measurable indicators must correspond closely with the intended objectives mentioned above, for example, contributing to effective peace processes. The availability of tangible indicators that would make it easier to show results would contribute to an increasing demand for mediation support, and to better co-operation and co-ordination among MSEs. One such indicator could be the expressed acknowledgement and evaluation of the usefulness of the support provided, by those that are supported. This may remain wishful thinking since mediation and mediation support are located in politically sensitive, complex, constantly changing and soft-skill related human interaction that should not be measured by the *absence* of violent conflicts or tensions, but by the *presence* of something like “peace”. It is difficult to assess a given mediation intervention as successful or not, however certain indicators may help measure and signify success, in the sense of effectiveness.

Success can be measured in at least two different ways. On the one hand, success can refer to a mediator being effectively supported. On the other hand, success can directly mean that a conflict has been settled. For example, the level of demand for mediation support, and the level of continuity of engagements, is clearly referred to the first type of success. These success indicators are of a direct nature. Here, an involvement of a MSE from a very early stage is an even greater indicator of success, and as such justifies the existence of the MSEs. Another success is the level of capacity built among mediators, which can be monitored by an indicator that measures the mediation techniques applied by the mediator and her/his team.

If success is measured by a conflict settlement or a peace process itself, a different kind of indicators needs to be defined. These success indicators are indirect. Most MSEs take it as a positive sign when conflicting parties continue to be committed to resolving their differences through dialogue. In other words, it needs to be taken as an indicator of success if stakeholders, including MSEs, are able to keep communication channels open. The measurability can be seen in the absence of stalemates rather than the presence of a settlement and “peace”.

Moreover, measurable success indicators should consider the inclusiveness of mediation processes as well as their potential for addressing root causes of the conflict over the long term. Especially the latter needs to be one of the key indicators of success, although it is not yet reflected significantly. In many mediation processes, conflicts are addressed with the technique of problem-solving, which is not bad *per se*, but still leaves the actual root causes untouched. The growing imposition of advocacy agendas on mediation processes, creating “Christmas tree” peace agreements that are drafted by international experts rather than thoroughly negotiated by conflict parties, is problematic. This development often takes place in international conflicts due to time

problems. Mediators, such as Special Representatives, are usually assigned for a limited period of time and as such, time pressure to reach significant, visible progress within this period is quite high. It is much easier to achieve small compromises regarding concrete problems related to daily lives as a kind of conflict management rather than achieving conflict resolution.

3.2 Challenges

To summarize, MSEs emerged out of the need that arose with the increasing complexity (in topics, stakeholders and cross-cutting issues involved in peace processes) of today's conflicts. The formalization and institutionalization of mediation support within organizations is aimed at providing a systemic capacity to professionalize mediation through capacity building, knowledge management, and co-operation and co-ordination. However, mediation processes as well as MSEs still have room for improvement and effectiveness due to noteworthy challenges.

What is missing in these portfolios and to what extent are MSEs meeting the demands? The deficits are threefold: lack of funding, lack of availability of experts, and lack of access to various levels of a peace processes.

3.2.1 Lack of funding

Despite the increasing rhetoric around the necessity for mediation, there is a notable lack of financial support for its early implementation. This is a particular problem with regard to the aforementioned success indicator of early involvement of MSEs in peace processes. Mediation too often remains an alternative to failed robust interventions and is not applied as a part of preventive means or taken advantage of as a part of early warning or early action measures. The latter also addresses preparedness as a concept and would often be a possibility to identify the gap between early warning and early action. Peace processes often require rapid responses to critical issues and events, which mediation support has to accommodate. This requires standby funding so as to rapidly recruit and deploy mediation support staff, external experts, etc. on an ad-hoc basis. When a conflict situation worsens and needs quick intervention, funds are often not available for reacting quickly. Therefore, a big challenge is the availability (or lack thereof) of flexible funding. For a mediation support organization to be both agile and responsive, it needs sufficient, independent and flexible funding.

This seems difficult for donors to provide in times where visible, quick, results-oriented funding dominates the decisions of international actors in peace processes. Some MSEs even speak of 'donor fatigue', which results in a thin mediation and mediation support structure. The degree of mediation support requested includes on-the-ground expertise as well as long term institutional development. This type of support requires a sufficient amount of staff that can commit to following-up both aspects of the demands. These demands are also not of a very complementary nature, which again requires broader staffing and thus, larger financial resources. The consequential workload for each mediation support staff stretches the response capacity of the MSE, which has to cover all kinds of requests.

Some MSEs also face the challenge that they cannot offer small grants for projects of NGOs. Special Representatives would prefer to have non-earmarked funds, for example, to subcontract NGOs for fact-finding missions or local contracts in support of mediation processes.

3.2.2 Lack of availability of expertise

The deficits in funding also lead to a deficit in resources regarding the availability of ad hoc external expertise. The ever changing dynamics and nature of conflicts require a constant re-evaluation of the parameters linked to

different strategies. MSEs can only respond appropriately and rapidly if there are sufficient resources available through a broad spectrum of expertise. The lack of funding and the lack of availability of timely and specific expertise results in a decrease of portfolio and, as such, detracts from the professionalization of mediation processes. The latter impacts the level of mediation support requests in general, as described below.

3.2.3 Lack of access to various levels of a peace processes

A main constraint is the lack of access to peace processes (from the earliest possible stage of involvement of a third party mediator) due to insufficient acknowledgment of the added value that mediation support activities can bring. Consequently, MSEs work unevenly; more with certain operations and processes than with others. This is a major problem that affects the *raison d'être* of MSEs and which receives insufficient attention since the thin staff structures and respectively heavy workloads hardly leave room to tackle such fundamental problems. The lack of access to mediation processes leads to targeting mid-level experts, or supporting staff working in mediation teams, rather than high-level mediators.

If MSEs are not able to provide support to all levels, units and phases of a peace process, the potential for gathering lessons learned remains unused and, therefore, cannot be incorporated into future practices.

This raises the question of how to get a foothold into mediation processes – one of the core questions of mediation support. Providing direct operational support is still challenging. While mediation and mediation support clearly are among the most effective tools in conflict settlement in terms of results and costs, as well as by being formalized in UN General Assembly resolutions, there is still a slow uptake in demand for both mediation and mediation support.

Clients and stakeholders often think of mediation support as a service provider. While this is not wrong, it implies a kind of voluntary nature that may bring about a need to “sell the product” of mediation support. All MSEs offer support upon request as there are no institutionalized mechanisms that make collaboration with MSEs obligatory within their organizations. This is largely due to the fact that existing formats have to be respected and political sensitivities taken into account.

A lack of long-term appointments of mediators present another challenge to creating a strong foothold with these clients of some MSEs: the mediators – may they be heads of missions, Special Representatives, or eminent persons, such as former heads of state – change almost constantly. Either their period of assignment ends or the context of the conflict changes in a way that necessitates a change of actors on the side of the third party. Additionally, mediation support often offers tailor-made, needs-based assistance that can hardly be considered concrete before an in-depth consultation with the client has taken place. This also raises the issue that tailor-made assistance requires clients to know about available options. This leads to a need to constantly promote mediation support with potential clients, creating burdens on current work.

At the same time, while effective mediation requires the application of the principles of mediation, effective mediation support requires it too. Mediation support is political, sensitive and personal, and therefore, very much requires a relationship with their client based on trust and confidence. The self-perception or client perception of an MSE as a service provider that has to sell its product and therefore needs to be “cool and sexy” does not coincide with a confidence-based working relationship. Instead, it harms the work of MSEs because their opportunities to reflect, adjust, or further develop are taken away.

So, how is it possible to actually gain a foothold in mediation processes? First of all, mediation support ideally speaks for itself. There should be no need to convince anyone because the complexity of conflicts and the demands faced by mediators and mediation processes themselves require the need for methodological-political support. Secondly, trust in processes is best generated over time. Mediation support personnel and mediators require time to explore needs, capacities and personalities. In conclusion, the ideal institutionalization of mediation support lies within the balance between the mentioned pros and cons

regarding the level of formalization of the working relationship between the support entity and the mediator. In other words, an initial consultation with the mediation support entity before the actual mediation process starts should be mandatory, whereas further collaboration needs to be based on the principles of voluntariness.

MSEs face several interdependent challenges, such as the correlation between the difficulty in evaluating mediation and mediation support processes and the lack of funding that, *inter alia*, leads to deficits in resources, such as the availability of on-demand and specific expertise. These obstacles feed into the main challenge of getting a foothold in mediation processes in a comprehensive and systematic way so as to professionalize the field of mediation.

4 Recommendations

The stocktaking and assessment of the field of mediation support allow for the following recommendations:

As MSEs are still in their teenage years, it is still important to further embed mediation support structures into peacebuilding efforts. Therefore, MSEs need to further develop the building of trusted relations with key institutions, which may take years to establish. This should probably start with research- and experience-sharing and slowly develop into a long-term partnership with an increasing focus on providing targeted mediation support to the institution's peace efforts. It is important to acknowledge and highlight mediation, and accordingly mediation support, as one of the first approaches adding a micro-level perspective of human behaviour to the macro-level analysis provided by the political sciences.

When it comes to co-operation and co-ordination, it is necessary to look at and learn from other industries, such as humanitarian assistance. The possibility for joint preparation trainings and even the establishment of clusters need to receive further consideration.

In addition to external co-operation and co-ordination, closer collaboration with other internal sections and units, e.g. country desks, early-warning units, etc., is recommended in order to ensure coherence and effectiveness in support. This implies a "teaming-up" for the same goal of providing support to peace processes based on a clarification of roles and responsibilities, which are distinct (political policy advice versus political methodological advice), but also overlapping in regards to, e.g. analysis.

The increasing number of mediation and mediation support actors can be streamlined in their mental models. Mediation approaches, or their comparative advantages – their niche – can be made visible through streamlining and harmonization. In other words, MSEs should have a constant discussion of their own approaches. Streamlining might not be an ideal goal; rather the constant rapprochement serves a coherent appearance towards external actors.

The article so far already defined the physical distance to negotiations of peace processes as among the biggest challenges for MSEs. MSEs need to attend the events of negotiations itself, and steadily accompany their client, may it be a Special Representative or her/his team or representatives of foreign ministries. Only this way, professional advisory on the macro and micro levels to the process is possible.

MSEs mainly recommend being included as early as possible in a mediation process. This bears in mind consultation or co-operation even before the actual mediation process starts in order to jointly design the best effective peace process. Consequently, such comprehensive, holistic mediation support requires a constant feedback mechanism in order to ensure the benefit. Here, appointing mediators for longer terms could facilitate greater effectiveness in MSE work.

Likewise, a broader institutionalized approach, for example establishing explicit mediation or dialogue process support focal points in the given local subsidiaries, field operations or delegations, would relieve

headquarter entities from constantly having to start from scratch and from having to “sell” the advantages of mediation support capacities.

In order to respond to the dilemma of not having to “sell” mediation support as a service provider, it is advisable to start with smaller activities, such as invitations to retreats or exchange platforms. MSEs need to find formats that are attractive to high-level mediators or show concretely the usefulness of identifying lessons. MSEs should start establishing a relationship by providing help, for example in logistical matters, and then take things forward. In this way, the clients develop confidence in the expertise and see the added-value of mediation support.

Diplomats are generalists as a rule; therefore, it is very important to foster an understanding of mediation as a specific approach, including specific tools, as well as the differences between mediation and dialogue facilitation, problem solving or diplomacy in general. Strengthening capacity building amongst diplomats and ambassadors, as well as the conflicting parties at the negotiation table, also reflects a demand from civil society actors involved in peace processes. If professionalization of mediation support is a core objective of MSEs, they need to streamline and harmonize the wide range of definitions and models existing among mediators, and they need to reduce the conflicting vocabulary used for different things in multi-stakeholder peace processes.

5 The way forward

As MSEs are still young and the conflict landscape is constantly changing, dynamics in the field of mediation support offer a broad range of diversity, therefore, the following assumption about the future of mediation support and MSEs in particular are made:

The focus certainly will be stronger on partnerships with other MSEs to compensate for the deficit in available expertise. This may also lead to an increase of the hybrid format of MSEs where non-governmental organizations collaborate formally over a long period with governmental organizations, which have assured funding.

Since MSEs cannot yet reach out systematically to high-level mediators, and since such engagement is also dependant on personal preferences, the awareness of mediation support and the capacities of high-level mediators, MSEs might shift to other individuals. It is very likely that MSE staff will provide more assistance to other stakeholders in a peace process, for example to so-called Insider Mediators. At the local level, mediators will increasingly come from within communities that MSEs are still not taking full advantage of. The mediation support staff of today are also likely to take over several roles in mediation processes, including as mediators themselves. This is useful because mediation support staff would have many skills and networks that would benefit a mediation team.

Generally, future mediation teams will still consist of prominent figures, such as former heads of state, but will be partnered with professionals, as well as be supported and complemented in skills by mediation, political and legal advisors. The latter will come from MSEs bringing knowledge of mediation process and mediator expertise into the team. In order to deliver such trained and skilled personnel to mediation teams, mediation support also needs to become more professional as an entity. The tasks that MSEs can undertake and the skills that members must to bring in will have to be clearly defined. MSE staff will be trained as mediators and, ideally practice as mediators themselves, eventually arising from smaller scale mediation processes. The professionalization of mediation and mediation support are consequently interdependent.

In conclusion, based on the above-mentioned reasons, it is also recommended to push forward research and analysis in evaluating mediation and mediation support processes. This is fundamental to attracting more

funding, which will enhance the availability of sufficient and timely resources for operational support, training, guidance and networking. Finally, more focus on preventative use of mediation is a realistic approach and could greatly enhance the relevance of mediation. Generally, all efforts have to aim at protecting mediation space, regardless of the role, level, or phase of the peace process.

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