



Mediation Potential Screening (MPS)

A decision tree for the quick assessment of potential peace mediation entry points

The Mediation Potential Screening (MPS) is a tool designed to help decision-makers identify entry points¹ for mediation/dialogue-related activities in a given conflict.

Mediation activities in the context of complex peace processes have become increasingly professionalized in recent years. To this end, most multilateral organizations have created mediation support units consisting of subject matter experts who support and consult personnel in the field, e.g. lead mediators, mediation teams or field operations directly involved in peace processes on questions relating to their mediation activities. However, before the technical or subject matter experts can get involved, an assessment of whether there is a realistic chance for a third-party intervention to succeed must take place. Hence, it remains the task of the actors on the ground, be they international organizations, field operations, embassies or others, to assess the prospect for a mediation intervention in their specific context.

Think and Act Multitrack

It is generally acknowledged that peace mediation, in order to be successful, requires concerted and coordinated activities at all levels of society, a so-called multi-track approach. Hence, although being the track that is most visible, mediation attempts should not only focus on the governmental level, so-called track 1, but include other levels as well. Mirroring the complexity and diversity of layers and actors in a peace process, a multi-track approach also requires a diverse set of instruments and approaches. The term “peace mediation” is therefore used as an umbrella term, covering official mediation processes as well as a multitude of other related approaches, such as national dialogue, insider mediation, intra-party dialogue, track 2/3 dialogues or other confidence-building activities. Thus, even if official track 1 mediation already takes place, has either failed or is not pos-

sible, other formats of peace mediation, e.g. at another level of society, can be key to moving a peace process forward and therefore should be further explored.

The Mediation Potential Screening is a straightforward decision tree which helps professionals in the field to quickly assess whether there is potential for a mediation (support) intervention in a given context and which format might be most successful, hence should be further explored. It was developed by inmedio, CSSP and ZIF and is based on the German Federal Foreign Office/Initiative Mediation Support Germany understanding of the different forms and formats of peace mediation.

Explore Potential Peace Mediation Formats/Approaches

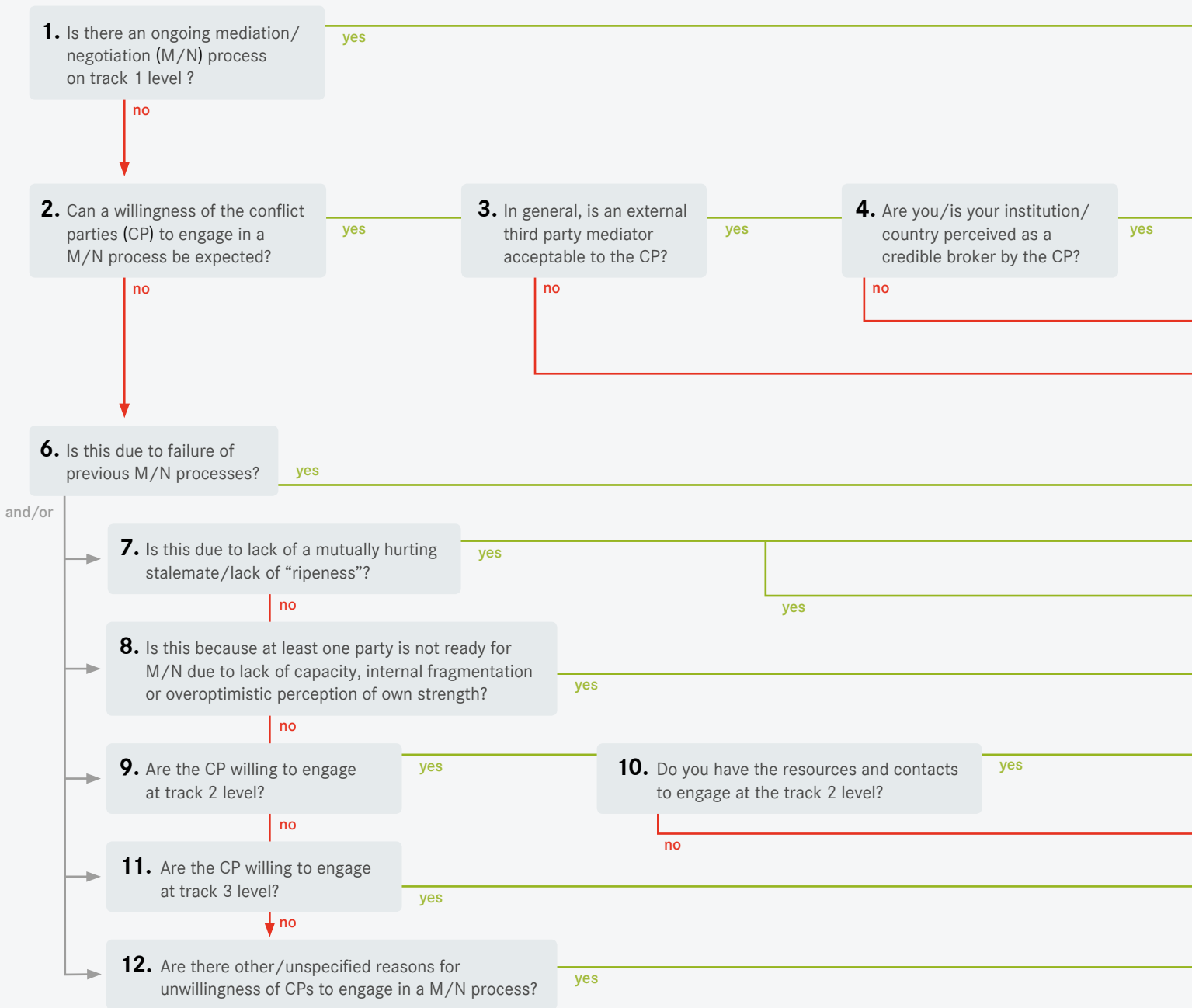
Based on existing empirical research, conceptual studies and field experience regarding the indicators and criteria for the forms of mediation that are likely/unlikely to deliver success, the Mediation Potential Screening provides a simple set of yes/no-questions which guide the user to a result which peace mediation approach is likely to be most relevant and should be further explored. The tool incorporates factors that relate to the roles of state actors in embassies or ministries, staff of multilateral organizations or civil society actors and can be used by any of these actors.

The Mediation Potential Screening does not replace a proper conflict analysis but should ideally be based on a thorough analysis of the context of previous and ongoing processes. The quality of the conflict analysis has direct influence on the validity of the answers to the questions posed in the MPS and the reliability of the chosen approach.² It can also be used as an additional check for the results of the preceding conflict analysis.

¹ “Mediation Entry Points are the specific features or elements within the anatomy or context of a conflict that help mediation actors create access to the conflict parties or stakeholders and have the potential for a feasible and successful mediation approach.” Federal Foreign Office & Initiative Mediation Support Germany: “Identifying Mediation Entry Points” (2016). www.peace-mediation-germany.de/fileadmin/uploads/friedensmediation/dokumente/Report_Mediation_Expert_Meeting_2015.pdf.

² See e.g. Conflict Sensitivity Consortium “Conflict Analysis Tools” www.conflictsensitivity.org/conflict-analysis-tools. Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2005). “Conflict Analysis Tools, Tip Sheet” www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/Conflict-Analysis-Tools.pdf; Simon Fisher et al. “Working with Conflict. Skills and Strategies for Action”(2000).

Mediation Potential Screening (MPS)



How to best use the MPS tool

- STEP 1** Define the conflict you want to address.
- STEP 2** Based on your conflict analysis (actors and relationships, positions, interests and needs, strategic options of the parties, etc.) and your knowledge of the resources available and the access of your organization to the conflict actors, follow the yes/no-decisions in the chart.
- STEP 3** If there are no clear yes/no-answers, follow both paths in case of doubt, which will implicitly suggest hybrid activities and formats.³
- STEP 4** Cross check your result with different experts and elaborate ways of exploring the options in more depth.

³ The tool has an inbuilt hierarchy of activities: If you can work on track 1 or 2, the tool will deliver track 1 as a result. If you can work on track 2 or 3, track 2 will be the result, etc.. You should not follow only one path, but properly recognize that mediation takes place on different tracks (not necessarily by the same actors). Hence, even after having come to a result (right column), it can be helpful to follow other paths and determine what other activities might be important in addition. The tool is designed in such a way as to deliver the mediation activity which is likely to have the biggest comparative advantage and potential impact as first result.

5. Are sufficient resources / expertise available and are you / is your organisation ready/ able to act as an impartial party?

yes

no

- A.** Identify measures to support the track 1 effort, e.g.:
 - financial support
 - subject matter expertise
 - garner international support
 - intra-party/track 2 dialogue
 - local mediation structures
- B.** Explore the possibility for a track 1 or 1.5 M/N process
- C.** Explore ways to obtain additional resources/expertise
- D.** Assist in finding a mutually acceptable mediator/facilitator
- E.** Explore options to engage in informal mediation or facilitation behind the scenes, to initiate a national dialogue process, or support high-level insider mediators
- F.** Analyse Lessons Learned from those processes and determine next steps
- G.** Keep lines of communication with the CP open
- H.** Foster “ripeness” through promoting a coherent international approach (peace diplomacy)
- I.** Explore an intra-party dialogue/ bilateral consultations to prepare for the M/N table
- J.** Initiate/support track 2 dialogue through INGOs/NGOs and/or insider mediators
- K.** Assist in identifying actors who could engage on track 2
- L.** Support local mediation structures, insider mediators & infrastructures for peace
- M.** Conduct more in-depth conflict analysis to identify possible mediation entry points

Explanations/comments on the questions (1. – 12.) and formats/activities (A. – M.) in the chart

As the optional mediation activities mentioned in the MPS are not always self-evident, some of them are briefly explained here. The MPS is an invitation to explore the identified mediation activity/ies of interest more thoroughly.

- 2.** This does not necessarily mean that the conflict parties would openly express readiness to negotiate. It rather refers to power relations and strategic options which indicate that a negotiated solution in general would be beneficial to all sides.
- 3.** Due to cultural or political factors, in some cases conflict parties might rather engage in direct talks than agree on an external mediator. Various ways of supporting this in a mediation-like manner exist nevertheless.
- 4.** Here, it could be worth to examine what to do if only one of the parties considers you to be credible. In this case, you could proceed with D.

- 5.** Even if mediation is desired, a third party might not be able to take the role of a go-between because of other international obligations which require this third party to pursue a partisan stance.
- 7.** According to the concept of “ripeness”, which is based on the empirical analysis of case studies, successful mediation is more likely if the parties perceive a mutually hurting stalemate plus a mutually enticing opportunity (in the sense of a way out).⁴ Although this concept has been criticized and further developed it is still useful as an orientation to understand conflict parties’ motivation for or against mediation.⁵
- A.** To further determine which type of support is needed, analyze challenges to the existing M/N process and compare the result with the points mentioned in questions 7-9.
- H.** In many cases mediation cannot work because different international actors have competing mediation approaches or support opposing conflict parties.

⁴ William I. Zartman “Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond” in Paul Stern & Daniel Druckman, eds. “International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War” (2000).

⁵ Aytekin Cantekin “Ripeness and Readiness Theories in International Conflict Resolution” in: Journal of Mediation & Applied Conflict Analysis (2016).

Forms and Formats of Peace Mediation

Track 1 Mediation

Refers to an official mediation process on a decision-making level (governments, top leadership of political or armed groups). Mediators are usually representatives/envoys of multilateral organizations or states, sometimes so-called eminent persons (e.g. former presidents), very seldomly NGOs.

Track 1.5 Mediation/Dialogue

Involves the top decision-making level or elements close to this level, yet in informal settings. Often rather labelled as dialogue than mediation. Often used to prepare for formal talks/negotiations.

National Dialogues

Are regarded as nationally owned political processes aimed at generating consensus among a broad range of national stakeholders in times of deep political crisis, in post-war situations, or during far-reaching political transitions. Although there is no official mediator in a national dialogue, plenary sessions and working groups are facilitated with a mediation-based approach. The process is often supported technically by third-party actors and can thus be seen as being part of peace mediation.⁶

Insider Mediators

Are affiliated with one or the other conflict party but still respected and seen as trustworthy by all conflict parties and thus able to bridge divides, particularly if they are able to work in teams of individuals leaning to the different sides. Insider Mediators have a proven ability to engage with the parties in many cases when external actors have been rejected. Thus, international support to insider mediation has become an important concept.⁷

Intra-party Mediation/Dialogue

Addresses internal rifts within conflict parties that often block their ability to effectively negotiate with the other side. To mediate/ facilitate dialogue within a party can thus be as important as the inter-party talks. Often, intra-party mediation processes are key to bringing parties to the negotiation table and to preventing their fragmentation throughout the process. Usually the same mediator cannot do both.⁸

Track 2 Mediation/Dialogue

Involves leading figures in society, such as religious dignitaries, intellectuals, political parties, trade unions etc. and often feeds into official talks. It helps to explore spaces for solutions, to preserve communication channels when official talks are stalled, or to secure public support to peace processes or the implementation of peace agreements.

Track 3 Local Mediation Structures/Infrastructures for Peace⁹

Local conflicts are often related to the political conflict at the national level. Hence, local mediation structures and dialogue efforts involving e.g. local communities, schools, IDPs, veterans and conflict victims help to stabilize the situation, prevent escalation of local conflicts to the national level and increase readiness for and support of the society to engage in official peace efforts.

The authors

Sebastian Dworack heads the International Capacity Development Team at ZIF. Previously he has worked for several multilateral peace operations for many years and is a trained mediator and organizational development consultant. **Christoph Lüttmann** is the managing director at CSSP – Berlin Center for Integrative Mediation. He has been involved as a mediator in diverse mediation processes in Europe, Asia and Northern Africa and previously worked for the UN, ZIF and other NGOs. **Dirk Splinter** co-directs inmedio-peace-consult.org. He has been working as a mediator and mediation trainer for more than 15 years and represents inmedio at the Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland.

⁶ Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland (IMSD) and the Federal Foreign Office: Factsheet "Basics of Mediation" www.peace-mediation-germany.de/fileadmin/uploads/friedensmediation/dokumente/Basics_of_Mediation_Concepts_and_Definitions.pdf (2017); Berghof Foundation "National Dialogue Handbook" (2017).

⁷ Further Reading: Hislaire/Smith/Wachira "Insider Mediators in Africa" (2011); Berghof Foundation "OSCE Support to Insider Mediation" (2016).

⁸ Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD): Oslo Forum 2014, Meeting Report.

⁹ Hajo Giessmann "Embedded Peace. Infrastructures for Peace. Approaches and lessons learned" (2017).