



BEYOND THE VERTICAL: WHAT ENABLES WOMEN MEDIATORS TO MEDIATE

Report



WOMEN MEDIATORS: BRIDGING THE PEACE GAP

Women Mediators across the Commonwealth (WMC) was established in 2018 and brings together women from different backgrounds and with different experiences of mediating conflict to learn from each other. The network advocates for greater recognition of the crucial work done by women mediators at all levels – from the local to the global. WMC is part of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks.

For further details on the network and its members visit:
<https://www.womenmediators.org/>

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SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

In September 2020, Conciliation Resources and the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth (WMC) network published the report *Women Mediators: Bridging the Peace Gap*.¹ This report highlighted the diverse and vital contributions to peace made by women mediators across community, national and international spaces, and presented key challenges faced by women mediators, as experienced by WMC members.

This report, *Beyond the Vertical: What Enables Women Mediators to Mediate*, builds on the findings of the previous publication but focuses on the question of *how to better create enabling environments* for women mediators. It asks specifically: what are the enabling factors that contribute to the meaningful inclusion and recognition of diverse women in peace mediation? By examining cases that have (1) facilitated the meaningful inclusion of women in mediation processes, (2) contributed to developing women's careers as mediators, and (3) promoted recognition of women's roles in mediation across various mediation spaces, these enabling factors can inform good practice in this field.

Drawing from the experiences of WMC network members, this report demonstrates how a complex mix of factors such as regional and local networks, positive visibility, intergenerational collaboration, effective peer-to-peer learning, flexible funding, responsive donors, and supportive and inclusive institutional cultures can contribute to constructing enabling environments for women mediators. It highlights both the immense value of women mediators in community spaces, as well as the urgent need for their greater inclusion in formal mediation processes.

Findings also indicate that in the context of a global pandemic imposing multiple restrictions to freedom and access to resources, women have borne the brunt of these restrictions, while continuing to be at the forefront of peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The rise of digital communication platforms has enabled women mediators to connect with one another more frequently – connections made more imperative by the increase in gender-based violence globally and other lockdown-induced gender discriminations. However, it has also excluded those without easy and affordable internet access.

This report presents a series of recommendations for international and regional organisations, national and local governments, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and NGOs, and regional networks of women mediators.

WOMEN MEDIATORS: ENABLING FACTORS

NETWORKS

Local, national and international networks play an important role in bringing women together across geographies and identity groups. Research shows that regional women mediator networks may act as an effective mechanism for support and collaboration among women mediators, as well as a conduit for qualified women to find entry points into peace negotiations.⁵ Networks can also act as a support mechanism for career development, or as a means for establishing a collective voice on obstacles that prevent women from fully engaging in international mediation.

Members spoke very positively about the WMC network, particularly its facilitation of lesson sharing across regions. Atia Anwar Zoon explained that being part of the WMC network is itself a recognition of the work that she has engaged in at the community level for over 20 years. She described how “having a platform enables you to play that role that is needing to be played” and that working with the WMC has “almost doubled her self-recognition”. Similarly, Nikhat Sattar highlighted that being connected to an international network is enabling in that it helps to raise credibility among stakeholders, and enhances members’ knowledge through listening to each other’s perspectives.

Members also shared that the WMC network – and the peer-to-peer learning initiatives it has facilitated – are important mechanisms for learning from, and connecting with, other women engaged in similar work across a variety of regions. Some members observed that facilitating more exposure to mediation experiences in one another’s conflict contexts would be extremely helpful, especially for members who have not received much formal mediation training.

Beyond the WMC network, some members referred to the role of local networks that connect women across different sectors as an enabling factor. One member spoke of her experiences of support mechanisms through informal networks in the women’s and rural development sectors in Northern Ireland.⁶ She also noted how informal community networks can be instrumental in strengthening advocacy and collective voice. Such initiatives are important for linking local and national processes through channelling information from civil society to political representatives.

Members noted that the WMC network has been highly valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased use of digital platforms during this period has allowed for much more dialogue among members, and there has been greater participation of members at events. Network meetings have been convened to suit multiple time zones so as to be more accessible to members. The increased use of digital platforms has overcome the barriers of travel costs and travel-related childcare. Members with reliable internet access benefit from easier participation in global events, possibilities of working remotely and access to online training. Although some members reported ‘zoom fatigue’ and shared concerns that online meetings should not overshadow in-person interaction, digital platforms have provided opportunities to widen networks. The increase in violence against women and girls globally and other gender discriminations during this period have precipitated the need for increased interaction.

The rapid transition into the digital arena has also restricted participation for some women, given disparities in access and costs of data and internet connectivity. The WMC network has addressed this for members in Bougainville by arranging access via a local organisation. Mediation institutions can play a role by helping facilitate access to digital meetings, including contributing to connectivity costs.



The Global Alliance (GA) of Regional Women Mediator Networks was launched in September 2019. It includes the Nordic Women Mediators network, FemWise-Africa, the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, WMC, and the Arab Women Mediators Network, and since May 2021 the Southeast Asian Network of Women Peace Negotiators and Mediators. These networks are part of a global movement to enhance women's meaningful participation and influence in peace processes at all levels. The GA works closely with the UN on brainstorming, coordination and linkages between the networks and UN infrastructure, to enhance the prospects of achieving shared goals.

While each network operates slightly differently, they all provide platforms to showcase the work of women from different geographic regions who are actively engaged in mediation and peacebuilding in local, national, regional or international contexts. Some networks have been instrumental in the deployment of women in regional processes. For all the networks, the ability to deploy women mediators is dependent on relevant connections to regional and international bodies and the network's ability to leverage those connections. Building strong connections to mediation organisations and sharing members' profiles with national governments is crucial for regional women mediator networks to increase the visibility of their members.

VISIBILITY AND RECOGNITION

Women's roles, impact and success in mediation are often overlooked. Yet women work across multiple mediation spaces and conflict situations, and their impact across the board is indisputable. Some WMC members possess prominent profiles due to their roles in well-publicised negotiations or their political status. However, recognition of women's value, particularly within formal mediation processes, is minimal. Women are still excluded from such processes due to multiple barriers, including 'macho' cultures in some mediation spaces.

Meanwhile, in community spaces, research shows that women's mediation work is much less recognised under the umbrella of 'mediation'. It is frequently referred to in terms of 'peacebuilding', without recognising that peacebuilding itself often *involves* mediation.⁷ Greater visibility of women in diverse mediation spaces and recognition of their expertise across different regions and thematic areas is vital in challenging gender stereotypes and inequalities in national, regional and international peace mediation.

As detailed in Case Study 1, recognition by local government structures and effective use of local media has been enabling for one WMC member. Other network members have also used radio podcasts, or have featured in short advocacy films to demonstrate to a wider audience the work that women undertake within different mediation spaces.⁸

The use of both traditional and social media can help raise the profile and visibility of individual mediators. However, efforts to raise visibility should be undertaken with caution, given that in some contexts media attention could increase risks to the individual. Mitigating this involves obtaining their prior consent and undertaking an intersectional gender-sensitive conflict analysis.⁹

Bebhinn McKinley described how recognition of her work in communities, including on issues such as contentious demarcation of space, and work with ex-prisoners, has helped her to build trust with individuals and organisations across the Island of Ireland. Bebhinn's lived experience of how communities function, the legacy of the conflict, and appreciation of the challenges of reconciliation have meant that she has gained respect across the divide as a mediator.¹⁰

Recognition in the community through having a 'respected' profile has been enabling for other women mediators, particularly in communities where respect comes with status, age and association with certain

traditional values. One member's extensive work with a range of peacebuilding stakeholders in Bougainville highlights how her own standing as a well-respected community leader better facilitates her ability to mediate in the community. Her connection to the Church has meant that she maintains support from local religious leaders, including male pastors who facilitate further community access for her. Visibility through the Church has also been instrumental in maintaining her support from local chiefs and other institutions, including the police (see Case Study 2).

The importance of community respect as an enabling factor was particularly emphasised by those working in conservative contexts, highlighting the pressures on women to conform to certain social norms in order to carry out their work. This may be problematic for younger women or those from excluded groups, such as women mediators with disabilities, who may be subject to various social stigmas. Mediation organisations and women's networks therefore bear a responsibility to challenge these discriminations or find innovative ways to support such women.

For another WMC member, a key enabler has been the recognition that she has expertise in multiple areas. Her ability to work on "security issues, process issues, inclusion, gender-based violence and conflict sensitivity" has meant that she is not "pigeon-holed". She is appreciated for her versatility and is able to operate in

CASE STUDY 1

HANNAH FORSTER The Gambia

Hannah has 20+ years of mediation experience and has worked in multiple policy initiatives, including the African Transformative Justice Project, *Platforme des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance*, and the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa. Hannah implemented a project that established Mediation Centres in five regions of The Gambia. The African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS), where she works, facilitates the operations of the Mediation Centres, which provide mediation training and respond to domestic violence, child truancy, land conflicts and cattle-rustling in their regions.

The ACDHRS has brought community leaders, including religious and traditional leaders, together with local government, police and civil society through regular meetings, and provided them with mediation training. These individuals mediate weekly in their communities across the country, under supervision, and supported through exchange of experiences and expertise. The Mediation Centres

have benefitted from community recognition and support from various institutions and individuals such as the Attorney General, regional governors, and traditional and religious leaders, particularly local Imams and Alkalos.

Media attention has contributed to ACDHRS' success and respect for Hannah's work, with journalists and media personnel among the beneficiaries of mediation training. Phone-in discussions on the merits of mediation were held on radio and television, highlighting the long-standing history and importance of mediation in Africa, and linking it to present day peace education and training. These discussions also raised the profile of the organisation, informed wider communities about the mediation initiatives, and enabled the Centres to gather data from communities on the types of conflicts taking place within them and how to address them. An evaluation of this work noted that individuals trained by the Centres were consequently able to play a far more proactive peacebuilding role in their communities.

many different spaces. This member noted that women are often boxed into categories – particularly women who work on gender issues. She stressed that “it is critical for institutions to play a role in making visible the multiple skills and expertise that diverse women have so as to disrupt this norm.”

This was also the view of Elizabeth Solomon, who acknowledged that gaining diverse thematic experience across areas of mediation, peacebuilding, human rights and numerous other areas of post-conflict reconstruction has been enabling for her. However, she explained that it was “her choice” to take professional and personal risks in order to move between different but related fields throughout her career, and that it should not be expected that women have to go further than men in gaining new skills in order to be recognised.¹¹

“There are very different standards. Women are required to have much higher levels of expertise than men.”

EMMA LESLIE

These caveats and contradictions reveal how some enablers are not straightforward: visibility can put women at risk; conforming to local gender norms may, at times, reinforce essentialism; possessing expertise in multiple areas highlights the reality that women tend to have to work harder to gain recognition. Such contradictions demonstrate the need for women’s networks to challenge these narrow gender norms and forms of inequality which prevent women from playing more of a leadership role in mediation and peacebuilding.

ROLE MODELS

Role models often act as an important source of inspiration and encouragement for women in peace mediation. They may come from within the family, the workplace, the community, or indirectly via the media.

Having a strong family role model from a young age was an inspiration for Bebhinn McKinley. In Northern Ireland, her mother ran a cross-community women’s group. As a teenager, she joined meetings with her mother and was inspired by the work of the group. She was also enthused by the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition, who had campaigned to secure their influential place in the talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement.¹² Similarly, Florence Mpaayei described that, in the Liberian peace process, there were important women role models who visibly challenged gender norms and influenced change. She explained how “they really opened my eyes to see, hey – there are women doing this. It’s the right thing to do.” Florence recalled how earlier in her career there were very few women role models, so she was unsure if this was a field for women.

“I was just frantically looking for examples of women doing things related to peace so at least you would have an icon or role model.”

FLORENCE MPAAYEI

This reiterates the importance of raising the visibility of women’s extensive peacebuilding work, using media and education to disrupt stereotypes of women’s narrow roles in society. To broaden the visibility of women in mediation, INGOs, national governments and international and regional organisations should promote the visibility of women in senior positions in peace negotiations to a greater extent.

INFORMAL SUPPORT

Some WMC members shared that informal support from senior leadership within organisations has been critical for progressing their careers. Two members described that their male CEOs actively encouraged them and regularly offered them informal advice. One member explained that when she was first starting out, a prominent woman politician shared her experience of being a young mother in public office and provided her with guidance in how to deal with elected members.¹³ Another WMC member, who is also a member of the UN Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisors, explained how informal and formal support from colleagues, seasoned peacebuilders and activists has been instrumental in furthering her career.

The informality of such support means that creativity is required when developing mechanisms to support women mediators, particularly given that some women, due to personal circumstances or as a result of structural inequalities, have more access to informal support than others. From an institutional perspective, initiatives to facilitate knowledge exchange and informal support mechanisms can create spaces for women to engage. This can be achieved through holding informal events, allowing time for dialogue, nurturing a supportive environment in the workplace, ensuring that there is no stigma attached to asking questions, and encouraging influential individuals to champion women from a range of backgrounds.

Informal support may come from within the community, the workplace or the family. It may take the form of advice and encouragement, childcare or economic support. Family support can be nurtured through family-friendly policies including maternity and paternity leave, acknowledging that the roles played by a husband or partner can shape the experiences of women mediators. For example, one member noted that her husband has shared family caregiving responsibilities, even though this has been difficult for his own career at times. This member recognised that many women do not have the same level of support from their partners.



INTERGENERATIONAL COLLABORATION

Intergenerational collaboration refers both to support and mentorship for younger women by older and more experienced women, and to the manner in which older women mediators learn from younger women mediators while preserving respect and appreciation for their own wisdom and expertise.

One member from Cameroon described how she has established a network of young women mediators as a way of challenging social norms that make it difficult for young women to gain respect and recognition as professional mediators. Another spoke of coaching and mentoring other women as a priority, and noted how she strives to pass on her expertise – both in formal settings where it is compensated, and also informally in a pro bono capacity. She sees this as a particular responsibility given her self-stated identity as a “white Western woman” and noted that, “as a feminist, I need to pass the baton on and think about how I share the opportunities that I have had in this field.”

One member spoke of her satisfaction in supporting young men and women through mediation and leadership skills training and subsequently witnessing them taking on important community roles. Another member described her pride in helping to create a welcoming work environment for younger women. She explained that her success has been enabled by her status in the community, and the respect and support she receives from the Church and local leaders (see Case Study 2).

While there was general agreement that support for young women entering the mediation sector is vital, members also expressed concern that this should not overshadow the meaningful participation of older women. Moreover, as noted by a representative of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Organisation, greater inclusion of young women must be managed carefully to consider the specific and intersectional risks that young women may face coming into the field; for example, sexual harassment and other forms of exploitation.

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Training and professional development initiatives were identified as critical and as advancing women’s careers in several instances. However, members cautioned that training is often seen as an easy solution, but is insufficient unless the systemic barriers that prevent their access to formal peace negotiations are addressed.

Some women have organically developed their own mediation practice and considered that more mediation training would not be beneficial. However, other members noted that opportunities for training on topics such as public office, conflict analysis, leadership and constitution building can help broaden skill sets. The WMC network provides gender-sensitive mediation training for its members. Rose Pihei noted that training is critical in her context of Bougainville where, following the recent political transition, only two or three of the

CASE STUDY 2

BARBARA TANNE Bougainville

Barbara has 18 years of experience in community mediation and leadership. Her work has included conducting peacebuilding dialogues and mediation in the lead-up to Bougainville's referendum, and she works tirelessly to support women and girls in the community.

Barbara considers one of her greatest accomplishments to be the mentoring of women and girls in leadership. After the 1988 -1998 crisis in Bougainville, she attended peacebuilding meetings held by Sister Lorraine Garasu from the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation who, along with two other women leaders, was a huge inspiration to her. Working with these three women became the "backbone of who she is today", and they now work together as a team.

Now Barbara focuses on mentoring young women and men in four communities in Bougainville. She selects young women for training and then works with them in the community with the male village chiefs, and the male and female community ward members. Before the referendum, Barbara took four of these young women and men to introduce them to the chiefs as the young leaders of tomorrow, explaining that it will be these young women and men who will mediate cases and hold dialogues. The chiefs now know these young people and they can be selected for programmes on peacebuilding, youth in leadership, conflict analysis, gender, human rights and community dialogues. Barbara also believes that good mentorship helps to resolve problems that young people face, such as drug and alcohol problems, and should be prioritised.

80 individuals participating in the current dialogue and consultation process are women. Rose maintained that training for public office for women mediators would enable them to be included in these consultations within government. This could also increase their eligibility to join mediation technical teams, which would disrupt the tendency for technical team mediators to be recruited from outside the national context in Bougainville.

Recognition as a trainer can increase professional status and profile. However, as cautioned by one member, it is important that women are involved in training on a variety of topics, not just on gender or topics stereotyped as 'women's issues'.

Members noted that training can act as an enabler when delivered in a culturally appropriate manner, including paying attention to the identities of the trainers themselves. For example, Helen Bishop delivers community mediation training amongst First Nation communities in the Northern Territory of Australia. She ensures that her training incorporates the local language and that cultural meanings are embedded in the process. This enables access to training from a broader pool of participants from the community, including women.

Engaging women community mediators as trainers with context-specific, culturally-sensitive knowledge can be a way of linking community experiences with global processes, whilst also benefitting the women trainers themselves.

FUNDING AND DONORS

Funding is, unsurprisingly, vital for women mediators. However, the approaches and practices through which donors make funding available are as critical to its effectiveness as the money itself.

The WMC has created a Strategic Mediation Fund (SMF) for its members. This fund provides short-term small grants, noting that women mediators often draw on their personal resources to continue mediation when funding runs out or is slow to be disbursed. The application process and reporting requirements are streamlined to make funds easily accessible.¹⁴

An advisor to the WMC, Dudziro Nhengu, used a grant from the SMF to conduct trauma-informed mediation during COVID-19 in collaboration with another WMC member. Dudziro then established and formally registered the organisation 'Sisters of Light Trust', working on peace and mediation. She noted that the SMF has "transformed lives and processes" and "really had an impact" on the women who were trained. They now have "resiliency skills to manage themselves and families, and have formed crisis groups and developed international networks."

WMC members in Bougainville used the SMF to conduct training, dialogues and consultations with key leaders such as chiefs, religious leaders, auxiliary

CASE STUDY 3

HELEN BISHOP Australia

Helen works across Australia, particularly with First Nation communities. In 2018 a community conflict occurred in Ali Curung, a remote desert community. The majority of the Warlpiri speaking population fled and the remaining inhabitants were government employees including police, teachers and medical staff. Helen worked with a renowned peacebuilding team that received government funding. The peacebuilders worked in the community to establish stability. They helped to create a 'peace project' which encouraged community members who had fled to return, build trust and develop peacebuilding agreements. In 2010, Helen and her colleagues also worked with another Warlpiri community in Yuendumu to support a process that promoted Warlpiri conflict management processes and language. This drew on powerful practices and social mechanisms connected to their land, cultures and social systems. Helen noted that this process reduced contact with the State justice system, restored community capacity and engagement and "grew a small peace movement in the desert".

First Nation approaches to restorative practices are not adequately understood or acknowledged by many Australians. Helen observes that conflict resolution processes conducted by non-Indigenous mediators can be problematic. In one case, a non-Indigenous male mediator introduced certain types of 'Western' masculinities into a First Nation community and failed to consult and engage with women and families appropriately. His patriarchal and colonial practice distorted the community's view of mediation and destabilised the community's gender balance.

By prioritising peace projects like the one mentioned above, Helen sees that First Nation communities can achieve justice and interrupt the cycles of violence. These approaches can begin to heal the disenfranchisement, the void in services and the crisis of imprisonment of First Nation communities. While grants are welcome, she advocates for regular and reliable funding from governments rather than one-off sums to deal with a crisis. Crucially, First Nations traditional peacebuilding approaches should be acknowledged, supported and embraced in policy and practice, and funded by governments in line with Article 38 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

police, magistrates and village mediators, to address land conflicts in four locations across Bougainville. Members noted how these activities facilitated access to training and peace dialogues for youth and illiterate people by using local languages. These programmes were hugely beneficial, as "in the past [the participants] may not have been able to be in dialogues with leaders at policy levels."

These funds were enabling both in terms of the activities they facilitated, and because they deepened the credibility of this work with other donors, which led to further funding.

"We can't spend all day trying to build peace and then deal with all these boxes and logframes."

EMMA LESLIE

Good practices embedded in genuine partnerships with donors can also be hugely beneficial for women mediators. Emma Leslie shared an experience of feeling very challenged by donors seeking to "reorganise our work into their boxes."

She explained that her team "evaluated all our donors based on shared values, vision, shared analysis, flexibility, real partnership, more than money. It had to be about really working together. One national donor stood out as a true partner." She noted that "we had calls with the ambassador to say what we thought; she would say the same; it was very frank and open." This reciprocal dialogue was instrumental in creating a genuine donor partnership.

However, such partnerships are rare. Case Study 3 demonstrates that while funding can facilitate good programmes, it is limiting when it does not take context into account.



One member pointed out that even when funding is designed to be flexible, access can become almost impossible when rules around foreign funding change. She noted how, at a time of historic need, India changed its Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) requirements, making it more difficult for NGOs to access relief support. It is important for donors to explore avenues for policy advocacy to guarantee support and funding to civil society, particularly to women at the frontlines of conflict settings.

“Rather than just funding people to ‘do do do’, we also need to give people the space to reflect and think these things through differently.”

MEREDITH PRESTON MCGHIE

What also emerged as deeply needed for women mediators is the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. As Meredith Preston McGhie noted, “one of the challenges for women [in this field] is that they are called on to do so much, nobody gets to take a step back and figure out bigger thoughts.”

This is particularly the case for women, given the additional caregiving responsibilities they tend to have. However, the constant pressures on all peacebuilders to produce, perform and succeed does not serve

mediators of any gender, let alone the achievement of sustainable peace. This points to the importance of funding initiatives that support individual wellbeing as well as programmes and activities.

Two members spoke of the immense value of attending retreats; particularly the Unyoke Reflective Practice Retreats for peacebuilders that provide the space for reflection and inspiration that is so sorely needed. Florence Mpaayei explained that these retreats are “not about strategic plans or theories of change. You share about yourself as a person; how your journey in building peace has been; the highlights and fears, where you felt broken, made wrong decisions, didn’t know what to do”, in a safe, confidential, and non-judgmental space. Florence described these retreats as “re-humanising processes” that have been restorative and important for her mediation work. As she noted, “getting funding for women who are in the front lines of dicey conflict settings to attend these sorts of retreats is very important.” Moreover, given their therapeutic orientation, these retreats may also help to facilitate the healing of trauma experienced during difficult work at the front lines of conflict.

The case studies and experiences here evidence the benefits of funding responsively, with minimal bureaucracy, in the spirit of true partnership and in support of self-reflexivity. In adopting these principles, donors and funding can be invaluable in the enabling of women mediators.

CASE STUDY 4

ATIA ANWAR ZOON Pakistan-administered Kashmir

Atia is Director of the Women Wing at the Kashmir Institute of International Relations (KIIR) working on mediation and peacebuilding in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Atia credits KIIR as enabling her work. She comes from a remote region of a conflict context, so “there are many struggles. No matter how passionate I may be, I need platforms that enable me.” Something she credits with being “very consciously provided” to her was mentorship from male senior leaders within her organisation. “These men have been part of public spaces and have good networks within policymaking [and] government structures. They have always been very helpful and my mentors in connecting me to these constituencies. [Then] I had all the freedom to do my work.”

Atia’s recent research documented the impact of conflict on women living on the Line of Control (LoC). This research required her to travel to

remote areas where, “as a woman, she [would have] faced suspicion that, coming from the city: ‘is she bringing a foreign agenda?’” However, Atia’s senior organisational leadership connected her to community leaders locally, which provided Atia with credibility and the necessary access to do her work.

In an interview with Ershad Mahmud, Director of the Centre for Peace, Development and Reforms, a KIIR partner, he shared how as a senior director he had deliberately encouraged Atia to take on a leadership role, based on his recognition of the importance of including women in peacemaking. He noted that he had sometimes needed to facilitate Atia’s access to certain stakeholders and networks in subtle ways, and had encountered some minor discriminatory attitudes, but that his status had helped to overcome these. Mr Mahmud played a key role in normalising Atia’s involvement in mediation and he saw this normalisation as key to her success.

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AND PRACTICE

The impact of internal culture and practice of mediation and peacemaking institutions on women mediators and their practice cannot be overstated – whether within regional bodies, INGOs or organisations operating at national and community levels.

Several WMC members spoke of a ‘cowboy’s club’ or ‘boysy’ atmosphere within many mediation institutions and spaces around the world. One woman mediator described a sense of incongruity in her work with male mediators in her institution in the Global North, who are “exceptionally good listeners [in conflict settings] and at building relationships, and yet in a room of ‘the mediators’, all of a sudden you are in debate mode rather than dialogue; everyone is trying to ‘one-up’ each other.” She noted that this was particularly noticeable when meetings constituted less than 30% women. Another member referred to “the hardness of male spaces” in which conflicts are technically analysed and discussed with a ‘remoteness’ from the suffering of those most affected by conflict. These members noted that they do not feel that these approaches come from a deliberate suppression of female voices but are rather

due to a lack of awareness of unexamined patriarchal privilege. Other WMC members noted damaging practices and narratives around appearing ‘in demand’ and constantly travelling as part of what they describe as the ‘male mediation model’ – which COVID-19 has disrupted, with travel-as-work no longer the main measure of working hard and competency.

WMC members have also experienced men as agents of positive change within their respective institutions. Members spoke of how male directors have provided practical support at early stages of their careers (see Case Studies 4, 5 and 6). It is important to acknowledge this, while emphasising that male staff at all levels, especially those in decision-making roles, must recognise their responsibility to enable women mediators and be accountable for this, rather than see these efforts as charity.

Further ways in which institutions and organisations have created enabling environments for WMC members have been through ensuring their early exposure to mediation and dialogue processes, and providing them with strong, widely respected platforms to conduct their work (see Case Study 5). As indicated in the section on informal support, institutions can also help enable women mediators through making practical and responsive support available to women with young children or other caring responsibilities (see Case Study 6).

CASE STUDY 5

FLORENCE MPAAYEI Kenya

Florence is the Senior Advisor of peacebuilding practice at Hekima Institute for Peace Studies and International Relations and, since January 2021, a Senior Mediation Adviser on the UN Standby Team. During Kenya's 2007/8 post-election violence, Florence was asked to "build consensus among the Kenyan Women Consultative Group (WCG) who were polarised and hurting, and needed a safe space to be candid about how we felt [about] our ethnic identities and political affiliations." With Florence in a key facilitation role, the WCG provided recommendations to the national negotiating teams, several of which were incorporated into Kenya's final national agreement.

Florence credits an institution she worked for early in her career as a critical enabling factor: "When very young, I worked for Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI)-Africa, which was conducting pioneering peacebuilding work across Africa. The Director

was a seasoned peace practitioner. Organising and participating in debriefing sessions helped me witness and learn. When violence started in 1992 following the general elections, we worked in the North Rift helping ethnically divided communities begin a dialogue process. I saw the importance of garnering local ownership and government involvement in peace processes. Accompanying my director and colleagues meant that when the 2007/8 violence happened, I could be called upon."

In 2013 a national insider mediation team formed to prevent electoral-related violence re-emerging. When Florence saw that the team was all male, she called a member who she knew from earlier work and requested to join – and was admitted into – the group. The group maintained high-level dialogue with key stakeholders in the 2013 and 2017 general elections.

Of course, patriarchal values of hierarchy and competition – as compared with power sharing and collaboration – are not just perpetuated by men. WMC members described experiences of gatekeeping and hierarchical behaviour from senior women in institutions. One member shared that in her institution senior female staff "do not share their expertise". Another WMC member expressed concerns that "the women who tend to progress up mediation institutions may have learned that to be taken seriously is not to pipe up on gender issues: then you are seen as non-threatening. [The men] will be more prepared to give you access to the next levels up."

As observed by one WMC member, there is a tendency for mediation institutions to think that "doing better on gender equality is going to be this incredibly overwhelming task" involving a "big draconian policy shift". But, as she highlighted, "you can effect change if you have quite small strategic shifts in certain parts of the organisation. Small organisational shifts to adjust or create missing policies, or address gender imbalance on expert or consultant rosters can lead to tangible achievements. They can often be more quickly and easily achieved than major policy decisions." Identifying and implementing a mix of concrete and subtle shifts can accelerate more equitable institutional cultures in which women, indeed all staff, can thrive (see Case Study 7).

However, institutions must go further than operationalising the enabling factors outlined in the case studies here. They must move towards reflection on how pervasive patriarchal norms may infuse institutional cultures regardless of the numbers of women in their midst. This is necessary if the masculine dominance of institutions described at the beginning of this section is to be transformed. Attention must also be placed on the less tangible, more subtle dynamics which make up institutional cultures. This requires the creation of spaces for diverse women – including younger or less experienced staff and those of other marginalised identities – to share their lived experiences within the organisation and to be heard, using processes that are safe and promote genuine sharing. Leadership must listen to these experiences and take action accordingly.

Ultimately, by doing the work to create equitable, just and genuinely reflective workplaces, institutions can play a hugely enabling role for women mediators. Institutional good practice and culture can also support the much-needed transformation of the mediation system.



CASE STUDY 6

MEREDITH PRESTON MCGHIE Canada

Meredith is Secretary General of the Global Centre for Pluralism and has managed various peace processes across Africa. For Meredith, a central enabling factor was the particular internal institutional practices of an INGO employer early in her career, which she described as “massively enabling as a mother with young children. They were very good at setting the tone when I got pregnant that I could ask [for support]”.

“They paid for my [caregiver] when I facilitated a group of Sudanese leaders in Cairo when [my son] was six months old. They helped with the logistics of being a professional working mother, breastfeeding and not wanting to leave [the children] right away. I trained on the peace

mediation course for the Swiss government. The first year I taught it Swisspeace obtained increased budget support and my INGO flew my mother from Vancouver, and my son from Nairobi. They covered their [accommodation]. They also did the training around my breastfeeding schedule.”

“When [my children] were toddlers and my husband travelled for work, I was called to meet a senior political figure. He was in London [and] could meet me two days later. I called the deputy director and said ‘I must take my kids’, and the organisation paid for all our flights.” Meredith notes that for an organisation to provide this kind of significant material support it needs not only political will but, critically, the resources and flexibility.

STAKEHOLDERS

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP

“Women’s equal leadership and participation are fundamental. Now is the time for gender parity in governments, parliaments, corporate boards and institutions everywhere”

SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, ANTÓNIO GUTERRES¹⁵

In March 2021, the UN reached a significant internal milestone by achieving gender parity among UN Heads and deputy Heads of Mission (D/HoM). This is important progress. As noted by one WMC member who worked with various UN missions, women D/HoMs can greatly shift the dynamics within missions and make the

environments less challenging for women.¹⁶ However, it should be reiterated that gender parity must not be conflated with gender equality. It is also important to undertake an intersectional analysis of which women are in such positions.

Strong leadership that advocates for more women across all areas of the UN has played an important role. This research found that it has been small teams of women in other areas of the organisation, such as members of the Leadership Support Section, that have done much of the heavy lifting to make this happen. This demonstrates the importance of women being placed in strategic positions within international and regional institutions.¹⁷

To date there has been less success in raising the number of women Special Envoys, and there are less women appointed as Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSG) than as Deputy SRSGs. Both Special Envoys and SRSG positions involve buy-in from key member states and support, or non-objection, from the Security Council.

CASE STUDY 7

CATE BUCHANAN Australia

Cate is a mediation and inclusive process design specialist, working with the UN Special Envoy’s Office for Yemen as a Senior Mediation Adviser, for the Myanmar Livelihoods and Food Security Fund as a Conflict Adviser, and as a Senior Adviser to the United Nations Population Fund Myanmar on conflict-related sexual violence.

Cate reflected that some of the more effective efforts when assisting mediation and peacebuilding organisations to promote gender inclusion relate to identifying practical internal organisational shifts. This perspective is partly shaped by responding to the demand from mediation actors for ‘practical’ support, and disillusionment with the dominant focus of the WPS agenda on more global norms: a perspective also expressed by several WMC members. “In recent work conducting inclusion reviews for mediation organisations and donors, what I find time and again to be more effective, and leading to smaller but perhaps more sustained gains, is looking at the micro-systems within organisations and where gender inclusion can be elevated through a mix of practice and policy shifts.”

Cate observes that many mediation organisations rely heavily on consultants and advisers to undertake their “formative, political work”. This preferences men from militaries, governments, or non-state armed groups who are “highly prized in the mediation community.” This raises questions as to where the sector looks for expertise and what is valued as expertise. This model means that it is still difficult for female staff – younger and older – to progress in the mediation field, as they are often relegated to logistics and in ‘enabling’ roles. “This old approach creates ‘natural’ pathways consolidating male domination of mediation. If you disrupt the ways these roles are determined, you can change things – who advises, who analyses, who does the initial contact work with belligerents.” These old approaches determine who has access to opportunity and whose expertise is valued. Cate reflected that these exclusive dynamics can be shifted once they are “seen”, particularly at senior levels within organisations, but this requires consistent leadership and being prepared to disrupt the status quo.

STRATEGIC RESOURCING

Strategic and flexible funding that is responsive to specific needs is a vital enabler for women mediators in international, national and community spaces. Examples of this type of funding are the WMC Strategic Mediation Fund (SMF) discussed in Section 2, and the Rapid Response Window (RRW) on women's participation in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements – the latter established by the UN's Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF).ⁱⁱ The SMF is open only to WMC members and advisors, but the RRW is open to all women mediators globally.

AMBASSADORS AND SPECIAL ENVOYS

Two WMC members noted the important role that in-country ambassadors can play in supporting women mediators. One member noted the support provided by an in-country ambassador from a donor country, who was open to engaging constructively with the member's context-specific knowledge. Another observed the important role that ambassadors can play in supporting women's inclusion in negotiations: for example,

Deirdre Ní Fhallúin, the Irish Ambassador to Cyprus since October 2017, has initiated a number of lesson sharing events and workshops between women.

Special Envoys are still overwhelmingly male. Like ambassadors, they have an important role to play in fostering women's inclusion in international mediation processes, and in so doing to recognise this as a responsibility rather than a 'nice to have' addition. For example, during the Syria talks the UN Special Envoy established the Syrian Women's Advisory Board (WAB), which he consulted regularly.¹⁸

While this was a positive initiative, critics have pointed out that the WAB was predominantly populated by elite women and lacked buy-in from women's movements. One WMC member noted that Syrian women had been mediating between conflict parties before the talks and should have been given far more credit. Special Envoys and organisations supporting peace processes need to take this into account and push for greater inclusion of diverse women from civil society, recognising that international teams often arrive long after dialogue initiatives have begun.

RAPID RESPONSE WINDOW

This mechanism consists of two streams of funding, designed in consultation with UN agencies, UN Women country offices, various INGOS, NGOs and networks.

Direct Support (Stream 1) directly finances costs to the individual or civil society organisation (CSO) (up to \$25,000 USD) to access and participate in peace processes, such as travel costs, childcare and other logistical outlays. Under this stream, the applicant receives support in the form of a service rather than a grant: for example, flights can be arranged and purchased by WPHF on behalf of the recipient.

Short-term Grants (Stream 2) is aimed at NGOs and CSOs to assist with short-term projects (up to \$100,000 USD for a maximum of six months) aimed at tackling immediate barriers to women's inclusion in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements more broadly.

The RRW mechanism is designed to be highly practical and to help women deal with logistical, technical and monetary barriers that may prevent access to negotiations. In this way it is a 'fill the gap' fund to cover unforeseen logistical costs. The two stream approach provides opportunities to better connect community voices to international or regional processes by facilitating women from community spaces to participate in peace negotiations directly or on advisory teams.

The straightforward application process for the RRW has been designed to maximise accessibility: for example, the Direct Support stream has removed requirements for a logical framework; and potential applicants can attend a webinar in multiple languages which provides detailed advice on the application process. RRW processes are monitored and updated based on feedback from applicants; this commitment to ensuring that funding processes evolve in response to the needs of potential recipients is both progressive and important.

ii. Pilot initiatives for stream 1 have been made in relation to initiatives in Afghanistan, where the RRW supported the inclusion of four women in the Doha talks. It also supported the cost of a programme coordinator in Afghanistan: a focal point to ensure that the 'Track 2' process is inclusive and participatory. In Mali the fund has been used for local consultations to strengthen advocacy initiatives for women's participation in the implementation of the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation.



CONTRADICTIONS

This research has demonstrated a number of inconsistencies between the views of stakeholders and members which are important to note.

Firstly, a number of stakeholders noted that there is a need for greater clarity on establishing “who counts as women mediators” and a need for more clarity on the difference between women as third-party mediators, as members of a negotiating or technical team, as special envoys, or as part of community or national dialogues. However, for many women mediators there is significant value in remaining ‘unboxed’, as this allows more scope to move between different mediation and peacemaking spaces, and for those working in community spaces, to avoid being categorised as peacebuilders without recognition of their mediation skills.

Secondly, interviews with both members and stakeholders noted that international and regional bodies tend to prioritise women from the diplomatic community for positions of Special Envoy or other high-level positions. Members strongly advocate for decision-makers to recruit from beyond this small and elite pool, acknowledging that the space must adapt to allow them to enter.

OPPORTUNITIES

Representatives of women mediator networks such as FemWise-Africa and the Arab Women Mediators Network expressed the need to broaden and diversify their membership to include more women operating in informal and community spaces.

Discussions also highlighted opportunities created through institutional restructures. For example, the African Union’s (AU) recent restructure now brings together the three main entities that work on gender: FemWise; the Gender, Peace, and Security Programme; and the Special Envoy on Women, Peace, and Security, Madame Bineta Diop. This new configuration may offer an opportunity for greater integration of FemWise members into mediation processes.

Similarly, the creation of a specialist mediation and reconciliation hub within the new Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation in the UK FCDO has the potential to support better inclusion of women in mediation, not only with regard to promoting and supporting women as mediators but also within the provision of technical support to teams.

Greater coordination within institutions requires establishing mechanisms for passing on institutional knowledge and sharing of useful resources. For national governments and regional and international institutions, this includes increasing engagement with the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks and using the WMC database of women mediators, as well as other tools such as the PeaceFem mobile phone app, which provides detailed information on women’s inclusion in peace processes globally.ⁱⁱⁱ

iii. The PeaceFem app also provides information on strategies used by women to influence peace agreements, factors for greater influence, gender provisions in the resulting peace agreements, and information on implementation: www.inclusivepeace.org/peacefem-app/

TRANSFORMING THE SYSTEM: FROM THE VERTICAL TO THE HORIZONTAL

While this report identifies key factors that can make a significant contribution to the meaningful inclusion of women in mediation processes, for many women mediators the notion of creating enabling environments does not go far enough. At the very heart of the agenda for increasing and recognising women's meaningful inclusion in mediation is the need to transform the wider system of mediation.

This is the position of various WMC members and some stakeholders. Dr Alhaji Sarjoh Bah, Chief Advisor at the AU Permanent Observer Mission to the UN, agreed that the practice of using former presidents and heads of state means that women are inevitably excluded because of the very limited number of women who have occupied these positions in Africa and globally. He therefore proposed that it is time to explore "the best practices with respect to how envoys are appointed and who is appointed." Dr Bah noted that the current model of selecting lead mediators/envoys requires some "serious reflection" in order for it to be more inclusive.

Some members working within regional and international spaces described the dominant model of mediation, in which an individual high-profile envoy with a diplomatic background is dispatched to a conflict context, as a 'big man mediation approach' inherited from the post-World War II era, with racist and sexist connotations. This view sees the current model as 'power focused', working only with elites or groups with access to weapons, and merely offering 'firefighting' solutions without taking into account the complexities on the ground.

Rather than seeking to change unequal power structures which produce crises of violence, current mediation efforts prioritise brokering agreements that stop the immediate manifestations of violence. As one WMC member stated:

"We are afraid of people dying in [war], but we don't mind when millions of people die because of underdevelopment and inequity. This is also where the mediation system is failing: it is not focused on conflict transformation and structural change but on patching up until we can get back to business."

The message here is to recognise structural violence as the primary form of violence, and to address this as a priority in peace mediation.

The mainstream funding approach also supports the current narrow, exclusive model of mediation. One member noted that there is such pressure to "get an agreement, because if I can get a signed piece of paper from the parties I can claim 'success' and the donors will fund us over other organisations." This model feeds into the 'boys club' that promotes competition over collaboration, and values performance and relentless achievement. The irony is that this model has not yielded very good results, with more than 50% of peace agreements failing within five years of signature.¹⁹ Greater involvement of women in formal processes would help to remedy this poor success rate. Members point out that the wider peacemaking system requires a more integrated, collaborative and longer-term approach to mediation and conflict transformation.

A challenge for women mediators working across all spaces is to manage the imperative to 'bring more women to the table', and at the same time to make the mediation system more diverse and equitable. Some members expressed despair that the broader WPS agenda has been depoliticised from its feminist and



anti-militarist origins.²⁰ In particular, the agenda may have promoted a preoccupation with women ‘at the table’, within a system which is arguably ineffective at ending violent conflict. As one WMC member said:

“The purpose is to end war, not to manage it or make it an NGO or UN project.”

As expressed by another member, the goal is not to bring “more of the same” people to the table, but to bring those who are willing and able to transform inequalities. Emma Leslie shared her view that what is needed is a “flipping [of the system] from the vertical to the horizontal.” Florence Mpaayei and Emma Leslie noted that this requires greater involvement of women mediators, but also a promotion of qualities such as collaboration, deep listening, empathy and responsiveness in mediators of all genders.

Many WMC members spoke of bringing this different approach to their mediation work. As an alternative to the dominant model, mediations can be conducted by groups of mediators who operate at a much lower profile than an envoy, without media attention, and work inclusively with the parties in conflict and all stakeholders, including ‘spoilers’.^{iv}

These approaches may involve bringing in local or regional expertise, conducting early gender-sensitive participatory analysis of the conflict drivers with all parties, listening carefully to parties’ needs, and being open-minded and responsive even when these needs are purely logistical or their relevance is not immediately apparent. For such innovative and effective approaches to be implemented, it is vital that national, regional and international institutions and donors recognise and support them.

iv. Spoilers are conflict actors who strive to undermine or prevent peaceful and effective resolution of conflicts for a range of motives. Spoilers may include militia, governments, diasporas, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

- a. Priority recommendation: Nominate a diversity of women onto mediation teams internationally and nationally, and create mechanisms to achieve this. This includes mediation technical teams.**

Actively seek a diversity of women to be nominated to technical teams. This should go beyond the civil service and diplomatic core to include women from civil society with extensive mediation experience and other relevant skills. A useful resource is the database of women mediators across the Commonwealth and other such databases, including at national level.²¹ To this end, engage closely with mediation networks and organisations to find skilled and diverse women suitable for inclusion in mediation and technical teams. Through the UN, advocate for domestic laws to mandate inclusion of women at all negotiation tables.

- b. Develop constructive partnerships with domestic and international mediation institutions that support women mediators. Provide financial support for women mediators operating at community levels.**

Partnerships with mediation institutions can be most effective when there is a reciprocal knowledge flow and support system in place. This means that national governments must be responsive to knowledge produced by partner organisations and take into account the voices of local women. This can be fostered through dialogues between grassroots women and governments, using approaches that recognise and seek to equalise power imbalances. It could also include opportunities for women to engage with an in-country ambassador.

It is critical for national governments to fund mediation initiatives conducted by women at community levels and to support their efforts to educate the public on the role and value of mediation. This can be achieved through strategic funding to community organisations that employ or engage women mediators, or directly to networks of women mediators operating at community levels. Strategic funding is most effective when it is flexible and responsive to applicants' needs.

- c. Encourage in-country ambassadors, special advisers, and other eminent persons including religious leaders to support women's inclusion in mediation in multiple ways.**

Where in-country ambassadors, special advisers, and other eminent persons including religious leaders are seen to support and encourage women mediators, this can raise visibility of the work and expertise of women mediators. This may include ambassadors opening or attending events led by a community-based mediation centre, or supporting a high-level process through forming an inclusive 'group of friends' to the talks, which can raise issues of women's meaningful and sustained inclusion.

- d. Police and local government to work collaboratively and supportively with women mediators in communities.**

Police and local government can help raise the profile of community women mediators and their work. In contexts where police/civilian relations are not contentious, and where there is no danger of backlash or intimidation of communities, this can be achieved through local authorities taking an active interest in women mediators' work within the community. Many women mediators are ideally placed to provide training to local police and in doing so can build constructive relationships between the police and the community. This could also lead to referrals to women mediators from the police, where appropriate.

REGIONAL AND MULTILATERAL ORGANISATIONS

- a. Priority recommendation: Encourage member states to nominate women mediators, particularly those who can bring an inclusive, equitable, and gender-sensitive lens to mediation processes. Broaden the selection of women for mediation roles beyond only those with a background in civil service or diplomacy.**

Regional and multilateral organisations have a key role to play in encouraging member states to nominate women mediators. These organisations should also promote moving beyond use of predominantly former

heads of state and presidents to conduct formal high-level mediations. Women relevant to the respective context with extensive mediation experience from civil society and other such backgrounds should be considered, ensuring inclusion of women of diverse ethnicities and ages. Women mediator networks and databases can be a resource for international and regional bodies, and a source of knowledge on individual women with specific types of mediation or contextual knowledge. These organisations should encourage the selection of women – and mediators in general – on the basis of their inclusive and transformative approaches to mediation and their technical expertise.

b. Ensure women mediator network databases are integrated into the mediation rosters held by regional and international organisations.

It is no longer enough to say that the women mediators cannot be found. The women are there and the databases exist. It is essential that the databases are utilised in the decision-making process of who gets to be a mediator and who gets to sit on a mediation team, and that the visibility and credibility of women mediators is amplified and made known as part of these processes.

INGOS AND NGOS

a. Priority recommendation: Review workplace cultures, policies and practices to ensure they do not reinforce patriarchal and exclusionary norms and are supportive environments for all women staff.

Attention to internal institutional cultures, policies and processes is critical for mediation organisations to ensure they are supportive environments for women mediators and staff. This requires recognising cultures or 'ways of being' within institutions that may be exclusionary, even subtly so. Ensure that reflective spaces are created to review organisational cultures. Establish family-friendly policies such as adequate maternity and paternity leave; recognition of work-life balance; flexible working hours for staff with caregiving responsibilities; shorter-term deployments for parents; and psychosocial support access. Also create and implement anti-sexual harassment, safeguarding and protection policies to protect all persons from harm, abuse, neglect, bullying, harassment and exploitation in any form, with zero tolerance for harassment and abuse.

b. Make use of the women mediator network databases as a resource when seeking external mediators for assignments.

INGOs and NGOs could further engage women mediation networks as a resource for recruitment. INGOs and NGOs should review their existing rosters of external mediation consultants to ensure that women mediators are fairly represented and contracted. They should also routinely provide all individuals on their mediation rosters with meaningful, participatory gender training.

c. Ensure that young women mediators, including those from minority groups, are provided with exposure, entry points, opportunities and platforms.

INGOs and NGOs can play an important role in providing young women staff with platforms and access to develop their mediation skills. This can include training, mentorship programmes, exposure to mediation processes and peer-to-peer learning initiatives. Senior staff of all genders can make particular efforts to support younger staff formally and informally and should be held accountable for doing so. Promotion of younger staff members should be accompanied by context-specific safety measures.

ALL STAKEHOLDERS

a. Routinely conduct comprehensive gender training for the mediation teams deployed by national, regional and multilateral bodies.

Trainings for mediation teams should include information on gendered power dynamics within mediation teams and how to address them. They should also advise on inclusion of human security and gender-related issues at the negotiation table. Trainings on gender norms should be participatory and based on lived experience, rather than overly-theoretical, so as to avoid 'gender fatigue'. Consider employing women mediators with established skills as trainers.

b. Engage with a broad, intersectional range of research on women's roles in mediation, including research produced from the Global South.

Refrain from prioritising research and knowledge from the Global North above locally-produced knowledge. Ensure that particular attention is paid to research that demonstrates women's multiple roles and skills in peace mediation, and the diversity of women in these roles, both domestically and cross-regionally.

c. Recognise the value and effectiveness of indigenous mediation approaches.

Recognition of indigenous mediation and peacebuilding approaches must be reflected in legislation, policy and long-term funding. It is critical for indigenous approaches to be enabled, resourced and embraced in policy and practice, and funded by national and state governments for restorative justice purposes under Article 38 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (and Articles 15, 18, 19, 23, 34, 35, 37 and 40).²²

d. Donors of all types to fund women’s organisations and mediation organisations flexibly, responsively, and with minimal bureaucracy.

Women’s and mediation organisations conducting complex work in often difficult conflict circumstances are frequently overburdened with reporting requirements for donors. Donors of all types, including governments, could make funding calls and reporting requirements simpler and less time-consuming. Instead of lengthy proposals, short expressions of interest, interviews at early stages, the use of logical, adaptive and responsive frameworks would reduce this burden. Proposals received in a broad diversity of languages should be catered for. Donors should also consider funding ‘time out’ reflection opportunities for mediators which are critical for their personal wellbeing, addressing trauma and, in turn, aiding effectiveness in their peace efforts.

e. Ensure that where women mediators are recruited for external assignments, women mediators and their team are provided with safeguarding and training appropriate to the context.

Given that women mediators may face gender-specific insecurities during deployment in fragile contexts, organisations should ensure that women mediators are provided with appropriate security and protection, in consultation with the individuals themselves.

REGIONAL WOMEN MEDIATOR NETWORKS

a. Increase diversity within network membership and facilitate cross-context learning between members.

Some networks currently limit their membership to high-level diplomats and former heads of state. Membership of all networks could be extended to include women mediators from civil society, as well as those who do not have formal training but are skilled in practice. For the latter particularly, provide opportunities for cross-context exposure between network members to advance their learning.

b. Where appropriate, increase the recognition, visibility and profile of women mediators, using various forms of media and communications.

Create and share databases of women mediators, and their specific expertise, across networks and via connections to national governments and international and regional organisations. Use communications with INGOs, multilaterals and other platforms to promote individual women mediators, showcasing their specific areas of expertise, contextual knowledge or thematic skills.

Various forms of media can be used to raise the profile of women mediators and the visibility of their work across mediation spaces. This is particularly important for community mediators who may not have a high profile or use social media. Mediation networks can use their media platforms to do this, always ensuring great care, adherence to ethical standards, and in consultation with the respective individuals, mindful of risks associated with greater visibility.

ALL STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING REGIONAL WOMEN MEDIATOR NETWORKS

a. Use digital platforms to be more inclusive in meetings and events, taking into consideration the accessibility challenges that may be faced by some women.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms have been used to host online events with greater geographical reach and inclusivity than in-person meetings. A combination of in-person and digital engagements in future will further advance access to events. Networks and stakeholders should be aware of the challenges that some women face in securing reliable internet access and disparities in data costs, and should seek to mitigate these by contributing to connection costs or arranging internet access via partner organisations. Online meetings should be organised with adequate notice and at times that enable those in all time zones to attend.

6. CONCLUSION

Women mediators operate in complex and extremely challenging environments regardless of whether they are mediating in community, national or international spaces. The barriers they face are not only due to the inherent difficulties of working and mediating in conflict contexts, but also pre-existing exclusionary gender norms (which may have been further reinforced by conflict). These norms, although varying between geographical contexts, universally help shape scarcely visible but deep constraints for women seeking to use their skills to transform conflict and build sustainable peace.

This being said, the key enabling factors outlined in this report can greatly alleviate some of these barriers and constraints. They can even begin to dismantle some of the deep-rooted gender norms that women mediators face in their respective contexts. Many of these factors are specific measures and concrete actions that are very much within the power of external actors and stakeholders to put in place. Their implementation can make a huge difference in enabling women mediators to use their unique and transformative skills to respond to conflict.

The seven case studies in this report illustrate this, evidencing how: (1) increasing visibility and recognition of women mediators, while simultaneously ensuring their protection; (2) ensuring their political access through influence and sponsorship; (3) resourcing – and using as a resource – women mediator networks; (4) providing easily manageable, flexible funding; and (5) transforming restrictive masculinity and femininity norms, and building equitable, gender-inclusive institutional cultures,

offer women mediators the possibility of conducting mediations in the ways that they see fit.

Acting on the recommendations of this report will require strong political will on the part of stakeholders – some of whom have significant power, such as donors, multilateral and regional bodies, governments, and INGOs. At the heart of the approach required is the notion that when power is shared no-one ultimately loses out: sharing power allows for others to obtain it too. This idea is particularly important for a peace process. It both highlights and challenges the often transactional nature of mediation processes (particularly those at high level), the current approach to multilateralism, and the geopolitics which underpin these.

Moreover, there needs to be a fundamental coherence and commitment within governments to their support of women mediators and women in peacebuilding. WMC members argue that governments, especially in the Global North, must not simply carry on with 'business as usual' because they have provided some funding to women peacebuilders, but must use their political capital to transform peacemaking.

Confronting these systems and suggesting that there are other ways of governing and responding to conflict may appear highly challenging. As peacemakers, regardless of gender, it is our responsibility to imagine this transformed world and the pathways to its creation. Women mediators in the WMC network and beyond are already at the forefront of this journey.

WMC member at network meeting, Malaysia. © Conciliation Resources



APPENDIX 1

KEY RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

- i. Atia Anwar Zoon**
Pakistan-administered Kashmir
- ii. Barbara Tanne**
Bougainville
- iii. Bebhinn McKinley**
Northern Ireland
- iv. Cate Buchanan**
Australia
- v. Dudziro Nhengu**
Advisor to the Network, Zimbabwe
- vi. Elizabeth Solomon**
Caribbean
- vii. Emma Leslie**
Cambodia
- viii. Ezabir Ali**
Indian-administered Kashmir
- ix. Florence Mpaayei**
Kenya
- x. Hannah Forster**
The Gambia
- xi. Helen Bishop**
Australia
- xii. Meredith Preston McGhie**
Canada
- xiii. Nikhat Sattar**
Pakistan
- xiv. Rose Pihei**
Bougainville

Other WMC members that contributed to this research include:

- Etong Fanny Bessem**, Cameroon
Nolliettie Chihana, Malawi
Miriam Labanue, Bougainville

APPENDIX 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Two WMC network meetings were held online in February 2021 where the initial ideas for the research were gathered.

A series of individual semi-structured interviews were held online with a diversity of network members. These interviews used a predetermined set of questions but allowed scope for members to go beyond these questions where they wanted to add extra comments within the framework of the overall research questions. Twelve members of the network participated in interviews, in addition to one advisory member. In this sample there was representation from all five regions of the Commonwealth. A focus group was also held with 10 members.

In addition to interviews with members the study included semi-structured interviews and discussion groups with a number of stakeholders. These included the United Nations (UN) Department for Political Affairs and UN Women, African Union, European Union, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, as well as representatives of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediators, the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa) and the Arab Women Mediators Network – League of Arab States. We also included interviews with the Conflict Resolution Unit in Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs and the Irish Ambassador to Cyprus. This inclusion was because Ireland currently holds a seat on the UN Security Council and is co-chair of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security.

The research findings were analysed by the two consultants and written into this report which was shared with WMC members for comments and feedback. A workshop was held in March 2021 for initial feedback on recommendations, which was attended by 10 WMC members. This was followed by a final validation workshop in May 2021 which was attended by 11 WMC members. A further four WMC members provided feedback afterwards via email.

ENDNOTES

1. Conciliation Resources. 'Women Mediators: Bridging the Peace Gap' (2020): www.c-r.org/learning-hub/women-mediators-bridging-peace-gap
2. Conciliation Resources. 'Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth': www.c-r.org/programme/women-mediators-across-commonwealth
3. Conciliation Resources. 'New database puts women at the forefront of peacemaking' (2021): www.c-r.org/news-and-insight/new-database-puts-women-forefront-peacemaking
4. Current statistics on women in mediation are a stark reminder that there is still a long way to go in meaningfully fulfilling this commitment. Between 1992 and 2018, women only constituted 3% of mediators and 13% of negotiators within high level negotiations. See: www.politicalsettlements.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WPS-Paper-2_Finalfeb2021.pdf. For information on 20 years of UNSCR1325, see Peace Women: www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/WILPF_UNSCR-1325-at-20-Years_Web.pdf
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Conciliation Resources, Burghley Yard,
106 Burghley Road, London NW5 1AL UK

@ cr@c-r.org

+44 (0)20 7359 7728

www.c-r.org

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