

Editorial

This issue of *Peace Prints*, *Mediation through a Gender Lens. Perspectives from the Community to the International Level* turns the search lights on the practitioner. It focuses particularly on women mediators across the world, who work at all levels, from the community to the national and international. It highlights myriad practices associated with what is described as peace mediation a notion around which several women's peacebuilding activities across the world have coalesced. This edition of *Peace Prints* has specially encouraged collaborative writing between those in more formal academic and research field and those who are practitioners. The purpose is that best mediation practices across the world along with the opportunities and challenges faced by women mediators in the field are brought to the forefront and rendered accessible both to academics as well as the body of practitioners and trainers.

The United Nations guidelines define mediation "as a form of good offices whereby a third party upon request, seeks to assist parties to a dispute to reach an agreement voluntarily through a formal dialogue process." In 2012, taking cognizance of both the possibilities and challenges of mediation processes Ban Ki Moon, former Secretary General of the United Nations, had pointed out "mediation is one of the most effective methods of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. To be effective however, a mediation process requires more than the appointment of a high profile individual to act as third party. Antagonists often need to be persuaded of the merits of mediation, and peace processes must be well supported politically, technically and financially. Ad hoc and poorly coordinated mediation efforts – even when launched with the best of intentions - do not advance the goal of achieving durable peace." Overlaid with this is the fact that despite many calls to include women in peacebuilding there have been limited examples of women actually leading mediation processes.

In recent years the scope and possibilities of mediation has grown significantly with its application in diverse fields ranging from commercial disputes, public policy disputes, environmental disputes, inter and intra state disputes. Mediation is no longer confined within the realms of international diplomacy. With peacebuilding becoming more people centric the scope of mediation has also expanded to embrace reconciliation between victims and offenders, groups and communities state and non-state actors. At the same time Security Council Resolution 1325 calling for the more active participation of women in peacebuilding continues to be referenced leading to many discussions around women in peace mediation.

This edition of *Peace Prints* examines the theory and practice of mediation from a gender perspective. It engages with the possibilities and challenges of women as they enter the field of mediation across sectors and a range of disputes. The articles in this collection examine the literature around mediation as a mechanism for the peaceful settlement of disputes both

conceptually and operationally, draw on field experiences and case studies of mediation, engage with specific themes around which women have mediated. It reflects on how practitioners (specially women) understand and define the process of mediation in contexts characterised by multiple conflict sites and across cultural constituencies that cut across national borders; the opportunities and challenges for women dialogue facilitators and mediators; the role of women's mediation networks such as women mediators across the commonwealth (WMC) and other regional networks in building a community of practice and mutual learning on mediation across contexts and how mediation can work in contexts of forced migration and violent extremism.

In many ways the paper by Amy Dwyer-Neigenfind titled *Women's Meaningful Participation in a Changing Mediation Landscape* has set the tone for this collection of papers by providing a broad overview, both of the barriers faced by women mediators across the world as well as efforts to strengthen their role in mediation. These two themes are also revisited by the remaining papers in particular contexts across the world. Dwyer-Neigenfind identifies structural impediments in the path of women's mediation such as gender stereotypes that promote an essentialist view and detract from women's agency, the gender hierarchies inherent in multi-track diplomacy, and prevalent socio cultural norms that block women from participation. The practical roadblocks to women's active and meaningful participation in peace mediation that she identifies include trauma and burnout, the lack of confidence among women who often feel they lack the skills to be an effective mediator, resource constraints and political violence targeting women.

Four well known senior women practitioners – Prabha Sankaranarayan of Mediation across Borders International, Sakuntala Kadirgamar, former Senior Mediator with United Nations, Visaka Dharmadasa who has actively mediated in the Sri Lankan conflict by bringing two warring sides into safe spaces for conversation, and Neha Sanghrajka who was part of the international mediation team that mediated the successful Moputo accord in Mozambique – reflect on the methodology they have used, the timing of their intervention, the scope of their work as well as the opportunities and frustrations they have faced in their journey as peace mediators over the years. In keeping with the collaborative approach, two of the articles are co-authored by a practitioner and an academic, in a unique collaborative style. Visaka Dharmadasa spoke to Mallika Joseph who framed the inputs within the theoretical framework of mediation. In another article, senior mediator Prabha Sankaranarayan teamed up with researcher and lawyer Archana Medhekar to co-author the article based on mediation practices by women mediators associated with MBBi (Mediators Beyond Borders International).

In *The Intersection of Gender and Mediation: A Quiet Revolution*, Prabha Sankaranarayan and Archana Medhekar reflect on what they call mediative practices and the lessons this offers for the peacebuilding field more broadly. They submit that women led peace processes challenge the old hierarchical ways in which peacebuilding was done earlier and has steadily and unobtrusively generated what they term a “quiet revolution.” As women mediate across multiple domains,

traversing geographical borders and make adaptive peacebuilding their mantra, new models of leadership also emerge. Women in mediation changes the way in which negotiation, dialogue and facilitation is conducted in communities, countries and companies and this article explores this quiet revolution through the stories of Mediators beyond Borders International.

Taking forward this idea of women led quiet mediation the article titled “*Peacebuilding can’t be a profession; it must be a passion*”: *A Conversation with Visaka Dharmadasa*, takes a deep dive into what went on behind the scenes of a new peace mediation initiative that sought to bring together a group of monks representing the Sangha for a Better Sri Lanka (SBSL) and members of the Tamil diaspora group Global Tamil Forum (GTF) to build what they called a peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka following long years of civil war. Veteran peacebuilder Visaka Dharmadasa has been a key player in this new initiative with a mediative approach. Representing the quiet mediation style described by Prabha and Archana in their article *The Intersection of Gender and Mediation: A Quiet Revolution*, Visaka Dharmadasa negotiated the challenges of mediating this initiative without turning the spotlight on herself. The article, authored by scholar activist Mallika Joseph, maps the challenges that Visaka Dharmadasa faced emanating from the ever present patriarchy that tended to marginalize and invisibilise her contributions.

Sakuntala Kadirgamar’s contribution *Reflections of a Woman Mediator* traces the events and opportunities that shaped her journey as a senior peace mediator. As she points out, while the UN SCR 1325 recognised the importance of including women in mediation, the gap between the rhetoric and practice remained wide. Women, if at all they were given a chance to play the role of a mediator, often found themselves restricted to Track II negotiations. Her article raises difficult questions where she challenges herself to reflect on whether mediation as a practice is merely transactional in nature or has a deeper significance and whether she as a senior woman mediator made a difference and if so how. Kadirgamar does not shy away from asking if peace has ceased to be a fundamental value in and of itself in a world of what she describes as “unrepentant state and non-state actors” leading her to ask what unorthodox interventions might be imagined to create conditions for mediation to succeed. She raises these questions as she discusses some of her personal experiences as a woman mediator in Somalia, Nepal, Yemen and Libya.

Neha Sanghrajka’s paper *Gender Influencers: Styles of Leadership in the Mediation and Implementation of the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation* is a reflection on the mediation process that went into the signing of the Moputo accord in Mozambique and in particular her own role within it. It describes a unique mediation process in Mozambique that resulted in the successful disarmament and demobilization of over 5000 former combatants including 271 women. The process was supported by a mediation team that included the author –Neha Sanghrajka who was the only woman (Kenyan) along with the United Nations Secretary General’s Former Personal Envoy for Mozambique, Mirko Manzoni (Switzerland), Jonathan Powell (British), a Renamo MP Eduardo Namburete (Mozambican). It involved what Neha Sanghrajka

calls “peace listening” and confidence building measures through shuttle diplomacy between Moputo the capital of Mozambique, and the military base of the Renamo in rural Mozambique. As a woman mediator she reflects on how deep listening is possible only with empathy and how this, in combination with adaptability and flexibility enabled the women peace and security agenda to be integrated organically into the mediation process. This is what made this mediation process unique in terms of generating a definitive, acceptable and tangible outcome.

While Neha Sanghrajka’s paper examines how an international mediation team played an impactful role in reaching an agreement during the civil war in Mozambique, this collection also features two other papers from the African continent where the African Union and several regional organizations have been given a definite mandate to engage in mediation. This is particularly so after the adoption of United Nations Resolution 1325 and its sister resolutions that called for women’s participation at all levels of peacebuilding including mediation. However, there remains considerable gap between rhetoric and practice.

Nkechika Ibe and Seth Appaiah-Mensah’s article *Women’s Roles in Mediation and Peace Processes in Africa* focuses on Nigeria and Somalia as two case studies to make the case that despite women’s significant role in mediation and peacebuilding it has perhaps not received the attention it deserves. In Nigeria for instance, as they point out, women in the Niger delta have mitigated militancy by facilitating negotiation and fostering reconciliation by leveraging gender specific networks. Despite this there is a lack of sustained support for initiative by women in these areas. The authors also point to the impact of clan warfare on women in Somalia which has had a particularly profound impact on women including the use of rape as a weapon of war. Yet women have refused to see themselves as victims and have assumed a central role in the civil war by fostering community ties beyond clan divisions binding families and acting as bridge builders by bringing warring parties together. Despite this at the formal peacebuilding architecture they remain under represented and there is little financial support for the peace mediation activities they undertake. The authors point to the steps that can be taken to create a more enabling atmosphere for women mediators in Africa that recognizes and supports the work that they have already been doing.

Another paper from Africa examines one of the subjects that have not been adequately researched through the lens of gender and mediation and that is the topic of gender based sexual violence (GBSV). This becomes an everyday reality during intra state conflicts where the terrain is dominated by tribes, clans, militias and mercenaries. The paper *Analyzing Women’s Roles in Mediating Sexual and Gender-based Violations in Conflict: Insights from the Global South* by Dudziro Nhengu has used semi structured interviews from selected countries of the global south to analyse both the opportunities and challenges as they deal with gender based violations during conflict using transformative mediation strategies. Nhengo argues that GBSV should not be treated as a “soft issue” but rather as a hard issue of concern necessary to build sustainable peace. As a

result, it is imperative that we document women's mediation and peacebuilding efforts as they deal with this form of everyday violence.

Swarna Rajagopalan's piece *Reconciliation in Indian Epics: A Mediative Perspective* offers a Political Scientist's insight into how the interplay between politics, war and peace invariably offers multiple spaces for mediative action. Both the Indian epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are centred around the notion of exile and displacement – a theme that is all too familiar in the 21st century where global displacement is at an all-time high. As Rajagopalan indicates, a mediative approach to displacement must engage with the conditions for displacement and how these must eventually cease. Mediation also involves a leap of faith at critical junctures – the learning from the epics is that good faith is always integral to post conflict settlements. Another lesson for the 21st century mediator is that “bad actions must not be chased by worse ones.” Invariably the mediator and conflicting parties in the pressure to ink in an agreement do not adequately take into account the possibilities of post agreement violence. The epics also carry lessons on gendered violence, the role of the two leading women—Sita from *Ramayana* and Draupadi from *Mahabharata*—offer keen insights on women and war and the fallacy of boxing women into uncomplicated essentialist roles. Their complex roles in mediation, reconciliation and retributive justice problematizes the issue of gender and mediation.

This collection also includes a review article by Upasha Kumari of Ken Cloke's magnum opus *The Magic in Mediation: A Search for Symmetries, Metaphors and Scale-Free Practices*. Cloke who has spent a lifetime engaging with conflict in creative and collaborative ways has described this book as the last of his offerings in the field of mediation. Upasha Kumari draws attention to the web of magic that unfolds when Cloke encourages readers to move beyond engaging with mediation as a dry skill based activity and allow the values of creativity, connection and compassion to seep into the process. This necessarily requires a different vision of the role of the mediator and what follows is a provocative but compelling deconstruction of the notion of neutrality which has for years been seen as a core principle of mediation. Kumari points out that though the overall offering does provoke the reader to challenge patriarchal norms it falls short of shining a torch on what she describes as the “disproportionate emotional labor borne by women and marginalized genders in conflict settings.”

The now burgeoning field of women peace and security (WPS) has been the normative fountainhead from which the idea of gender and mediation has gradually evolved. Initially the WPS agenda did not pay specific attention to the idea of mediation and women mediators in particular. That changed significantly in 2013 when few formal mediation processes effectively included women. Globally women mediator networks proliferated from 2015 onwards with the commencement of the Nordic women's mediator network. The United Nations Department of Political Affairs issued its specific guidance document on gender and inclusive mediation in 2017. Drawing on the overall normative framework outlined by the WPS, the guidance document details

the practice of mediation preparation, gender sensitive process design and outlines what it means to have a gender lens on mediating agreements. There have also been advocacy groups like the Women in Mediation Action Group of Mediators beyond Borders who have been specifically advocating for women's effective participation and representation in mediation.

This collection of articles in *Peace Prints* specifically looks at the experience of women in the field of mediation particularly in the global south to understand their challenges and opportunities in this fast expanding field. The new focus on women and mediation has raised some important theoretical and practical considerations. The articles reflect on the expectations that inevitably fall on a woman mediator simply on account of gender and the rising number of women mediation networks. They highlight the attempt of women to strive to be their best professional self and ask whether overlaying this with taking on the role of gender activism overburdens her. Findings in the field indicate that women mediators consciously or unconsciously do indeed bring "soft skills" to the forefront and pave the way for more inclusive and sustainable agreements. Even when women are included as a matter of fairness of representation rather than on the basis of the specific skills they bring to the process or their self-identification as feminists, they still tend to gravitate towards addressing patriarchal structures that perpetuate violence against women in conflict situations. As many of the mediator-writers in this collection highlight, an emphasis on relationship building, empathetic listening, the ethics of care, and trust building form the cornerstone of any mediation process and both the WPS community and the mediation community can learn from this. This collection of papers suggests that this two-way dialogue on how women can influence mediation processes and how mediation processes can influence women need to be placed centre stage.

Sumona DasGupta

Guest Editor