

## Youth As Mediators: A Guide

*"It's important to engage youth because they are the generation responsible for the future; they are the leaders, development actors and civil servants of the next governments. Thus, involving them in peace work means preparing a safer peaceful future." —Peace and Conflict Student, Juba University*

### UNDERSTANDING MEDIATION:

Mediation is a process of dialogue in which conflicting parties transform their perceptions of and relationships with each other, often facilitated by an impartial third party. The aim of mediation is often to negotiate on what was causing the conflict with the hope of preventing or transforming violent conflict. This process can take place in a wide range of different situations, including mediation between governments, opposition parties, armed groups, or citizens. As such, there are many ways in which young people can get involved in peace mediation processes. These can range from the work within the community, to the state level, to the national level.

*"Young mediators can work effectively when they are first exposed to conflict mediation at the outer layer of the framework, 'Outside the Room', mentored at the middle layer of the framework, 'Around the Room', and meaningfully engaged at the most important section of the framework, the 'Inside the Room'. This way, they can be able to achieve re-*

*sults at the inside discussion simply because they have fully understood the dynamics of the mediation process." —Interview, Peace and Conflict Student, University of Juba*

### Where does mediation happen?

To conceptualise the spaces where mediation takes place, it is useful to think of three layers, a model originally outlined in the "We Are Here" policy paper:

**IN THE ROOM:** this layer often gets the most attention in formal peace processes. "In the room" mediation is often between the negotiating teams of different conflicting parties. However, formal peace processes also sometimes account for participation of other stakeholders, such as civil society, in the room.

**AROUND THE ROOM:** this layer can create opportunities for formal participation in a peace process, without being directly in the room. In Around the Room mediation processes, young people are likely to be close to the peace agreement through connections with formal and informal mechanisms. This can involve young people being mediators at the local and sub-national levels. In these situations, young people act as insider mediators to mediate within communities in which they have a large number of trusted contacts and insider knowledge.

**OUTSIDE THE ROOM:** this layer represents the most informal level of the "We Are Here" framework, addressing informal or alternative mediation pro-

cesses. This can include mediating community level conflicts which can escalate to become more serious problems, using social media to engage in mediation or raising public awareness of conflict to put pressure on In the Room negotiations.

*"It depends from the empowerment level that the young mediators have reached. If they are not fully trained and mentored, they can be situated at 'Around the Room", but if they are adequately trained and have enough experience, they can be better engaged in the 'Inside the Room' arena."*

—Peace and Conflict Student, Juba University

*"The ideal place for young mediator's engagement in the 'We are Here' Framework is inside the room. This is because, they can effectively influence a win-win solution inside the room, not around or outside the room."* —Young Woman Peacebuilder, Juba, South Sudan

## PREPARING FOR MEDIATION:

*"The young people need to be trained and given access to apply the knowledge they acquire in mediation. The government and development partners should actively involve the youth in all their programs because they are the future and hope for peaceful communities and country."*

—Interview, Women Group Leader, Juba, South Sudan

Being prepared for mediation is extremely important at all three levels of the "We Are Here" framework. If a mediator is not adequately prepared, there is a risk that the violent conflict could escalate or continue with no agreement being reached. In particular, it is important to understand the different actors in a given conflict, the issues which are at stake (both obvious and hidden) and key dynamics. This will help a mediator to be prepared for issues that come up during a dialogue process. Key skills important for mediation include: problem-solving, impartiality, active listening, patience, teamwork and effective communication.

## Conflict analysis:

*"The crucial initial steps in mediation are conflict analysis and stakeholders' identification. They [the mediator] must properly know the underlying root causes of the problem and must have knowledge of the actors and their influencers."* —Interview, Young Woman Peacebuilder, Juba, South Sudan

Conflict analysis is extremely important when it comes to mediation as it enables mediators to find entry points, identify the relevant issues and needs of the conflicting parties, prepare for future negotiations through understanding the narratives of the conflicting parties, understand the core conflict drivers and how to minimize the potential harm caused to any parties. Interviews held in Juba, South Sudan, found that it is especially important to be able to conduct an effective conflict analysis before engaging in mediation. There are many ways to approach a conflict analysis. Two useful tools for preparing for mediation and visualising conflict analysis include:

- ➔ **Conflict Tree:** The conflict tree is a simple way to conduct a conflict analysis, and is particularly useful for understanding the root causes and effects of the conflict. The trunk of the tree represents the core issues of the conflict, the roots represent the causes and the branches represent consequences. This helps a mediator understand what are causes and what are consequences in a given conflict. *To read more on the conflict tree, click here:* <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261899/3-Understandingconflict.pdf/0f63c846-6942-4e8f-83c0-3626f2f73dfa>
- ➔ **Onion:** The onion model helps understand the behaviour of different actors in a conflict, with needs, interests and positions represented as different layers of an onion. This helps a mediator develop deeper insights into what drives the behaviour of each actor they are working with. *To read more on the onion, click here:* <https://unoy.org/downloads/youth-4peace-training-toolkit/>

## Questions to ask yourself before engaging in mediation:

Before engaging in mediation, it is important that the mediator is aware of what their role will be within the process and whether they are adequately trained to take part in this mediation. Interviews held with young mediators in Juba, South Sudan found that if a young person feels that they are not prepared to take on a specific mediation role, they should seek mentorship from more experienced mediators or work alongside a Civil Society Organization or other partner to ensure that they are ready for the mediation process. Additionally, it is important for young mediators to understand how their age and gender may impact their ability to mediate in different situations. The quote below is an example of some of the questions a mediator should ask themselves and the parties they are working alongside before engaging in mediation.

*"It's important to ask questions like, 'what's the problem?', 'what caused the problem?', 'how do you want the problem to be addressed?', 'who do you want to mediate the conflict?', 'what are you willing to compromise or not willing to compromise on?'. Understanding the aspect of compromise is very important."*

—Interview, Peace Activist, Juba

## Ethical concerns to consider before engaging in mediation:

*"Young mediators must be neutral in all their mediation attempts. They should cease to be aggressive when dealing with the rival parties. They should never take sides, have the ability to absorb confidentiality, and must be trusted by the community by being honest in their dealings."*

—Interview, Young Woman Peacebuilder, Juba, South Sudan

When preparing for mediation, it is important that mediators pay close attention to any ethical concerns that may arise when taking part in mediation.

This can be done by conducting an in-depth conflict analysis prior to engaging in mediation. Ethical issues which may arise include keeping information confidential, remaining impartial and treating conflicting parties equally. When working as a mediator, it is important that you Do No Harm, this means that mediators must pay close attention to conflict sensitivity, as this will allow mediators to maximize the benefit of their work, whilst minimizing any potential harm.

## PRACTICING MEDIATION:

### Challenges that young people may face when mediating:

*"You must be prepared for all sorts of discouraging questions from adults involved in the conflict. Thus, you need to be bold enough to prove your competence in bridging a durable peace among the conflicting parties."* —Interview, Young Woman Peacebuilder, Juba South Sudan

*"As a lady, they might not agree that a woman could adequately manage a conflict. Some could walk out, but it's upon the young mediator to portray a positive image of him or herself to win trust and confidence from the parties involved in a conflict being mediated."* —Interview, Young Woman Peacebuilder, Juba, South Sudan

As a young mediator, it is likely that you will face a number of challenges when practicing mediation. These challenges are largely caused by age and gender which can often affect the credibility of young mediators and make it more difficult to engage in intergenerational dialogue, however these challenges should not stop you from engaging in mediation. As the examples below show, challenges can be overcome and young people can become effective mediators.

## Examples of the work of young mediators:

**The experience Atap, a young woman mediator working with the National Women Empower-**

## ment and Rehabilitation Organization (NWERO) and Search for Common Ground in Juba, South Sudan:

*“The training has strengthened me in overcoming some barriers created by societal stereotypes or prejudices created against women in my community”*

Atap worked to empower a group of 21 young women with the necessary knowledge and skills to act as a mediator within their families and communities, and supported them to live peacefully with their families by educating them on issues such as sex and menstrual hygiene. She believes that the training that she has gained from NWERO built her confidence to overcome the challenges that are posed by being a young woman and enabled her to conduct mediation with both young and older women within her community. Atap's story is an example of how young people can engage in mediation in an *Outside the Room* setting.

### **The experience of Deborah, a woman mediator in Torit, South Sudan, who has worked alongside NWERO and Search for Common Ground:**

Deborah is a member of a young women mediators group, composed of 12 members. The group meets monthly to conduct conflict analysis, sharing experiences, documenting issues, and selecting those that they believe need the most immediate attention. Once issues are found, the group conducts community mediation meetings and engages in dialogue with community elders and chiefs to overcome the issues. Most recently, the group have mediated on issues around Gender-Based Violence, particularly the cultural practice of offering girls as life compensation property for people killed in intercommunal violence through customary arrangement and are in ongoing talks with community elders on this issue. Deborah is hopeful that continued dialogue and media awareness will result in the community abolishing negative practices. Training and community engagement have empowered these young women and positioned them as strong peacebuilders within their community.

### **The experience of the Joint Galkayo Youth Committee in Somalia** [\*\(Taken from the 'We Are Here' policy paper\)\*](#):

This is an example from the city of Galkayo in Somalia which shows how young people can come together to build bridges across lines of conflict. Galkayo saw the outbreak of violent conflict in 2015, between the two dominant clans of the city. In November 2016, *Inside the Room* mediation between the two clans led to the agreement of ceasefire to end the violence. A Joint Ceasefire Committee was created to oversee the implementation of the agreement, however even when this committee became more community focussed, women and young people were still excluded from the peace negotiations and formal processes.

With the support of the United Nations and peacebuilding organizations, local youth organizations campaigned for the establishment of the Joint Galkayo Youth Committee (JGYC). The committee was composed of members from both of the conflicting sides of Galkayo and is recognised as a formal platform for youth engagement in peacebuilding, however, the committee still failed to have much influence over community elders. This lack of recognition led to the JGYC organizing a 3-day peace conference to celebrate the UN International Day of Peace. The conference was a huge success and was attended by over 300 young people from both sides of Galkayo, as well as by Galkayo's leadership. The conference brought together conflicting parties who hadn't seen the 'other side' of the city for many years.

The success of this conference shows the importance of young people being engaged in *Outside the Room* mediation to build bridges across conflicting lines. Additionally, the conference's success demonstrates that if young people are determined to overcome barriers and challenges, they can work towards being included in achieving long-term peace.

## ADDITIONAL USEFUL DOCUMENTS:

**We Are Here: An integrated approach to youth inclusive peace processes.**

<https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2019-07/Global%20Policy%20Paper%20Youth%20Participation%20in%20Peace%20Processes.pdf>

**Peace Mediation Guidelines, European External Action Service.**

[https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eeas\\_mediation\\_guidelines\\_14122020.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eeas_mediation_guidelines_14122020.pdf)

**Making Women Count - Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations.**

<http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Making%20Women%20Count%20Not%20Just%20Counting%20Women.pdf>

**Youth transforming conflict toolkit**

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-12-youth-transforming-conflict>

**Youth4Peace Training Toolkit, United Network of Young Peacebuilders**

<https://unoy.org/downloads/youth4peace-training-toolkit/>

## PROJECT PARTNERS:



**#ANATABAN**