



United Nations



European Union

Technical Expert Retreat Operationalizing mediation support within intergovernmental organizations – sharing experience and good practice

Rome, 15-17 November 2016

Summary Note

The United Nations and European Union co-hosted a technical expert retreat on “Operationalizing mediation support within intergovernmental organizations – sharing experience and good practice” 15-17 November 2016 in Rome. The retreat was attended by participants from African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).¹

This was the first meeting of its kind, and it was agreed that such a retreat to promote engagement and experience sharing between similar functions of different intergovernmental organizations should be organized every two years. Participants from regional and subregional organizations felt that this was a good opportunity for them to share experience and learn about support to peace processes across regions.

The discussion focused on lessons learned from providing mediation support and identifying gaps and avenues to make the services better and more effective. The overall discussion can be summarized in following three categories: 1) mediation support mandate and capacities; 2) mediation support tools; and 3) partnerships and cooperation.

Mediation support mandate and capacities

The participants discussed the political and organizational contexts in which they operate. Each organization’s mediation mandate is different and as a result so is the space for mediation support. What is common is that all participating organizations have a formal mandate from their membership to systematize and professionalize support to their organization’s

¹ Organization of American States (OAS) and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) were invited but could not attend due to other engagements.

peacemaking efforts. Mediation support entities differ in size and composition (from 1 to 16 full time staff members) as well as in proximity to the organization's mediation activities. Some entities are imbedded in mediation teams by design (backstopping), while most need to negotiate space and access to mediators and their teams each time they provide support.

The participants discussed the challenge of prevention and early response and how to create space for mediation support early into the strategic planning phase of interventions. Other challenges discussed included budget constraints and the need to adjust to changing political and institutional realities. Access to mediation processes was a shared challenge by most: mediation support entities are rarely invited to be part of the mediation planning phase and often struggle with ad-hoc information flow from mediation teams. All participants highlighted the need to clarify and institutionalize the role of mediation support entities in each organization's mediation related processes.

Mediation support tools

Each mediation entity has developed a range of tools and approaches for supporting their organization's peacemaking efforts. Three broad categories were identified: 1) secondments/working within the mediation team (mediation support entity deploying expertise to work with the team); 2) special events (retreats, workshops, trainings); and 3) text-based support (check-lists, comparative examples, analytical pieces). Innovative ideas were shared. One organization hosts informal events for senior leadership to enable a more coherent approach to a given conflict; another organization imbeds mediation experts periodically to observe track I talks and provide feedback on mediation and process design questions to the mediation team. Process design is not clearly understood as a concept. The lack of practical guidance on process design was identified as an issue on which the participants could work together.

Mediation styles: The participants discussed mediation styles and how they differ based on the organization, mediators personality and the context in which they operate. Style and status are combined. There was a general consensus that most mediation trainings emphasize one style (facilitative) over other styles. Mediation support practitioners should increase awareness of different mediation styles and their advantages and disadvantages and encourage the ability of mediators to switch between styles or bring in capacities with different styles when needed. Mediators also develop their style over time as they become more familiar with the context and the parties. When discussing more directive styles, the question of sanctions was also discussed.

Deployment of expertise: The participants discussed approaches and mechanisms for identifying and deploying expertise to support mediation efforts. All draw on in-house mediation support staff, which was considered critical for strengthening long-term institutional capacities in mediation and mediation support. To complement staff, all maintain databases for external mediation expertise. Some organizations have established standing capacities either for actual mediators (roster or panel of senior mediators) or for mediation support experts. Wide professional networks internationally and regionally were found particularly helpful in order to

tap into external expertise quickly. Rosters received a mixed review and most participants felt that building and maintaining genuinely effective rosters is both expensive and time consuming. The challenge of quality control and time and investment required for viability of roster was noted by all participants. The participants agreed to consider and revisit the issue of roster in future meetings.

Partnerships and cooperation

The participants discussed partnerships and looked at: a) working with member² states; 2) partnerships with non-governmental organizations; and 3) partnerships among each other. All participants stressed the need to regularly engage and communicate with member states to ensure their continued political and financial support. In some instances like-minded member states have established forums for raising awareness of and soliciting support for mediation and mediation support. The participants recognized the need for mediation support actors to better consider local and regional civil society, including local mediation actors, in strategic planning and process design for prevention and mediation. International non-governmental organizations provide welcome complementary resources for research, training and logistics, but there is often competition between them and the multiplicity of actors can present some challenges.

Cooperation between the UN and regional and subregional organizations and among them in mediation and mediation support has been encouraged in various UN General Assembly resolutions, including the most recent (A/RES/70/304). It encourages further development of these partnerships in order to enhance mediation, preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. The participants proposed joint deployments and regular staff exchanges to increase collaboration and cross-learning. All participants expressed their support to regularly organize a mediation support retreat for intergovernmental organizations to increase knowledge and experience sharing within the mediation support entities in order to ensure continued joint learning and development of the sector.

² The OSCE does not have member states, but participant states. Here “member states” refer both to member states and participant states.