



INTERNATIONAL CENTER
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TEACHERS COLLEGE | Columbia University

Expanding Online Mediation Support Tools: Mapping Mediation Networks for Effective Conflict Engagement and Intervention

A Research Proposal by the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (ICCCR)

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Introduction

International mediation is a highly-specialized, demanding job that requires a unique skillset and extensive professional network. While only a small number of individuals use the label of “mediator” to describe their work, professionals in a wide range of settings – academic institutions, NGOs, think-tanks, etc. – may engage in mediation or negotiation as part of other projects or agendas. Vital to effective conflict engagement in these settings is entering with a current and informed sense of the various stakeholders, interveners, and related initiatives happening on the ground.

Although the United Nations and the Department of Political Affairs have concentrated their efforts to provide the Secretary-General, his Representatives, and UN partners actively engaged in peacemaking efforts with general advice and support, **information about current mediation networks for effective conflict engagement and intervention is scarce, guarded and piecemeal at best.** At the same time, online resources such as UN Peacemaker, which not only include extensive databases of peace agreements but also guidance material and information on the UN’s mediation support services, are becoming an essential tool for actors that are actively engaged in peacemaking efforts globally, including Member States, regional organizations, civil society, non-governmental organizations and national mediators.

To address the need for more online resources on current mediation networks, and capitalizing on already existing online resources and databases, the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (ICCCR) has been conducting expert interviews and desk research to piece together information about how individuals in these settings gather and use information to advance their work in conflict-affected areas. **Based on our findings, we propose a broader mediation mapping project.** Project objectives include:

- 1) gain a deeper sense of how conflict-engagement professionals gain access to, gather, utilize and protect such information;
- 2) begin mapping the presence of organizations engaged in mediation and related efforts in different regions of the world;

- 3) present a report on important challenges, opportunities, and successful tactics for the development of solid mediation networks for effective conflict engagement and intervention;
- 4) present a detailed proposal for the development of a comprehensive global database on mediation networks.

Methodology

Beginning in November 2012, the ICCCR began conducting research to better understand the status and existing methods of “mediation mapping” by searching existing databases, websites and other online resources of mediation and related institutions across different countries and regions of the world. Searches were conducted by using the Peace and Collaborative Development Network (PCDN) website and Google queries.

In February 2013, the ICCCR reached out to various experts who have worked in conflict-affected areas to begin to investigate how they gather and utilize information about other groups, agencies and institutions working on conflict management and peace-building the ground. Informants included both academics and practitioners. The interviews were semi-structured, using a mix of pre-determined questions as well as follow up questions generated by the interviewer during the conversations.

Preliminary Findings

Online Research: Our findings to date have indicated that there is a lack of up-to-date, readily useable information located in databases and websites. Sites that were searchable by region or country were rare, and even when they did appear they sometimes excluded important resources. Sites that stood out for ease of use and comprehensiveness of information were:

- INCORE at the University of Ulster (UK), thematic guide on mediation
- Mediation World (UK), site searchable by country

Expert Interviews: Our interviewees emphasized the importance of using personal networks and relationships for gaining information about professionals working in conflict zones. Several of the experts indicated that they do not make use of online resources at all, and have a strong preference for speaking to partners on the ground. Others mentioned resources they have used and recommend, including:

- University of Notre Dame Matrix
- UN peacemakers website
- Uppsala University website
- An upcoming website being put together by UNDP

Several informants also mentioned a recent report by the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD), *Building Peace in 2013*, which touches on different ways that mediation is deployed in conflict, gathering reflections from the Oslo Forum Network.

The interviewees emphasized that in order for an online resource to be useful, it must be targeted and focused in nature, and that many of the existing resources need to be refined and improved, but added that resources which give history or background to the conflict would be particularly helpful.

Conclusion and Next Steps

All of the experts interviewed thus far have emphasized that mediation is a complex field; one informant described himself as a “mediation supporter” while the others preferred not to use the label of mediator at all. Our discussions confirmed one premise of our study – that mediation or mediation-like behavior is often carried out by individuals who do not necessarily identify as mediators. Unfortunately, the discussions also confirmed another assumption, which is that there is a dearth of reliable, regularly updated web resources for mediators and other professionals working in conflict areas to help them locate each other and “map” or visualize other institutions and groups working on the ground. One interviewee referenced a promising case from Myanmar – the International Peace Support Group (IPSG), a consortium of INGOs working in the area which has increased transparency and provided some structure for different actors working in the country. Unfortunately, such groups or consortiums have not been implemented in most other places.

In light of our expert interviews there are several next steps for the ICCCR at this juncture:

- Continue with expert interviews, preferably speaking to self-identified mediators
- Examine and compare some of the websites recommended by informants, contrasting them with the websites found during the initial online research phase of this project
- Carefully read the CHD report recommended by informants to glean more information about challenges, achievements and trends in mediation
- Learn more about the IPSG group in Burma/Myanmar, with a view to using its model for some sort of web-based mediation “map” or resource that could be useful for professionals in the field.