

Engaging Youth As Mediators: A Guide For Practitioners

"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

In 2015, the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security was passed, this resolution was the first of its kind and acknowledged the important and positive role of young people in the maintenance of peace and security. The resolution calls for "integrated mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute-resolution" to be created.

Youth are often seen as the perpetrators or victims of violence. This perception leads to them being understood to have limited roles in mediation processes both at the local and the national levels. This exclusion means that their extremely important perspectives and ideas are often ignored. To promote the role of young people in mediation, the present guidance aims to give practitioners and policy-makers a better understanding on the fundamental importance of the inclusion of youth in mediation, with the goal of enabling the meaningful participation of young people through developing **connections, capacity support and collaboration**. Guidance will be given on how to make connections with young mediators through mapping and outreach, how to effectively support and enhance the capacity of young mediators, and how to collaborate with young me-

diators. The document will be inspired by previous guidance documents and the real-life experiences of young mediators in South Sudan, with data from Key Informant Interviews playing a key role in influencing the guidance given.

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.

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, it is important that practitioners look across all three layers to engage youth in mediation. The three layers are detailed on the following page:

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 processes. 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.

*“Youth can be better engaged when **inside the room** to learn the clues for problem-solving from the experienced senior mediators and to directly get exposed to the resolution of complicated issues in mediation, which builds them up for the future.”*

—Young Woman Peacebuilder, Juba

MAPPING AND OUTREACH MEDIATION:

“The overall performance of the young person in problem-solving is what counts in the determination of potential mediators. Among their peers, there are certainly those young people with the natural capability of solving problems. They should be targeted when identifying prospective future mediators.” —Peace and Conflict Student, Juba University

Young mediators can be found through their work in the community, peacebuilding activities, educational settings and from recommendations from those within the community. However, a much wider scope of where to map young mediators can be seen in *figure 1*. By engaging young people who are not in education or involved in community work, a more diverse group of mediators can be mapped,

meaning that unskilled and vulnerable young people can also be engaged.

Mapping within the community:

Mapping should start with community level conversations; these conversations will give mappers a better idea of which youths and youth groups should be approached to become mediators. By holding conversations with the wide range of different community stakeholders shown in *figure 1* (taken from the [Mapping Young Leaders for Peace-building toolkit](#)), mappers can be sure that they will find recommendations of young mediators from both registered and unregistered youth structures. Young people within the community can also be given short questionnaires where they suggest young men and women within the community who they believe would make a good mediator.

Mapping within the community ensures that *insider mediators* are mapped and recruited. Young insider mediators are likely to have greater access to groups and people that outsiders do not, enhanced knowledge of the conflict and links to those involved in conflict.



When mapping young mediators, it is extremely important that this is a gender inclusive process, meaning that 50% female participation should always be aimed for, the mapping team should also be inclusive of both men and women. Women can be found in many of the same spaces as young men, however specific spaces such as women's groups are also great places to reach out to young women.

Triangulation:

Following community level conversations, triangulation should take place to analyse the names and groups that have been suggested. This allows the mappers to spot whether certain names or groups have been frequently mentioned, names that have been suggested by community leaders should be counted and compared to the names that have been suggested by the youth themselves. This will enable mappers to ensure that they can contact the best possible future mediators.

More information on mapping young mediators can be found [here](#).

SUPPORT:

Mediators come from all walks of life; therefore, it is necessary for capacity support and training programmes to acknowledge this diversity. Capacity development takes a wide range of forms, and can be pursued through training workshops & seminars, practical applications, coaching & mentoring, shadowing and web-based learning. Key skills that should be gained from capacity development include: problem solving, impartiality, patience, self-awareness, communication, teamwork and the ability to learn and reflect from the mediation process. By employing a wide range of capacity building initiatives, mediators can develop these key skills and the success of mediation projects is more likely.

Further information on how to implement the different approaches to capacity building and how potential future training programmes can take place can be found in the [UNOY Peacebuilders' Youth-4Peace Toolkit \(2018\)](#), the [EEAS Peace Mediation Guidelines \(2020\)](#), and the [UNDP's Supporting Insider Mediation \(2014\)](#).

Where is capacity support needed?

"Since the mediation process is a complex and flexible journey, young mediators should master the entire process (every aspect of the process). This

is important to make young people experts of the process, not only a single step." —Peace and Conflict Student, Juba University

The need for capacity support in all aspects of peace mediation was clear from the Key Informant Interviews conducted in Juba, South Sudan. Capacity support will help to enhance youth's abilities and the sustainability of their work. Capacity support can be provided directly from more experienced mediation practitioners, including those working for NGOs, donor agencies and national governments. This capacity support must enable the participation of young people ***In the Room, Around the Room*** and ***Outside the Room***. However, although capacity support is needed at all levels, interviewees in Key Informant Interviews believed that young people particularly need more training and mentorship on how to become In the Room Mediators, and how to mediate in these situations, as this is an area which young people feel that they are especially excluded from.

Interviewees also believed that more support is needed in helping young people to practically apply what they have learned through training and mentorship. By giving young people the ability to practice what they have learnt, their mediation skills will further develop and allow them to mediate in a wider range of settings.

Conflict analysis:

"Issue identification is the most crucial aspect of the mediation process. If the young mediators fail to identify the core issues (interests and actors) in a conflict, then they would equally fail in making the parties find a lasting solution to the conflict"

—Interview, Young Woman Peacebuilder, Juba

In addition to capacity support directly targeting mediation skills, support to develop conflict analyses can also be very important. Effective training in conflict analysis is vital for all mediation activities. Conflict analysis allows mediators to find mediation 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 harm caused to any parties, thus ensuring that the policy of Do No Harm is adhered to.

COLLABORATION:

“They need to involve the youth throughout the mediation process. There should be a close relationship not a distant one. The voices of the youth should be included both at the community and national level.”

—Interview, Young Woman Peacebuilder, Juba

Collaboration between young mediators, Civil Society Organizations, Non-governmental Organizations and government actors is extremely important for peacebuilding and peace mediation, as this will enable mediation to take place In the Room, Around the Room and Outside the Room. As the above quote demonstrates, close collaboration between all groups is necessary to ensure the effective participation of youth in mediation processes.

“At the local level, young mediators should work closely with the local authorities, such as the commissioners, chiefs and the local peace partners, while at the national level, young actors should engage with the ministries and commissions, directly or indirectly concerned with peace and conflict and other powerful international organizations such as the UN, IGAD etc.”

—Interview, Peace and Conflict Student,
Juba University

Governmental collaboration:

Key Informant Interviews conducted in Juba, South Sudan, found that government ministries such as the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport & the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare should collaborate with young people to enhance their opportunities as mediators. Specifically, interviewees suggested several ways in which government ministries could engage young people through mediation initiatives, including by:

- Creating a national network of young mediators.
- Offering capacity building and training initiatives.
- Introducing policies and laws that protect young peacebuilders.
- Increasing the involvement of young people in peace dialogues at the local and national levels.
- Supporting initiatives and policies which gain the trust of young people.
- Developing initiatives that encourage the equal participation of young women in mediation processes.
- Increasing the role of young people in *In the Room* mediation processes.

EXAMPLE COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN YOUNG MEDIATORS AND PRACTITIONERS AND DECISION-MAKERS:

The experience of Atap, a young woman mediator working with the National Women Empowerment 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 was mentored as a young women mediator as part of NWERO's project with the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF), the project provided her with the necessary knowledge and skills to become a mediator within her community and family.

The skills that Atap has gained have enabled her to lead a group of 21 young women to support them to live peacefully with their families by educating them on issues such sex and menstrual hygiene.

She believes that the training that she has gained from NWERO means that she is able to overcome the challenges that are posed by being young and a woman, meaning that she now has the confidence to mediate with both young and older women within the community.

This is an example of how young people can collaborate with practitioners to develop the necessary skills to 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 received training as part of the UNPBF project to enhance her mediation and community engagement skills.

The skills that she gained from her training have been put into practice as she has become a member of a young women mediators group, composed of 12 members. The group meets monthly to conduct a conflict analysis by sharing experiences, documenting issues, and selecting the issues that they believe need the most immediate attention. Once issues are found, the group conducts community mediation meetings and engage in dialogue with community elders and chiefs to overcome the issues. Training and community engagement have empowered these young women and positioned them as strong peacebuilders within the community.

This demonstrates collaboration between young people and practitioners leading to the enhanced engagement of young people, showing that if young people are given the chance to use their unique skills in real-life situations, they are able to make real changes within their communities.

Somalia—Establishing youth-led committees to influence peace ([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 peace-building 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 peace-building, 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

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>

Mapping Youth Leaders For Peacebuilding

<https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Mapping-Youth-Leaders-for-Peacebuilding.pdf>

Youth transforming conflict toolkit

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

Supporting Insider Mediation: Strengthening resilience to conflict and turbulence, UNDP.

<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Conflict%20Prevention/50380%20UNDP%20EU%20Guidance%20Note%20SUMMARY-LR.pdf>

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