



# Engaging with Insider Mediators

Sustaining  
peace in an age  
of turbulence



## Guidance Note 2.0

United Nations Development Programme

With funding and support from the European Union



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## Engaging with Insider Mediators

### Sustaining peace in an age of turbulence

#### Second Edition 2018

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One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA

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## Foreword

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require a significant and sustained investment of human and financial resources by all Member States, as well as a global commitment to preventing violent conflict and promoting peace. The political will to make this happen is strong.

Another, more subtle but equally significant, investment will also be necessary to strengthen the 'collaborative capacity' of societies. At the national level, this expresses itself as the ability to collaborate across political and social boundaries to push forward critical reforms, work together to utilize precious natural resources in the public interest and address emerging risks or disputes peacefully.

At the local level, collaborative capacity is reflected in levels of social cohesion and the ability of communities to live and work together in shared spaces. Without this capacity, the consensus and coalitions that underlie the meaningful change and critical reforms necessary to achieve the SDGs cannot be attained, nor can peace be sustained.

This capacity is partly reflected in the institutions, both formal and traditional, that mediate consensus and peaceful change, whether parliamentary committees, local peace councils, national reconciliation commissions or forums of elders.

Critically, it is also reflected in the roles and work of trusted intermediaries — 'insider mediators' — who bring influence, legitimacy, courage and unique skills to trigger the changes in attitudes and behaviours required for meaningful transformation, often mediating differences before tensions erupt into violence.

Over the past seven years, the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) have collaborated to assist these agents of peaceful change in nearly 20 countries. In many other countries, development partners have provided similar assistance to insider mediators to sustain both peace and development and, sometimes, to complement formal peace processes.

The updated version of this Guidance Note, which was first released in 2014, captures key lessons from a wide variety of cases, including those supported through the European Union-United Nations partnership. It highlights viable strategies to identify and support these intermediaries without compromising their unique roles and assets. It reflects the wider commitment of the partners to build national capacities for conflict prevention and to achieve the SDGs in a successful and timely manner.

Insider mediators reflect the innate abilities of a society to imagine new possibilities and successful pathways to sustainable development and lasting peace. We hope that users of this Note, in the EU, the UN and beyond, will be inspired to provide effective and timely support to these crucial intermediaries and, especially, their roles in sustaining peace and facilitating the achievement of the SDGs.



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## Acknowledgements

This Guidance Note was developed with financial support from the European Union. The process was led by Bureau for Policy and Programme Support at the United Nations Development Programme team under the guidance of Katy Thompson and Vesna Markovic Dasovic, and the lead author was Josie Lianna Kaye. We are grateful to the individuals who participated in workshops and meetings on this topic, as well as those who contributed invaluable insights during bilateral interviews. Initial drafts of this document benefited from the contributions of several experts, including Claire Hawkins, Chetan Kumar, Ana Lukic, Mir Mubashir, Luqman Patel, Antti Pentikäinen, Noella Richard, Lorraine Reuter, Richard Smith, Sabina Stein, Sanna Tasala, Olai Voionmaa, amongst others, who all kindly participated in the peer review process. Last but not least, we are grateful to colleagues, partners and insider mediators themselves for providing case studies, testimonials and advice for the benefit of others embarking on insider mediator-related work. We would like to, therefore, sincerely thank all colleagues and friends for the time and patience invested in this Guidance Note.

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## Executive Summary

The 21st century has seen a dramatic increase in the number and complexity of conflicts. The number of major civil wars has almost tripled since 2010 and conflict-related fatalities increased sixfold between 2011 and 2015.<sup>1</sup> Conflicts are increasingly **internationalized, regionalized and exacerbated by proxy warfare**. Driven by inequality, exclusion, climate change, and the politicization of religion, these conflicts have a devastating effect on lives and livelihoods. Current conflict trends have underscored the imperative of prevention and created a fundamental shift in the way the international community addresses conflict towards more comprehensive, locally-oriented and long-term efforts to promote and sustain peace.

As part of this shift, the United Nations (UN) has worked closely with the European Union (EU) since 2012 to support the **development, strengthening, and application of ‘insider mediation’ capacities worldwide**. An Insider Mediator (IM) is described in this Guidance Note (GN) as “an individual or group of individuals who derive their legitimacy, credibility and influence from a socio-cultural and/or religious – and, indeed, *personal* – ‘closeness’ to the parties of the conflict, endowing them with strong bonds of trust that help foster the necessary attitudinal changes amongst key protagonists which, over time, prevent conflict and contribute to sustaining peace.” The UN-EU partnership, therefore, has focused on strengthening the capacities of national and local actors to help establish sustainable national mechanisms, forums and/or capacities for internal mediation and conflict management.

The first phase of the UN-EU partnership culminated in the development of a GN entitled ‘Supporting Insider Mediation: Strengthening Resilience to Conflict and Turbulence’<sup>2</sup>, which was written in 2013 and published in 2014. Five years later, this **revised GN seeks to inform and shape the work of UN and EU actors in their efforts to engage with IMs** by ensuring those efforts are informed by the very latest, innovative research and insights from practice. To meet these ends, this GN draws together the insights of a wide range of academics, policymakers and practitioners as the result of an extensive literature review, expert workshops, surveys and interviews. This process highlighted four key findings, which provide the structure of this GN:

- IMs have a vital role to play in sustaining peace in an age of turbulence.
- Ambiguity exists around the concepts and practices of both insider mediators and insider mediation.
- Guidance on the topic should be updated and greater nuance should be introduced.
- Practitioners can share extensive good practices on engaging with IMs are available, and case studies provide a useful tool to understand such practices in context.

Part 1 of this GN, therefore, **explores the relevance of insider mediation in 21st century practice-policy landscape**. The increase in proxy warfare by global and regional powers has contributed to an increasingly complex and dynamic conflict environment, characterized by: land and natural resource degradation; the rise of identity politics; enduring patriarchy; the exclusive nature of political and economic power; and, the fragmentation of armed groups. These complexities have reduced the political space for mediation. Just as Agenda 2030 has underscored the linkages between peace and development, the Sustaining Peace Agenda has highlighted the need for more inclusive approaches to conflict. These are epitomized by endogenous mediation capacities at the local level, which are well placed to pursue the highly political work required to



Guidance Note 2014:  
Supporting Insider  
Mediation. Photo: UNDP.

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Secretary-General, ‘United Nations Activities in Support of Mediation,’ 27 June 2017, A/72/115, p. 3 (available at [http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1291524/files/A\\_72\\_115-EN.pdf](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1291524/files/A_72_115-EN.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme, ‘Supporting Insider Mediation: Strengthening Resilience to Conflict and Turbulence,’ Guidance Note, 2014 (available at: <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20prevention/Supporting-Insider-Mediation---Strengthening-Resilience-to-Conflict-and-Turbulence--EU%20Guidance%20Note.pdf>)

foster and sustain peace over time as part of a 'whole of society' approach. IMs, therefore, have a critical role to play, using their relationships at vertical and horizontal levels to build trust and foster the mindset and behavioural changes required to prevent conflict and sustain peace.

Part 2 of the GN seeks to **foster an understanding of the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the IM concept**. This section of the GN explores how key individuals and organizations, such as John-Paul Lederach, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, PeaceNexus and the Berghof Foundation, have used their experience working with IMs to elucidate their key traits. Those traits include: trust and respect of the conflicting parties; deep sensitivity to cultural, religious and political differences; the ability to serve as horizontal and vertical 'nodes'; high levels of influence, authority and personal closeness to the parties; and, strong personal commitment and dedication. This section then explores the relative concept of IMs' 'insiderness', comparing IMs to 'outsider mediators' (OMs). An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of both IMs and OMs underscores the imperative for joint work in any given conflict context. This section also explores how IMs serve as mediators, often acting outside the confines of a formal peace process; that is, mediating to change both mindsets and behaviours, build connections and trust, and rebuild or strengthen relationships where the social fabric is weakened or broken.

Part 3 of the GN provides a **step-by-step guide to engaging with IMs**:

- Step one, **context analysis**, ensures that the IM engagement strategy is informed by a shared understanding of perspective, actors and dynamics, as well as an appreciation of the power dynamics and gender relations that shape and constrain options.
- Step two involves developing a **risk management strategy** that explains the interrelation among the context, programme and lead institution so as to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the engagement.
- Step three shows how to **explore options for engagement** and make strategic choices by identifying entry points, potentially in key thematic areas.
- Step four outlines how to **foster consultative processes to identify relevant IMs** by developing consultative and participatory processes that are conflict- and power-sensitive. Such processes must be fully attuned to the dynamics of gender and youth.
- Step five outlines how to **determine the needs of the IMs** identified, taking into consideration their objectives, realities, capacities and resources.
- Step six presents a **menu of options** that can be used to co-develop, with IMs, an engagement strategy, including through: recognition; mobilization of political support; scenario development; intra-group facilitation; logistical support; and, training.

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