

# Insider Mediators

## Retreat on Informal Peace Processes: Learning from experiences of “Insider Mediators”

Schloss Münchenwiler, Switzerland, June 12-14, 2008

### Protocol

by Oliver Wolleh, October 2008

### Introduction & Objectives

The overall aim of this retreat was to offer space for learning and exchange between a number of persons that had participated in peace processes in an informal capacity.

The Retreat was organised by the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support (Berlin), in co-operation with the Mediation Support Project of Swisspeace / CSS-ETH Zurich and the Swiss Department for Foreign Affairs. Financial

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Often official peace processes are initiated, or supplemented by informal, non official peace processes. Such processes can be and are facilitated by people from the conflict regions, with in-depth knowledge and great dedication to work on the conflict.

During the retreat, there was a common understanding regarding the definition of an “insider” mediator. “Insider” mediator, we defined as:

people who are directly affected by the conflict, either because it is taking place in their own country, or in a neighbouring country. They are directly affected by the conflict and have in-depth knowledge of the stakeholders, the context and history of the conflict. This provides them with many strengths (and some weaknesses) compared to other mediators coming from the outside.

In this respect the workshop took focus on two elements of peace processes – “state involvement” and “informality”. The cases under examination were not on the grass roots or track 2 level but had to involve a state as a party to the conflict. In addition, it focused on mediators who did not have an official mandate but operated on an informal basis.

The retreat strived for learning about the role and potential of local and regional “insider” mediators taking a case-approach by focusing cases of Nepal, Burundi, and the Philippines, and how their work is complementary to official peace processes. What is the specific role, potential and challenges of local and regional “insider” mediators in today’s peace processes?

Lessons learned and assumptions so far:

- Each conflict is unique.
- Track 1 processes need to be complemented.
- One has to speak also to the “bad guys” even if they might be listed.
- Peace processes have to be as inclusive as possible.
- Local ownership is the biggest advantage and learning from practice is important.

**A first mapping brought about the following topics and questions.**

Topics	Issues / Questions
Concept	Is there an animal called Insider Mediator? Clarity in the distinction Insider-Outsider Mediator How to describe my work precisely?
Transfer of lessons and insights	Success cases and failure cases. Learning from ... From experience to good practice. How to document our work?
Track linkages	Complex multi-actor processes Multi-track 1,5
Resources	What do Insider Mediators offer? Cultural Sensitivity
Roles	Unseen / unheard!?
Mandates	How to gain acceptance?
External Support	Training Skills How to teach?
Open / General questions	How to nurture ripeness? How to deal with resistance? How to deal with “bad boys”? How to deal with emotions? Constructive processes of inclusion and exclusion How to preserve strengths and motivation in protracted situations? Social change needs more time than an individual lifetime. What comes after mediation?

## What is the unique added value of the Insider Mediator?

Three working groups were formed working on the cases Nepal, Burundi and the Philippines exploring the value and profile of an Insider Mediator.

### Topic: Link between formal and informal mediators

- It always goes side by side and a link is important.
- A person might start as being part of one party, be appointed by the other party and finally become an authorised mediator.
- Moving from a “party position” to the role of the mediator happens quite often.

### Topic: Roles of outsider/ insiders

- The insider must be seen as an independent mind and actor. This is seen to be essential even if the mediator is still perceived as being closer to one party.
- Outsiders are sometimes not knowledgeable.
- Outsiders tend to try to monopolise contacts to insider parties. That makes their role ineffective.
- The terms “insider” and “outside” are relative terms. The degree of “insiderness” might change over time.
- Insider can play a role in managing the diversity within one party.

### Topic: Qualities assigned to the Insider Mediator

- Trust of the parties in the mediator is essential but at the same time the parties mistrust the mediator.

- Mediators in general fight against polarisation and visualize where parties are close to each other without being aware of it. However, polarisations might also be “real” and manifest.
- Mediators need to be emphatic.
- Be cautious not to address too fast “hot issues”.
- Be patient.

### Topic: General challenges

- Frequent changes within the parties.
- One party blocking the negotiations.
- Listing and marginalisation of one party through another.

### Cultural background of the mediator

- The mediator is seen as a form of “African retirement”. The wise old “man”.
- Some mediators work to be known other work to be unknown.

### Topic: Open questions

- How to sustain our work taking so many failures into account and the long time they take?
- Empower leaders to deal constructively with their conflict. Or shall they also empower the communities?

## Moving into the role of the Insider Mediators –

Several examples were shared of how Insider Mediator move into their role and how they can be mandated.

### The Response System

- The role-play had sensitised the group on a variety of issues such as
- If an actor enters the space suddenly and without a mandate it might create suspicion or turn out to be distracting to direct talks.
- The disorder that can be characteristic to a situation.
- How brutal we can be.

In the discussion that followed the concept of the “Response System” was introduced and discussed. The Response System is a network of local actors that deals with local problems. It contains people from the government, politicians and NGOs. In case a problem is acknowledged the Insider Mediator is being mandated by the representatives of the Response System.

It was agreed that a Response System should be as inclusive as possible. However, how should groups be represented that are quite marginalized? Would local power holders accept them. One way of dealing with this challenge is the informal nature of the Response System.

### Challenges

- People in the Response System are permanently changing. The changes are not just related to the changes in the political development but also to the nature of funding for the NGOs.
- People do not see their social responsibility and are expecting payment for engaging.
- Creating the Response System is very time-consuming.

## Panel: Linking informal and formal mediation approaches – Experiences and challenges

### The example of the Early Response Council

The Early Response Council facilitated talks between the government and opposition of Kyrgyzstan. The facilitators had already deep contacts with the law enforcement agencies and started contacting both the government and the opposition on their own initiative.

### “Being named” by a party

In the case of Uganda the rebels named the Insider Mediator since she was well known to all parties due to her training.

### Persistently approaching the parties

In the case of Mali an influential person who could reach out to the rebels was regularly contacted and approached. After two months, this person helped to facilitate the contact to the rebels who accepted the role of the Insider Mediator.

### Relations of formal and informal approaches

A formal mediation exists only because there was an informal already existing before. The informal has ironed out the problems.

One cannot negotiate with the parties in isolation. Depending on the topic the scope of people needs to be extended (e.g. amnesty).

Formal and informal do not relate to each other in phases.

Peace processes become more complex with parties who fought many years in the bush and have no real political agenda. Under these conditions the question emerges to what extent the formal process is actually necessary.

## Reporting on Open Space

### Group 1: Institutionalisation & Training for Insider Mediators

- Documenting cases as important learning publications.
- Teaching Mediation at University.
- Coaching and supervision facilities.
- Culture of sharing experiences.

The Mediation Support Project of Swisspeace is documenting cases.

### Group 2: Emotional Blockade

People tend to say that they are part of the problem and therefore cannot intervene. In addressing this problem one needs to think about a public process of empowerment. One strategy for dealing with this challenge could be by letting people report what they are actually already doing in conflict situations. Through these stories the particular functions they are fulfilling becomes visible and explicable and they become aware of the concept of “mediation” themselves.

The process therefore tries to make people aware of their “mediation skills”, giving them the conceptual understanding and initiating a paradigm shift towards a more sensitive attitude.

### Group 3: Gender and age of Insider Mediator

- Women often have a natural authority that gives them access to conflict parties.
- Youth does not have to be a hindrance in becoming an Insider Mediator.

### Group 4: World Peace Movement

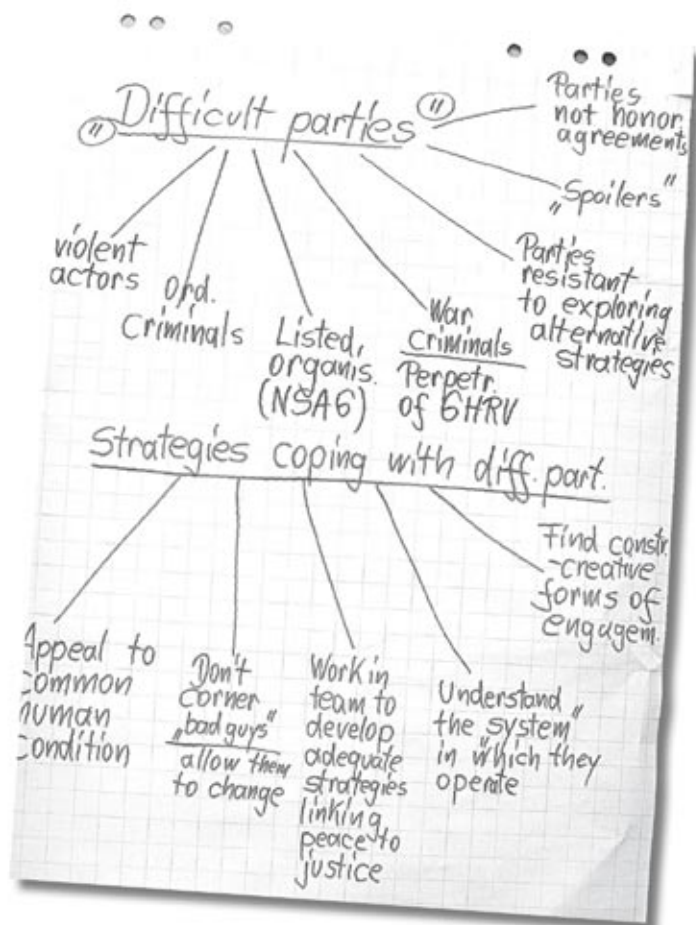
- Peace Ministries in each country being in charge of peace in our own country.
- A world wide movement with the ministries meeting once a year.
- Responsibility of western peace ministries would be also to fund and support peace activities.

**Challenges**

- The Ministries can be abused.
- The structure can end up as a bureaucratic employment agency.

**Group 5: "Difficult parties"**

- Who defines "bad guys" and "spoilers"? Or is this expression of us not seeing the other as a party?
- The parties to the conflict tend to see the other as "difficult". In case the mediator sees the parties as difficult he might get problems.
- The challenge is to find creative ways of engaging with all parties.
- In case of gross human right violations one needs to appeal to common human conditions.



**Needs Proposals**

Knowledge about political conditions; detailed knowledge about the parties

- Conflict analysis skills;

Ongoing process between insider and outsider mediator

- Discourse and self-reflection

Networks of Insider Mediator

- International organizer of network and exchange forums

Sustained recognition of the Insider Mediator

- Document the activity and mediation experience
- Creating a database on all Insider Mediator world-wide

Need for capacity building

- Training skills conceptual methods

Support and institutional backup

- Study trips to get to know cases

The retreat is a follow up to the "Lessons Learned" Retreat "Track 1.5 Approaches to Conflict Management: Assessing Good Practice and Areas for Improvement" (Schloss Hueningen, March 4-6, 2007)