



Strategic Security Analysis

**Advancing Inclusive Mediation
Through the Lens of Leadership**

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This policy paper has been developed following the GCSP's Strategic Security Analysis 'Women in Mediation: Connecting the Local and the Global'¹ by Dr Catherine Turner, as well as a number of multi-stakeholder meetings.² The approach and recommendations are intended to complement the United Nations System Leadership Framework³ and the Secretary General's System-wide Gender Parity Strategy⁴.

Key Points

1. The complex, volatile and long-lasting nature of contemporary conflicts demands more inclusive mediation processes. These must recognise shifting power structures and connect local, national and global actors. One way to achieve this is to increase the representation of women mediators globally.
2. Greater transparency and a move towards skills-based recruitment of mediators of violent conflicts would help to increase the representation of women by:
 - a. overcoming existing biases within the system to recognise broader experience and transferrable skills to build diverse teams;
 - b. shifting the emphasis towards skills such as emotional intelligence, which play a critical role in teaming and conflict mediation;
 - c. enabling the professionalisation of conflict mediation and level the playing field;
3. Skills-based recruitment would also enable greater synergy between Tracks I, II and III to facilitate more inclusive peace processes that are likely to deliver long-term peace and more resilient societies.
4. Specific actions are needed from networks, states and international organisations to enable women to overcome the structural barriers faced, supporting them from an earlier stage, and making them more visible.

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Introduction

The number of civil wars tripled in the decade to 2015. In this context, mediation is widely recognised as a critical tool for promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes, and for conflict prevention and resolution. The UN Secretary General, António Guterres, has made mediation a strategic priority, stating in his latest address to the Security Council that “*innovative thinking on mediation is no longer an option, it is a necessity.*”ⁱ In addition, regional organisations including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) are also increasing their mediation capacity.

It is also increasingly recognised that those who lead high-level mediation processes need to be more representative of diverse stakeholders who bring different perspectives and experiences. Increasing the diversity of mediators is important, because the experience of the mediator will determine how they assess the relative priority of issues in the peace process, and how they are able to connect across tracks to lead inclusive processes.

The barriers to inclusion of people with diverse backgrounds are highlighted by the lack of representation of women: this specific field is recognised as one of the most ‘stark and difficult to address gaps’ in achieving gender parity.ⁱⁱ As stated by Mossarat Qadeem, the exclusion of women is not about culture, it is about power.ⁱⁱⁱ A gendered lens helps us to identify the processes, biases and barriers which contribute to the marginalisation and exclusion not just of women, but of all stakeholders who should be at the peace table.

A leadership lens helps us to identify which skills, competencies, behaviours and practices could support more effective peace processes, as well as more inclusive ones. In particular, we focus on the skills and competencies needed to work in high-performing teams and in modern mediation contexts. We suggest that greater transparency centred on skills-based recruitment criteria could facilitate more effective processes. It will also enable greater collaboration between key actors, including governments, networks and regional and international organisations involved in the recruitment and appointment of high-level mediators.

Finally, given the political commitment by many governments and regional organisations to address the gender gap by supporting networks of women mediators, we make specific recommendations for actions needed for women to overcome some of the structural barriers faced in accessing high level mediation roles.⁵

i Secretary General’s address to the Security Council, 29 August 2018. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-08-29/maintenance-international-peace-and-security-remarks-security-council>

ii United Nations, (2017) “System Wide Gender Parity Strategy” <https://www.peacewomen.org/resource/system-wide-strategy-gender-parity>.

iii Mossarat Qadeem, co-founder of the PAIMAN Alumni Trust, Pakistan, in her briefing to the Security Council, 29 August 2018. <http://webtv.un.org/search/part-1-mediation-and-settlement-of-disputes-security-council-8334th-meeting/5828414277001/?term=mediation%20welby&sort=date&page=2> (24 minutes in)

I. The Changing Nature of Conflict: Why it Matters

From the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and Mali to Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen, conflicts are lasting longer and becoming more complex. The ‘chessboard’ of geopolitical state power and interests sits alongside a web of inter-connected actors, from terrorist and transnational organised crime groups to civil society groups who have gained power and influence.⁶ Despite the dominance of men, and men with arms at many peace tables,⁷ there is a shift in many processes from a “military political process of power sharing to a societal process of responsibility sharing” which includes non-state armed actors and ideally non-state non-armed actors.⁸

Mediations, traditionally seen as a power game in which a chief mediator could ‘leverage’ agreement at the state level, are seen more than ever as a process of sustaining and developing dialogue on the prevention, management, resolution of conflict as well as the implementation of peace agreements.⁹ This requires not just one mediator, but a whole team: a team which understands the different interests of the parties, the multiple drivers of conflict, and potential solutions. Furthermore, a sophisticated ‘human security’ analysis is required to complement traditional militaristic, political, economic and social approaches within the UN¹⁰ and other mediation organisations.

In its 2017 Leadership Framework, the United Nations stated “the challenges that confront us in the twenty-first century will not be met by mere deference to power, reliance on a shaky status quo or operation in old silos. Rather, they demand a model of leadership that is norm-based, principled, inclusive, accountable, multidimensional, transformational, collaborative and self-applied.”¹¹ In addition, personnel need to “truly connect cross-pillar knowledge and experience”.

In the field of peace mediation, we propose that this model of leadership needs to begin with greater openness and transparency, and increased value placed on diverse experiences that may be drawn from non-traditional sources. By this, we mean sources beyond diplomacy and careers within international organisations. The under-representation of women simply highlights the barriers faced by non-dominant groups traditionally excluded from power structures including ethnic and religious minorities, youth, as well as those with a lower socio-economic status often outside of government.¹² The culture of leadership also needs to recognise that hierarchical structures may need to shift towards more collaborative ones which build cross-sector groups and teams of teams.

Recommendation:

- **The complex, volatile and long-lasting nature of contemporary conflicts demands more inclusive mediation processes. These must recognise shifting power structures and connect local, national and global actors. One way to achieve this is to increase the representation of women mediators globally.**

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II. Towards Greater Diversity in Mediation

At the present time, a ‘mediator’ is often selected for their reputation, gravitas, and ‘convening power’. These qualities, we argue, are based on perceptions of the mediator and the experience he or she will bring to the role.¹³ The appointment of a mediator is usually the culmination of a period of negotiation between a range of actors, including the conflict parties, the organisation leading the mediation effort and other interested governments. As a result, the appointments process is inherently political. The politics of appointments begin even before these negotiations have opened, with candidates for international mediation positions often needing the support of their governments to be considered for appointment.

Informal distinctions between the roles played by men and women in time crystallise to create a norm... leading to women being excluded from the ‘hard’ portfolios such as security and military affairs.

At the national level there is often no clear or transparent selection policy for this process. Within the UN, mediators and experts working on mediation teams tend to be chosen by ‘referral only’ by UN staff members and Mediation Support Unit partners.¹⁴ Those who are nominated for such positions are drawn predominantly from two career paths, those of diplomacy, and from international organisations.¹⁵ This is unsurprising given that these careers are the ones that expose people to the work of the United Nations, meaning that they are ‘known’ to the organisation and have the institutional knowledge to advance within the system. However, recent research has highlighted that men hold 85 percent of ambassadorial appointments worldwide¹⁶ with a similar trend of the over-representation of men also identified in the composition of international organisations. It is unsurprising, therefore, that another recently published study has found that women constitute only 8% of Track 1 mediators.¹⁷

From a basic numbers perspective, if a successful diplomatic career or similar experience in an international organisation is a requirement for nomination to mediation positions, then the odds are significantly weighted against people with experiences outside these traditional routes – people who can bring the diversity of perspectives to help address the increasingly complex conflicts we face. This includes those who have been active mediators in their own communities at local and national levels, as well as those with professional skills in mediation or peacebuilding who could usefully contribute context specific knowledge to the design of mediation initiatives. They are also weighted against women.

Beyond simply looking at the numbers, the dominance of a certain ‘group’ or gender has a significant bearing on the way in which the skills and attributes required to succeed in the field are understood. This is particularly true where masculinised norms of power which privilege the state and military security paradigms continue to be influential on mental models of leadership as “stereotypes describing how we believe the world to be often turn into prescriptions for what the world should be”¹⁸ Informal distinctions between the roles played by men and women in time crystallise to create a norm. For example, an assumption that women are better at ‘soft’ skills and portfolios such as gender or cultural affairs leads to them being excluded from the ‘hard’ portfolios such as security and military affairs, and as a result, being excluded from key points of peace negotiations.¹⁹

Recommendation:

- Greater transparency and a move towards a skills-based recruitment process would help to:
 - a. overcome existing biases within the system to recognise broader experience and transferrable skills and build diverse teams;
 - b. shift the emphasis towards skills such as emotional intelligence, which play a critical role in teaming and conflict mediation;
 - c. enable the professionalisation of conflict mediation and level the playing field.



The Secretary General's Gender Parity Strategy

- Released in September 2017, the strategy recognises that a more **inclusive** and gender equitable workforce will better enable the UN to deliver on its mandates across peace, security, human rights and economic development, as well as being critical to its **credibility** as a standard bearer.
- There is a recognition that bias is inherent in policies and practices as well as organisational culture, and it is necessary to draw on evidence and experience of other sectors to reform and progress.

If the UN is to have a sustainable gender-equal and geographically diverse pool of talented and experienced staff and senior leaders, a number of key steps are recommended:

- Targets and system wide monitoring, data collection, **transparency** and accountability for staffing decisions.
- Strengthen **merit-based selection processes**. This will raise the overall quality of the selection process as well as mitigate bias inherent in more discretionary and less criteria-based selection.
- **System-wide collaboration** to improve inter-agency referrals and centralised databases.
- A **multi-pronged and life-cycle approach** to reaching parity among senior leaders, and widening of the scope and reach of senior eligible women.
- Creating an **enabling environment** that prizes diversity and flexibility, provides equal opportunities, recognises that staff are also family and community members, and ensures a safe environment in which to work. It includes new policies and practical measures such as:
 - o parental leave for mothers and fathers;
 - o on-site crèche or percentage reimbursement of crèche costs;
 - and
 - o stronger support for families taking up field postings.

In addition, the strategy recommends creating a positive image of women working in these environments to improve the 'brand' in public information, social and digital media campaigns, as well as tackling the 'institutional software', the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours within organisations. Terms of Reference should be developed in a more gender-neutral manner, paying attention to role attractiveness, and ensuring that non-essential qualifications that may limit female applicants are removed.

III. Overcoming the challenges through transparency: a threefold argument

a. Greater transparency and skills based recruitment will help to overcome existing biases within the system to recognise broader experience and transferrable skills to build diverse teams.

More conscious awareness of how bias manifests itself –and then steps to address that bias – are essential to redesign systems to enable talent to rise to the top and organisations to benefit from diversity. Repeated experiments in recruitment have demonstrated that decisions in recruitment are heavily biased towards ‘cultural fit’ rather than mental ability. This bias increases the tendency of recruiters to recruit others with a similar background and is exacerbated by a halo effect and confirmation bias.²⁰

Identifying key skills and competencies required by candidates and ensuring that job descriptions contain gender-neutral wording, anonymising demographic data on CVs, ensuring a mixed interview panel and performing structured interviews with work sample tests are key steps to both enhance recruitment practices to identify the best talent, and counter gendered assumptions about characteristics.²¹ Opening up the process would assist both those already within ‘the system’ working in diplomacy or international organisations, and outside it. It would help to shift the emphasis from ‘who’ the mediator is to ‘what’ skills they bring as an individual mediator **and** to the team.

As set out in the box on diversity and teaming, there are many benefits to including diverse perspectives and talents in problem-solving and decision-making outcomes across sectors. Whilst the private sector has been able to document the benefits in financial terms, the humanitarian sector is also building a body of evidence on the positive impact in the field.²² Some may argue that there is ‘operational friction’ to diversity, resulting in it taking longer to build a cohesive team and political pressures will not allow it. To counter that, the authors of this paper point to the variety of tools and techniques to build inclusive teams quickly, provided members of the team have the right mindset, and are willing to build skillsets. If leadership is inclusive and accountable, it will better support collaboration across pillars of knowledge and experience, which are no longer a ‘nice to have’, but are essential to meet the demands of contemporary peacebuilding.

In the humanitarian sector, where there are a plethora of technical, logistical, political, operational and ethical decisions, it is argued that diverse teams will make better decisions and are less likely to rely on cognitive bias.²³ In addition, the team can be more flexible in adapting to different scenarios and more creative in dealing with complex problems. Research by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on frontline humanitarian negotiations found that bias within the institution which limits individual potential based on gender-based identity is greater than the bias experienced in the field: gender diversity is in fact an asset. **The potential for diversity will however only be unlocked if the leadership is inclusive and different voices are heard and valued.**

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‘Diversity and Teaming’: The case for a team-based approach to mediation.

High Performing Diverse Teams (HPDT) are a well-developed concept in military and business environments – rapidly assembled teams with diverse expertise and skills who can work together in an interdependent and collaborative way.

HPDT have the potential to deliver better results; they innovate faster; see mistakes faster; find better solutions; achieve better results and report higher job satisfaction. They are not made up of people with higher IQ, rather it is the group norms which determine success. The fundamental building block of high performing teams is psychological safety within the group.²⁴ This allows the group to openly discuss and challenge one another, have less risk of cognitive bias and *group think*.²⁵

Diversity can be both:

- **Visible** (for example gender, age, race, ethnicity, socio-economic background and profession), which can enhance knowledge and networks; and
- **Invisible** (personality, perspectives, attitudes and values), which can support productivity and problem-solving.
- Two elements of visible diversity are thought to help activate cognitive diversity: racial diversity, which stimulates curiosity; and gender diversity, which stimulates collaborative group dynamics.

One study found that **gender diverse teams** are 15% more likely to outperform all-male or male-dominated teams, and the figure is even higher (35%) for ethnic and racially diverse teams.²⁶ Furthermore, studies measuring the ‘collective intelligence’ of a team found that it was higher when team members take turns and are emotionally sensitive to one another’s needs; and when more women were in the team. This was attributed to the extra level of ‘social sensitivity’ women brought to team dynamics.²⁷

b. Greater transparency and a move towards a skills-based recruitment process would help to shift the emphasis towards skills such as emotional intelligence, which play a critical role in teaming and conflict mediation.

The complexity underlying contemporary conflicts demands both new approaches, and new skills. As identified above, the ability to design processes that involve multiple actors with different interests and perspectives has shifted the emphasis from an individual lead mediator towards teams. During a series of workshops drawing on cross sector knowledge and experience across mediation tracks, a consensus emerged on core mediator competencies. These can be divided roughly along the lines of skills, knowledge and experience.

Skills	Knowledge	Experience
Effective communication and listening	Cultural and context knowledge	Personal experience of mediating conflict at an interpersonal level, community level or between multiple actors
Team work	Understanding of conflict dynamics/analysis	Experience of process design
Emotional intelligence	Understanding and respect for norms (cultural, local and global)	Creative thinking
Ability to build trust		Reflective practice
Empathy		
Resilience		
Self-awareness		
Ability to be inclusive		

When correctly interpreted, emotional, sensory and intuitive signals can enhance situational awareness and improve decision making.

What emerges is the importance of the **interpersonal skills** of the mediator and his or her team, in tandem with their ability to work within the context of a conflict. There is a strong emphasis on self-awareness and the ability of the mediator to **build effective relationships** and trust with the parties rather than just be “**perceived** as trustworthy, impartial and authoritative”.²⁸ **Emotional intelligence**, warmth, humanising communication and lack of ego have also been identified as important traits in a mediator, alongside the more traditional characteristics of self-assurance, assertiveness, daring, and leadership.²⁹

This is in-line with emerging neuro-scientific research which indicates that **emotions**, which were once considered ‘irrational’ are now understood to be intrinsic to decision-making.³⁰ **Emotional intelligence** is an increasingly important skill in leadership and teaming, and greatly enhances the collective intelligence of a group. George Lakoff and others affirm that, the ability to read nuances, atmospherics and pick up on subtle signals can be a vital skill in navigating complexity³¹ as is the case with modern conflicts. When correctly interpreted, emotional, sensory and intuitive signals can enhance situational awareness and improve decision making.

This subtle but important shift from perceived gravitas and status towards interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence for individuals and teams has implications for **women**. Women have been repeatedly assessed as having greater competence/capability on a range of emotional intelligence indexes such as empathy, service orientation, developing others, transparency and inspirational leadership.³² However, these skills and qualities have not been valued as significantly.

Some organisations are already orientating their mediation training and process design to ensure that their teams are multinational/cultural and that their methodology is multi-disciplinary. For example, organisations such as Mediators Beyond Borders International have, over the past ten years, used methods drawn from psychology and neuroscience that emphasise how emotions of the parties can inform their decision-making, and social factors that impact perceptions, biases and ‘in-group or out-group’ behaviour. In the ‘Smart Peace Consortium’, experts in governance and constitutional issues, democratisation and the economy, ethnic and religious issues, gender, the environment and natural resources, security and transitional justice are being joined by psychologists and behavioural scientists.³³

c. Greater transparency and skills based recruitment will enable the professionalisation of conflict mediation and level the playing field.

In contrast to mediation in civil, commercial, family and other contexts where professional guidelines, codes of conduct and specific measurable competencies to mediate are the norm, there is little agreement in peace mediation. Professionalisation de-mystifies processes and makes them more open to applicants from 'outside the field'. Transparent criteria enable understanding of what is expected and what to aim for: which skills and experiences are relevant and which need development.

Furthermore, clear transparent criteria enable more objective assessment of the skills and competencies. As highlighted by Professor Iris Bohnet of the Harvard Programme on Negotiation, reliance on unstructured interviews has not proven to be effective in recruiting the best talent and there is a danger that bias could come into play if assessment is not carefully designed to counter gendered assumptions. The UN System-wide Gender Parity Strategy says that senior staff assessment should include "additional tools such as psychometric profiling, personality tests, situational judgment questions and scenario-based questions in interviews".³⁴ In other fields of mediation, training is complemented by mentorship, simulation assessments, written assessments and peer review.

Finally, if drafted well, these criteria have the potential to **recognise and value** work at a community or national level, or in different but related fields, opening up career paths to a more diverse group. It would help to counter the current preference for 'field experience' which requires prolonged absence from home.³⁵ There is potential here for collaboration across tracks, networks and beyond to provide support, insight and ideas for improvement.

IV. Recommendations for Networks and States

Due to the nature of the process, skills based recruitment requires political and practical support. As identified in the U.N. Gender Parity Strategy, to shift the narrative towards more inclusive processes and make women more visible, a ‘life cycle’ approach is required. If the advancement of women mediators is to be successful, governments, networks and institutions need to ‘push and accompany’ women on their journey. This includes a commitment to career development, so that women with the relevant skills and competencies are identified, mentored and supported professionally, as well as the implementation of other practical measures.

Clearly defined and accessible career pathways should be developed to help women advance in mediation careers

Firstly, states, regional organisations, international organisations and networks have a key role to play in supporting women, helping to maintain and enhance their skills and keep up their visibility through the years where they are most at risk of dropping out of mediation careers because of the pressure to balance family and professional life. There are small steps that can be taken to ensure women remain engaged, such as creating opportunities for women to be present in key political and mediation spaces. The natural opportunities to be present to conversations and meet the ‘right people’ are not available as easily to those with caring responsibilities, whether female or male.

Secondly, increasing the **diversity of senior staff teams** is also a necessary step towards changing institutional cultures. As outlined in section 1, the lack of diversity in the system leads to the self-reinforcement of masculine working norms. Investment in practical measures such as child-care support and flexible working are a start, but ultimately they cannot compensate for a system that so heavily leans against women’s full and effective participation.³⁶ Clearly defined and accessible career pathways should be developed to help women advance in mediation careers, and these pathways should take account the fact that the progression of women’s careers may not mirror exactly that of men.

Finally, the **leadership ‘brand’ of women in mediation** needs to be developed and communicated: the unique value proposition for women in leadership roles for conflict mediation needs to be developed and communicated to all stakeholders including women themselves. Networks are key to bringing suitably qualified women to the attention of governments and widening the pool of candidates. As stated by Bohnet, “seeing is believing”. The more women are seen to be occupying these positions, the more it will become a norm.³⁷ Same-sex networks are particularly important for women due to the scarcity of senior female **role models**. We tend to relate to and learn from others who are similar, and so networks can help women to make connections with peers and senior mentors. Networks can also help women to connect to diverse actors from different departments of member states supportive of the agenda, including men e.g. groups of friends of Mediation, Women Peace of Security, and Gender Parity, and ensure that the networks themselves do not become exclusive or suffer from proximity bias.

Recommendation:

- **Specific support is needed from networks, states and international organisations for women to overcome the structural barriers faced, supporting them and making them visible from an earlier stage.**

Conclusion

To answer the call for ‘innovation in mediation’, we suggest the need for innovation in our people processes and practices.³⁸ Transparency and a skills-based approach have the potential to professionalise mediation, diversify the team of mediators and create more inclusive and effective processes. Specific support is still needed for women to overcome individual and systemic biases.

With the burgeoning research on leadership skills and practices and the impact of diversity on the functioning of teams in other sectors, there is great potential to use these cross-disciplinary insights and apply them to mediation, particularly in the field of conflict and emotions. There is also a need for further research within the field of mediation itself to look at this, the role of gender diverse co-mediation, and specifically on how women contribute to high-level mediation initiatives as mediators.

Mediators have the potential to create new norms both in terms of the processes they design and the way they represent and role model diversity and behaviour. Having more women mediators is critical – it will require a shift in mindsets, political will and funding, but the ultimate reward of more credible and legitimate gender-equitable norms that help to build trust and sustainable peace is one worth working toward.



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