

2020

Evaluative Exercises

A SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED
STUDIES AND EVALUATIONS



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ACRONYMS

DPA	Department of Political Affairs
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
HQ	Headquarters
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IGP	Integrated Governance Programme
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
MSU	Mediation Support Unit
MYA	Multi-Year Appeal
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PDAs	Peace and Development Advisors
RCs	Resident Coordinators
SBT	Standby Team
SPMs	Special Political Missions
TS	Transition Specialist
UN	United Nations
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNCTs	UN Country Teams
UNDP	UN Development Programme
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

INTRODUCTION

To strengthen the Department's accountability and organizational learning, DPPA commissions several evaluative exercises—lessons learned studies and evaluations—every year. Almost all of the Department's evaluative exercises are funded under the Multi-Year Appeal.

This report provides key findings and recommendations of evaluative exercises commissioned by the Department in 2020. Lessons learned studies and evaluations supported by the Peacebuilding Support Office are covered separately under the knowledge products of the Peacebuilding Fund.

Following the endorsement by Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary A. DiCarlo, to disseminate findings of evaluative exercises in 2018, DPPA has been preparing these annual reports by summarizing the evaluations and lessons learned studies related to the work of the Department. Even if confidential full-length reports cannot be shared, partners have appreciated such efforts to leverage knowledge and promote transparency.

2020 was exceedingly difficult by any measure. The pandemic upended our lives and tested us all, personally and professionally. Due to the impact of COVID-19, DPPA had to postpone several of its planned activities. Given the importance placed on institutional learning, the Department managed to undertake several evaluative exercises despite challenges related to COVID-19. Findings and recommendations of these exercises continue to improve the work of the Department, making DPPA a more relevant and effective entity.

The United Nations mediation of the boundary dispute between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon

2008 - 2016: Lessons Learned Study

BACKGROUND:

This is a study of the United Nations mediation of the Equatorial Guinea-Gabon boundary dispute between 2008 and 2016, which relates to their overlapping claims of sovereignty over three islands, and the delimitation of their maritime and land boundaries. It details the four principal phases of UN efforts during this time period and the strategies employed by UN mediators at different points in time. It shows that by working patiently, steadily, quietly, and non-threateningly, the Secretariat can help parties be better technically prepared to act when a window of opportunity opens.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The story of the United Nations mediation of the Equatorial Guinea-Gabon boundary dispute between 2008 and 2016 is one of quiet persistence, focussed on helping the parties – at their request – make incremental progress towards a binding agreement to refer their boundary dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), while ensuring United Nations efforts remained non-threatening throughout.

The boundary dispute between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon relates to their overlapping claims of sovereignty over three islands – located in Corisco Bay at the eastern end of the Gulf of Guinea and off the two countries’ western coasts – and to the delimitation of their maritime and land boundaries. Having unsuccessfully attempted to resolve the dispute through United Nations mediation between 2003 and 2006, the Secretariat subsequently assisted the parties in identifying a different means of peaceful settlement. The parties opted for judicial settlement at the ICJ, and again requested the Secretariat’s assistance – this time to mediate the process of defining the Court’s jurisdiction in a binding treaty known as a “special agreement,” or *compromis*.

The Secretariat’s mediation efforts between 2008 and 2016 can be divided in four phases. The first began with the appointment of Mr. Nicolas Michel as Mediator in 2008 and lasted until early 2012. During this phase, the Mediator and his team employed formal mediation tools to establish a process and steadily facilitate the development of the draft agreement text. The team was able to make significant progress, but by mid-2010, it was evident that attention should be paid to creating a more permissive political context.

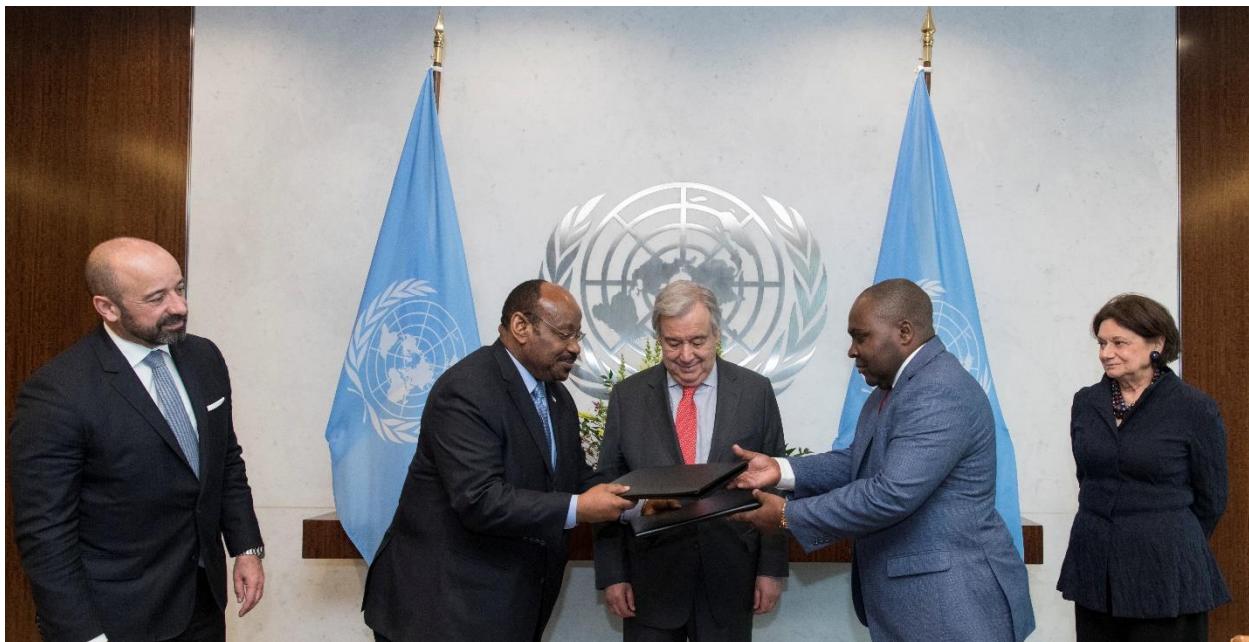
In the second phase, between 2012 and 2013, the Mediator continued to work with the parties on the agreement. In late 2012, the parties decided to negotiate a joint exploitation agreement in parallel, without the help of the Mediator, ostensibly in order to narrow the risk that an adverse eventual ICJ judgment could leave either party with no access to income from the under-water resources, and as a way out of the impasse. However, the parties failed to make any headway in these discussions by the end of 2013.

In the third phase, which lasted from late 2013 until late 2015, discussions between the parties lost momentum and stalled. In mid-2014, the parties reaffirmed their request for assistance in reaching a peaceful settlement and decided to explicitly include the joint economic exploitation discussions in the new UN mandate, although no further progress was made.

In September 2015, the parties unexpectedly expressed renewed interest in the mediation and decided to advance as quickly as possible towards the signature of the *compromis*. Given that Mr. Nicolas Michel’s role as Mediator had ended, the Secretary-General named Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, as the “Focal Point” for this file. In this fourth phase, the parties limited their discussions to the special agreement, and picked up from

where previous efforts had left off, making no significant edits to the 2013 version of the draft agreement. Then, on 15 November 2016, they signed the *compromis* (hereinafter referred to as the Special Agreement). Equatorial Guinea proceeded to ratify the Special Agreement within two months; Gabon informed UN Headquarters in November 2019 that it had ratified the Special Agreement. Finally, on 3 March 2020, the parties met the final condition set out in the Special Agreement in order for it to enter into force, namely the need for each party to formally notify the other that the necessary domestic ratification formalities had been completed.

In the end, careful work by the Mediator, chiefly between 2009 and 2011, laid the groundwork for the parties to speedily conclude an agreement once a window of opportunity finally presented itself several years later.



New York

Secretary-General António Guterres and Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo witnessed the last step in the resolution of the longstanding border dispute between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. At a ceremony on 3 March, the Permanent Representatives of the two countries exchanged notifications that formally put an end to a conflict that dated back to the early 1970's. The UN mediated in the conflict for more than two decades. UN Photo/Mark Garten

KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

1. The main lesson to be drawn from this process is that by working steadily, quietly, and non-threateningly – even when an agreement appears unlikely – the Secretariat and the parties will be better prepared to

seize the moment if a window of opportunity presents itself.

2. Other lessons learned and observations include the following:

- a. The Secretariat's work in 2008 to help the parties identify a different means of peaceful settlement for their dispute had the practical effect of helping them recommit to resolving this dispute through peaceful means. The parties also agreed not to threaten each other or have this dispute in the public sphere. This was itself a notable contribution to conflict prevention.
- b. It eventually became clear that it would be necessary to focus on creating a domestic and bilateral political context conducive to a solution.
- c. Ultimately, the decision to advance expeditiously towards the signature of the Special Agreement appears to have been made by the two Heads of State themselves.
- d. A significant part of the process was paid for by the Secretariat using voluntary contributions. This contributed to making the process non-threatening but imposed a burden on the Secretariat which, in the absence of Regular Budget funding, had to absorb the costs or spend time fundraising for them. This complicated planning for the medium- and long-term resource requirements of the process.
- e. Analysing the gender and inclusivity dimensions of legal and boundary disputes presents challenges. A focus on those most likely to be affected by the prolonged non-resolution of a dispute, for example in terms of missed or delayed economic development, may reveal differentiated indirect impacts on various groups.

3. In terms of good practices, the following can be noted:

- a. Having an interdisciplinary team of advisers was valuable for the Mediator.
- b. There was strong working-level inter-departmental collaboration between staff of the Office of Legal Affairs and of the Department of Political Affairs supporting the Mediator.
- c. The Mediator's team was gender-balanced, which allowed the Secretariat to set a good example.
- d. The mediation team conducted periodic stock-taking exercises, enabling the Secretariat to reflect on the achievements and difficulties in the process and adjust the strategy as necessary.

The UNDP/DPO/DPPA Project on UN Transi- tions in Mission Settings

Evaluation

BACKGROUND

UN transitions are high on the agenda as a number of peacekeeping operations and Special Political Missions (SPMs) are currently planning for or undergoing drawdown, reconfiguration and withdrawal processes that greatly affect the presence and work of the wider UN. In response to increased requests from UN field presences for transition-related support, UNDP, DPO, and DPPA initiated a joint project in 2014 that seeks to ensure that UN transition processes are planned and managed in a timely, integrated and forward-looking manner, thereby supporting the sustainability of peacebuilding achievements.



Nigerian peacekeepers serving with the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) departing for Roberts International Airport at the end of their deployment. Two hundred Nigerian peacekeepers, the last military protection force in UNMIL, left Liberia in February 2018 as part of the termination of the Mission's mandate. UN Photo/Albert González Farran

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the evaluation was narrow in scope and focused in particular on the project's relevance, efficiency, and sustainability by:

- Assessing the current demand for integrated support to UN transition processes among the Project's key stakeholders.
- Evaluating the Project vis-à-vis its intended objectives and deliverables of improving the planning and management of UN transition processes.
- Evaluating the extent to which the Project contributes to enhancing integrated and cross-pillar collaboration in transition processes at Headquarters (HQ) and at country-level; and
- Providing insights for the next programme design through findings, conclusions and key recommendations that emerged from the evaluation. This includes focusing on the sustainability of the Project and identifying suggestions to further mainstream UN transitions

into integrated assessment and planning processes, as well as highlighting areas where further support or initiatives are needed.

MAIN FINDINGS

1. The support provided by the Project, and its overall visibility, have led to greater recognition both at HQ and in the field of the importance of well-prepared and managed transitions. There is concrete 'traction' in that the topic is on the agenda and attracting considerable positive attention. The project is an effective mechanism that brings together different UN entities and helps to create a common understanding among the UN family and consensus on the need for recognition that better planned transitions can prevent relapse and leverage attention, including resources and capacities.
2. The project has effectively: i) mobilized support to countries; ii) influenced the preparation of policy documents at the highest level; and iii) started collecting relevant studies and analysis, helping countries to prepare for transitions.
3. The deployment of Transition Specialists (TS) is an effective and relevant contribution to transitions, but the positioning and effectiveness of TS presence can be further enhanced.
4. The project is slowly moving from a UN-centric approach to reaching out to other stakeholders, thereby acknowledging that partnerships and additional analysis are needed to deepen the understanding of transition challenges.
5. The different key policy and planning instruments are relevant. The extent to which these are effectively used could not be assessed. TS work and contribution and use of these instruments also show that considerable work is process and coordination-oriented.
6. Transition Specialists are bringing together key players and helping to implement the SG's Planning Directive. There are, however, capacity gaps in host countries. Addressing these could affect the transition work and enable host countries to play a more active role in the future.
7. Gender is on the agenda; some work has been done but more is needed to ensure that it is integrated in the transition documents and, responding to the SG's Directive, becomes fully integrated within transition processes.
8. Demand for the products and the services of the project remains high, both in countries that currently receive support and in countries where UN missions will likely undergo

reconfiguration or closure in the next phase.

9. The body of knowledge generated through the project is relevant and useful but does not reach all the different audiences yet.

10. The project is more than the sum of the outputs; good working relationships among the project partners have been created as well as with partners outside the UN.



Then-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (left) with Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, during the ceremony marking the closure of the UN Integrated Peace Building Mission in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) and the transfer of its responsibilities to the UN country team. March 2014. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Be ambitious:** capitalize on the gains of the work achieved, address the weaknesses and look for opportunities (= influence) to create more traction and leverage (partnerships, including hosts government and knowledge management).
- 2. Build a knowledge platform** and continue to contribute to the ‘body of evidence’ of how the project gains have contributed to *improved transition planning and processes* as well as undertake more analytical work in support of both transitions and outreach to different audiences.
- 3. Continue to revise and update key documents** and improve the use of these documents. Ensure to remain the ‘linking pin’ among the different key partners to revise and update guidelines and policies that respond to overall UN directives.
- 4. Continue to seek strategic discussion** at the highest level to bring forward

what works well and what not in order to further improve best practices and remain at the front of operational and strategic developments of transition thinking with the help of internal and external experts. Include Member States and the Peacebuilding Architecture.

- 5. Build on internal expertise** within the team and with partners. Expand research to feed into knowledge management and improve access to and distribution of knowledge products.
- 6. Improve communication:** prepare annual reports for wide distribution and include references for easy access; keep audiences informed; develop short briefs and other material for different types of audiences.
- 7. Prepare a road map** for the phasing out of the project: take to heart what the project preaches and develop an exit strategy with the next phase.

UN Support to Local Mediation: Challenges and Oppor- tunities

Lessons Learned Study

BACKGROUND

Over the past two years (2018-2020), the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) has increased its support around local mediation initiatives, responding to the Secretary-General's call for a surge in diplomacy for peace and the priority he set for the UN to increase its capacities to more effectively address local conflicts. MSU activities have included a series of reflection and learning workshops; the development of dedicated case studies on Afghanistan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Myanmar, the Philippines, and South Sudan; as well as direct technical support to UN and non-UN partners to help address local conflicts or establish linkages with national-level mediation or dialogue processes. This reflection piece summarizes emerging insights and recommendations from the case studies and workshops in an effort to help further enrich and strengthen UN mediation practice.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interest in local mediation has surged in response to shifts in the global conflict landscape. These include the growing regionalization and internationalization of conflict – evidenced by the emergence of regional conflict complexes such as the wars in Yemen and Syria; the rise in violent extremist groups; increasing violations of international standards of humanitarian and human rights law; as well as the multiplication and fragmentation of conflict actors and agendas.

Traditional, high-level negotiation processes have struggled to adjust to these global shifts, experiencing serious setbacks in their efforts to forge a negotiated agreement between conflicting parties. Within and beyond the UN, there is increasing recognition that comprehensive, multi-layered mediation strategies are an essential precondition to end violent conflict in an effective and sustainable manner. Local mediation is also sometimes seen as an entry point when high-level negotiations have become deadlocked. As such, focussing on local mediation represents a logical step in efforts to reduce violence, protect civilians and enhance local, if not nationwide, stability.

With this in mind, MSU has been piloting an engagement strategy which aims to enhance the UN's abilities to enable the resolution of local conflicts in a way that is strategic, collaborative, creative, inclusive and sustainable. MSU's efforts in support of local mediation aim to:

- Strengthen the UN's ability to **effectively engage** with local mediation efforts both as a means to help resolve local level conflict as well as to strengthen formal mediation processes at the national level;
- Help improve **strategic coherence** of UN engagement at various levels, including by exploring the development of mission-wide strategies for linking local mediation efforts and national political strategies;
- Strengthen **UN staff awareness, understanding, and capacity** to effectively engage in sensitive local mediation processes;
- Make the UN's efforts at the local level **more visible in UN Headquarters**, among senior leadership and Member States; as well as
- **Capture knowledge** on challenges and opportunities around the UN's increased engagement in mediation efforts at the local level and **provide opportunities for exchange and learning**.

MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 1. Do no harm:** The cases considered illustrate the importance of the do no harm principle when assessing whether to engage in local mediation or not. It is critical that the UN evaluate its comparative advantage in a given conflict setting, and carefully weigh the potential risks of getting involved more actively.
- 2. Local ownership:** Local ownership not only promotes the credibility of efforts and the responsibility of stakeholders for the process, but also increases the chances of achieving sustainable outcomes. Actors who are well-connected across the conflict spectrum, grounded at the local level, and respected and trusted by conflict parties, will be best-placed to facilitate local mediation processes.
- 3. Build on what already exists:** Another important consideration is to identify and try to build on what already exists in society, using and reinforcing existing structures and mechanisms; seeking acceptance and buy-in; respecting a locally determined peace; as well as taking decisions jointly throughout.
- 4. Support inclusive approaches:** Pushing for the inclusion of marginalized groups is paramount for effective and sustainable peacemaking. Youth, women, indigenous groups, victims, or other stakeholders are major actors of change that have to be meaningfully included in local decision-making and mediation processes.
- 5. Linkages:** To better understand and foster linkages across different levels of engagement, effective collaboration, including information sharing, between the field level and senior leadership is essential. Engaging relevant Government structures, local level stakeholders and mediation actors with access to various levels and processes, is also important.
- 6. The UN's role:** In local settings the UN's footprint should be as light and complementary as possible. The Organization can play various roles to assist local processes, providing, for instance, financial, logistical or technical support, as well as potential political engagement. For the UN to effectively lead from behind, benefiting from the expertise of national staff is critical.
- 7. Partnerships:** While roles and responsibilities have to be clearly delineated among UN entities, strategic partnerships with external actors should be pursued in support of local mediation processes; this seems particularly true for settings where such actors may have comparative advantages in working at the local level.
- 8. A principled approach:** Reflecting on the actual conduct of local mediation

processes it seems clear that the UN's involvement requires flexibility and creativity. It also calls for a principled approach whereby the UN's red lines and fundamental values, particularly with regard to the inclusion of women and the respect of human rights, are promoted and translated into local terms.

9. Resources and capacities: As with national mediation processes, human

and financial resources are needed for meaningful engagement in local mediation processes. Several skills will be required for UN staff to engage at the local level, including, amongst others, cultural fluency, linguistic abilities and experience with mediation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reflecting on UN support to local mediation process, there should always be **caution in making generalizations, as processes and types of UN involvement differ widely across different settings**. Still, some early insights may be considered when analyzing, supporting, implementing and/or monitoring local mediation processes:

1. Identify and leverage the UN's comparative advantages: The UN can provide critical logistical, capacity-building, technical and good offices support to local-level mediation initiatives. In many settings, the Organization has field presence as well as access to the highest circles of national and international decision-making. Its involvement can thus help solidify links between processes at different levels. At the same time, it is critical that the UN weigh the potential risks of getting involved more actively. Sometimes, the best the Organization may do is to take a step back.

2. Enhance coordination across various levels of engagement: Addressing local conflicts effectively requires an integrated approach both within the UN and between partners. Within the UN, there is a need to further elevate the understanding of local mediation

across different entities in order to ensure a more joined-up approach. Externally, while collaborating with partners, there is a need to identify roles and potential synergies with a view to strengthen overall engagement in support of lead mediators and their strategies.

3. Support capacities and expertise to engage with local level conflicts: Successful mediation requires specific skills, experience and a holistic understanding of the conflict system in question. The most significant resources for conflict resolution are the know-how and skills in the countries the UN is mandated to support. Building on, enabling and supporting the enhancement of national and local conflict resolution efforts, actors, and processes is thus a priority.

4. Strengthen knowledge development: There are plenty, often

undocumented, experiences of mediation efforts at the local level. Institutional learning and development of practice could help to further unpack and better understand some of the most critical topical areas around local mediation processes.

5. Seek conceptual and analytical clarity:

At present, there are no agreed definitions in the UN system of what makes a mediation process distinctively local. Seeking further

conceptual clarity to foster a common understanding of local mediation processes across the UN seems essential. There is also a need to develop a set of considerations or criteria that can help UN actors better assess the nature, risks and political significance of local mediation processes, as well as the prospects of pursuing linkages with high-level mediation efforts as part of broader peace process design deliberations.



UN-backed forum on women's inclusion and participation in peace discussions in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan. UN Photo/UNAMA

DPA's Engagement in the Maldives

2014 - 2018: *Lessons Learned Study*

BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, DPA/DPPA, in close coordination with the UN Resident Coordinator, has maintained engagement with the Maldives in support of its nascent democratic gains to build confidence between political actors and to foster the conditions for meaningful political dialogue. Successive Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) and members of UNDP's Integrated Governance Programme (IGP) have explored platforms to discuss delicate religious and societal issues. Additional examples of engagement have included high-level visits, good offices, desk-level working missions, and technical assistance to all-party talks within the context of electoral processes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The fiercely contested 2013 election, which President Abdulla Yameen and his Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) won after an annulled vote and second run-off, brought about a particularly turbulent period of governance for the Republic of the Maldives, characterized by recurring political volatility and several political and constitutional crises. Freedoms of expression and assembly were repeatedly restricted, including through the introduction of legislation criminalizing defamation and crackdowns on public demonstrations. The judiciary intervened in political processes and opposition members, judges, and other prominent figures faced trial, imprisonment and/or exile.

This study takes stock of the UN's role during the period 2014-2018, which culminated in the election of opposition candidate Ibrahim (Ibu) Mohamed Solih of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), and captures lessons learned and best practices. It identifies the key drivers of tension and connectors for peace and maps out DPA's engagement, before considering the effectiveness of its interventions, and the UN's cooperation with local, national, regional, and international actors. Drawing on these observations and identified lessons, it offers some best practices or recommendations for future strategic engagement in the Maldives, and potentially to inform other instances of good offices engagement of a similar nature. Its conclusions were validated in a review meeting held virtually amongst many of the senior UN participants in the UN's efforts in the Maldives on 13 January 2021.

MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. In 2014, after a disputed and tense presidential election, DPA's relationship with the new government was quite fragile and marked by significant mistrust. Direct interventions in 2013, which were necessary to prevent a further destabilization of the

country, unfortunately had consequences for the UN's rapport with Yameen's Government. Frequent turnover in leadership at the country-level and differences in opinion between DPA and UNDP likely contributed to the UN system's inability to

prevent the backsliding of the Maldives' democratic transition. The new Government's ambition to resist UN political engagement was clear from the outset, but the UN was not sufficiently resourced or aligned to slow the tide of change.

2. The deployment of a permanent Resident Coordinator (RC) and the arrest of former President Mohamed Nasheed in February 2015 contributed to a comprehensive UN response, and led to effective collaboration between DPA, the RC's office and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). By shedding a siloed approach, participants appreciated the greater number of tools at their disposal to enable more effective strategic planning, informed risk-taking and targeted responses. Coordinated political and human rights reporting between country-based analysts (PDAs, Human Rights Officers etc.) and HQs in New York and Geneva enhanced this partnership, as well as deep individual commitments to the common cause.

3. Restoring a working relationship with the Government required a reassertion of the UN's impartiality with the negotiation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) as a key entry point. The use of catalytic funding to respond to an emergent issue and deployment of a PDA through the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention were

crucial to restoring a more productive channel of engagement with the Government.

4. In July 2015, the collapse of the President's All-Party Talks (which lacked any international oversight) entrenched mistrust and damaged the prospects for future compromise between political parties. However, the Secretary-General's appointment of a Special Adviser for Asia and Pacific in January 2016 and effective senior engagement by DPA leadership revived a dormant and unripe dialogue process. After some positive momentum and a breakthrough meeting of party leadership, the absence of political will and use of the judicial system to target opposition leadership diminished the space for an agreement. Greater international support to a settlement and a neutral domestic institution dedicated to reconciliation or social cohesion could have complemented the UN's good offices efforts.

5. External partnerships with institutions such as the European Union and the Commonwealth were also crucial during the 2014-2018 period, resulting in mutually reinforcing strategies, an effective division of labour with UN actors, and distinct sources of leverage and influence. When the UN's relationship with the Maldives Government was not as strong, DPA was able to brainstorm policy ideas and discuss options after missions conducted by EU and Commonwealth colleagues. Effective regional pressure encouraging one candidate to

stand down, the EU's adopted framework for targeted restricted measures, and the gradual closing of the tourism market from Europe were prominent factors that contributed to a more competitive presidential electoral process in 2018.

6. During the political crisis of February 2018 that resulted in the Government's declaration of a state of emergency, the UN responded comprehensively, strengthened by its internal coherence and efforts of its external partners. The deployment of an expert from the Mediation Support Unit Standby Team (SBT), with a strong reputation garnered from experience negotiating a peace deal in a Muslim-majority context, was the first step in a sustained engagement by DPA. Participants also spoke of the importance of the gender dynamic of that time: the RC, Chief of DPA's Asia and the Pacific Division, SBT expert, and PDA were all women, and effective in presenting a united front and pushing

their messages to a group of mostly male government counterparts.

- 7.** This groundwork laid the foundation for a strategically timed visit of the Assistant Secretary-General of Political Affairs, which coincided with the registration deadline and announcement of qualified presidential candidates, signalling the UN's commitment to a free and fair election. Despite ruling party pressure and the efforts of government-aligned media, the electoral institutions and security services defended the election of President Solih.
- 8.** Participants concluded that sustained high-level DPA engagement, the utilization of flexible tools, availability of funding through DPA's Multi-Year Appeal, and reoccurring missions to establish and sustain relationships with key national stakeholders were core components of DPA's preventive diplomacy throughout this period.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Drawing on the review of available documentation and interviews with current and former UN officials (both at HQ and on the ground), national, regional, and international actors, and NGOs, including women's groups, the study suggests:

- 1.** Given the absence of a UN regional political office in the Asia-Pacific, prioritize the deployment of other Secretariat resources to provide sustained constructive engagement and longer-term good offices support to contexts, such as the Maldives, of continuing concern.
- 2.** Ensuring UN and DPPA staff reach out and engage with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, and not just rely on politicians and the traditional

CSOs. Due to the extremely close relationship between the political elite and the tourism industry in the Maldives, tourism tycoons, private sector entrepreneurs and the business community can provide crucial insights to help understand alliances and strategic decisions.

3. As national leaders look towards Presidential Elections in 2023, broader electoral support by the UN should be considered, subject to a request from the Government or the Elections Commission and approval by the UN Focal Point for Electoral Assistance Activities. Currently a desk review is being conducted to determine whether UNDP will provide financial aid and technical support in developing the Strategic Plan of the Elections Commission for 2022-2026 (requested by the Elections Commission in October 2020).

4. Applying for Maldives-specific projects from the Peacebuilding Fund, given the fund's 2020-2024 "priority window" on women and youth empowerment, and its focus area on dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

5. Proactively engaging the MDP-led coalition government (or its supporters) to ensure prevention of actions that are at odds with democratic principles and UN values, as well as maintain a constant dialogue with leading opposition figures.

6. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recently ratified Transitional Justice bill, it might be prudent to support a reconciliation process aimed at advancing national unity and reducing political polarization.

It also offers a few additional considerations for future reflection and action:

1. Irrespective of the merits of individual judicial cases, the practice or perception of targeting political opponents through the courts, or through social media campaigns is a lingering concern.

2. Extremism and the targeting of human rights organizations by conservative religious groups has persisted throughout 2019-2020, and critics claim the new government is

prioritizing political alliances over a principled approach against extremism, which is widening existing vulnerabilities.

3. The strengthening of non-partisan organizations is still needed to provide balanced views, and check government overreach. Participants highlighted the targeting of certain NGOs, who address issues of secularism in Maldives society and the politicization of religion. This point was

complemented by others, who highlighted the government's resistance to new civil society voices, and the

regulatory process which prevents the growth of this sector.

The UN and DPPA can draw on a great deal of good will and appreciation for its past efforts and current engagements in the Maldives. There have been a few noteworthy governance reforms that demonstrate progress, but many underlying factors that explained the instability of the past still linger. Managing these risks and suggesting preventive engagements could inform a plan of action for the next two years. This study proves that the UN's political engagement has been effective in times of tremendous turmoil. In a few instances, past lessons were even incorporated to inform decision-making with positive results. However, in these quieter moments, a concerted approach may still be needed to cut-off any further backsliding of democratic development and address the recent wounds that are still prominent in the minds of national stakeholders.

The Experience of UN Special Political Missions in Colombia on Women, Peace and Security

2016 - 2020: *Lessons Learned Study*

BACKGROUND

The Colombian peace process and its 2016 Final Peace Agreement are widely held to be an international model for gender-sensitivity and the inclusion of women's rights. The United Nations (UN) played an active role, along with others in the international community, first in encouraging and advising key actors to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda during the peace negotiations (2012-2016) and then through the establishment of two consecutive special political missions (SPMs) in Colombia to verify specific provisions of the Agreement. In its efforts to implement the WPS agenda in Colombia, the UN worked in close cooperation with the authorities and former guerrillas, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), as well as with civil society and international stakeholders.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020 marked the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 establishing the WPS agenda. Accordingly, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) commissioned this study to reflect on the principal ways in which, after shared efforts to support women's participation in the peace process, its missions have since 2016 conducted gender-sensitive monitoring and verification of key aspects of the Agreement, namely reintegration of former combatants and security guarantees, and supported implementation of the broader WPS agenda. The study identifies emerging lessons from this experience to strengthen support to women in peace processes and peace agreement implementation in Colombia and beyond.

UN Verification Mission official reviews list of elements delivered to former combatants for the fish farming project. Carmen del Darién, Colombia. UN Photo/Verification Mission in Colombia/Melissa Jaimes



MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Colombian peace process and Final Peace Agreement were ground-breaking in incorporating women's participation in peace talks and strong women's rights and gender provisions. The experience of two successive UN Special Political Missions in supporting Colombia's parties and society in the verification and implementation of the Agreement has similarly broken new ground and provides lessons for the UN and broader international community on how to support a gender-inclusive design and implementation of peace agreements. The breadth and depth of the experience in Colombia offers valuable lessons for other contexts in advancing the WPS agenda. These include, for instance, early deployment of dedicated gender expertise to set a foundation for inclusion of the WPS agenda in the work of the mission; the need for committed and accountable mission leadership and internal policies to mainstream gender across all areas of work; established and continuous consultations with women's civil society, both at senior level as well as through grassroots relationships with field offices; strategic partnerships between the mission, UNCT, the Government, Member States and civil society to support the holistic implementation of the WPS agenda; as well as the mobilization of dedicated resources and funds to support inclusive peace agreement implementation.



Women former combatants in the process of reintegration from the community of the former Territorial Area for Training and Reintegration (TATR) La Variante in Tumaco, Nariño, beginning a training programme in public health and community epidemiological monitoring, October 2020. UN Photo/Verification Mission in Colombia/Nadya González

RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDING NEXT STEPS

1. MISSION STRENGTHS FOR ADVANCING THE WPS AGENDA IN THE PEACE PROCESS AND GENDER-SENSITIVE VERIFICATION

- Strong UN leadership, both political and technical, is unquestionably the most important factor for advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda.
- Coherence at all levels within the UN and coordination on the WPS agenda in the peace process are essential.
- SPMs can benefit from an extensive field presence, a well-coordinated network of gender focal points and high-level access when these are integrated as strategic resources for advancing the gender and women's rights contents of peace agreements and the WPS agenda.
- Highlighting progress and challenges in gender-sensitive implementation of peace agreements in the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council, together with a strong mission communications strategy, is an effective means for raising awareness and advancing the process.
- Extra-budgetary funds are valuable for supporting strategic gender work, and the Colombia experience may provide an example for other missions in this regard.

2. ADVANCING THE WPS AGENDA WITH INTERNAL MISSION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- Mission-wide internal gender policies are essential and are supported by the strong alignment within the UN and new tools for accountability; the greatest challenges are often concentrated in aspects of internal culture.
- The ambitious gender content of a peace agreement requires that an SPM has commensurate resources and specialized capacity to support implementation.
- More systematic internal training on gender can help mainstream a high level of gender-sensitive analysis, reporting and verification.
- The experience of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism during the first SPM demonstrated the multiple benefits of including women in such operations and underscores the importance of including gender criteria in the selection and posting of UN observers, especially for leadership roles.



ASOMIC Association signs agreement for the fishing project in Former Reintegration Area La Pradera. Puerto Asís, Putumayo, Colombia. UN Photo/Verification Mission in Colombia/Laura Santamaría

3. ADDRESSING SOME CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

- Even with significant national ownership of the women's rights and gender provisions in the Agreement and strong national institutions and organizations, implementation is challenging and requires dedicated

resources; at the same time early gender-sensitive analysis to identify contextual obstacles and suggest mitigating strategies could be helpful to pave the way.

4. SPECIFIC THEMATIC WORK IN COLOMBIA: CHALLENGES FOR REINTEGRATION AND SECURITY GUARANTEES

- Economic empowerment is a key focus for the reintegration of women former combatants; the Colombian experience also suggests a need for a broader

rethinking of reintegration models for women.

- Security and protections for women are essential for their ability to participate meaningfully in the implementation of a

peace agreement and should be a priority; women's direct participation in the official structures that define protection and security policies aid in ensuring attention and a differential approach to their risks and needs.

- Careful consideration should be given to addressing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in a systematic fashion, as well as to the limiting effects of domestic violence on the possibilities for participation and reintegration of women former combatants.

5. STRONG PARTNERS AND A GENDER ARCHITECTURE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- SPMs benefit from strong relationships with national women's organizations, whose efforts can lay the foundations for strong national ownership of gender and women's rights content in peace agreements and their gender-responsive implementation.
- Specialized and well-resourced gender architecture is essential for peace agreement implementation and is a strategic partner for UN missions; such gender structures merit all technical and political support to enhance their role.
- Women former combatants play an exceptional role in Colombia; their experience can be helpful for women in other contexts who face many of the same challenges in transitioning to civilian life.
- The critical support for the WPS agenda by members of the international community can complement and magnify the work of SPMs on gender and women's rights; it represents an essential partnership.

Value-for-Money Assessment: DPPA Multi-Year Appeal

Evaluation

BACKGROUND

This Value-for-Money assessment examines the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) projects funded through the Multi-Year Appeal (MYA). The rapid-assessment methodology is modelled on the preliminary assessment phase of a public-sector Value-for-Money or Performance audit. The findings and recommendations in this report are based on confidential interviews, document review, and data analysis conducted between June and October 2020 by an independent consultant, in close collaboration with DPPA staff.

Below is a summary of the report. Please visit our website to access the [full report](#).

PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

- 1.** This Value-for-Money assessment examines the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) projects funded through the Multi-Year Appeal (MYA) in 2019 and 2020. This assessment was conducted in keeping with DPPA's Learning and Evaluation Workplan for 2020, which calls for rapid assessment of MYA projects.
- 2.** The assessment methodology is modelled on the preliminary assessment phase of a public-sector Value-for-Money audit. The findings and recommendations in this report are based on confidential interviews, document review, and data analysis conducted between June and October 2020 by an independent consultant, in close collaboration with DPPA.
- 3.** In 2020, the MYA provided around USD 40 million in voluntary funding from UN member states to DPPA, representing almost half of the annual DPPA budget,¹ and enabled the delivery of around 100 projects.
- 4.** This report takes a strategic and systemic focus, examining the MYA projects at a whole-portfolio level, while identifying specific areas for in-depth evaluation. This high-level strategic approach mirrors the focus of benchmark public sector Value-for-Money audits and inquiries in the peacemaking and conflict response sector.
- 5.** This assessment firstly analyzes the strategic logic (or relevance) of the MYA, examining the clarity and coherence of the MYA portfolio, and testing the logical connection between the MYA portfolio of projects and DPPA's high-level objectives.
- 6.** Secondly, the assessment examines the effectiveness of the MYA portfolio of projects in delivering valued results. This addresses the systems used by DPPA to determine whether the MYA portfolio of projects is attaining its objectives, while also identifying priority themes in which MYA projects are delivering valued results, including topics such as *Women, Peace and Security*.

¹ In 2020 the total amount allocated to DPPA under the 'Regular Budget + Extra-Budgetary funds' bracket was around USD 90 million. This does not include funding for Special Political Missions, which cost around USD700m each per year.

7. Thirdly, the assessment considers questions of cost-efficiency, asking whether the MYA portfolio is applying funds in an efficient way to minimize costs, and identifying areas in which there may be scope for greater efficiencies.
8. The primary audience for the report is the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary A. DiCarlo, along with senior directors and managers within DPPA. In keeping with the ‘Value-for-Money’ methodology adopted for this assessment, the report has been written with a broader audience in mind, including stakeholders, donors, counterpart organisations, future DPPA staff, and researchers.

RELEVANCE: THE STRATEGIC COHERENCE OF THE MYA

1. The MYA is closely aligned with DPPA’s strategic objectives and risk-reduction operational model. It aims to help DPPA to remain operationally focussed, to deliver rapid and responsive interventions to prevent and reduce violent conflict, and to foster more sustainable peace.
filling gaps in DPPA’s operational reach under the Regular Budget allocation.
2. By supporting DPPA’s capacity in the headquarters and in the field, the MYA strengthens the UN peacemaking role, linking peace-supporting initiatives across organizational and operational boundaries.
3. The MYA value-proposition in 2020 may be summarized as follows: *In pursuit of DPPA’s objectives to prevent conflict and sustain peace, the MYA portfolio demonstrates distinctive value through projects that respond rapidly and adapt flexibly to the risk of violent conflict, and by*
4. In operational terms, the MYA portfolio allows DPPA to fulfil its high-level objective of conflict prevention, peace-making, and catalyzing sustained peace. With the MYA, DPPA supports over thirty Special Political Missions, multiple ‘good offices’ initiatives of the Secretary General, including Special Envoys and Special Representatives, mediation processes including ‘Track 1’ diplomatic initiatives, technical support for peaceful elections, and strategic partnerships with regional organizations.
5. The allocation of funds within the MYA portfolio demonstrates a clear alignment with DPPA’s high-level

goals: peacemaking, partnerships, and a learning, innovative culture.

6. MYA portfolio prioritization could be further supported through the use of a simple portfolio mapping tool, showing the degree to which MYA

projects are serving the central value-proposition of the fund.

7. The MYA is also an essential source of funding for DPPA, in the face of a stagnant Regular Budget Allocation gradually eroded by inflation in recent years.

EFFECTIVENESS: THE RESULTS OF THE MYA PORTFOLIO

1. Apart from providing case-study examples, DPPA does not yet report on interim operational results in the MYA portfolio, such as when projects access the right stakeholders, engage them in dialogue, and begin to exert influence towards peace and away from violence. Including these interim results would move the MYA reporting focus towards the operational results that reflect the core value claim of the MYA. This could be accomplished through a low-burden and self-reported results register, as a first step.

2. DPPA's concept of risk-reduction underpins the MYA, but the MYA lacks a means to measure the 'risk responsiveness' of its portfolio. DPPA may be able to better demonstrate effectiveness and prioritization within the MYA portfolio by forecasting and documenting in advance where suitable risk-responsive opportunities are most likely to arise in the UN

system, and then measuring its ability to seize these opportunities. Several indexes of global conflict scale and intensity could also provide a useful guide to determine whether MYA has been effective in its risk-response role.

3. The MYA allows DPPA to gain days and sometimes weeks of advance deployment time, helping Envoys and Special Political Missions to deploy with a speed that is impossible if DPPA awaits the approval of an official UN mandate and the release of Regular Budget funds. Despite the centrality of this value-claim, DPPA does not yet report on the extent to which the MYA accelerates these kinds of deployments, either in days gained, or in costs avoided.

4. MYA funding is effective in supporting innovative initiatives which would otherwise not be feasible with Regular Budget funding alone. The use of innovative methods has

helped DPPA continue to fulfil its mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to fully support the Secretary-General's call for a Global Ceasefire.

5. The introduction of a new Gender Marker, tied to MYA project approval and review steps, positions DPPA well to report on its effectiveness in inclusion – potentially also considering youth inclusion, which is identified by DPPA as a critical issue.

EFFICIENCY: THE STEWARDSHIP OF FUNDS WITHIN THE MYA PORTFOLIO

1. Creeping gaps in the Regular Budget allocation have required an increasing proportion of MYA funding to be applied to core DPPA funding needs in recent years, such as staff salaries, routine staff training, and predictable travel needs. It is arguable that since these staff and travel costs are recurring and foreseeable, that they should feature in the Regular Budget of the DPPA.
2. 54 per cent of MYA expenses in 2020 were allocated to DPPA staff and personnel costs, while 12 per cent was applied to travel. Given the nature of DPPA's work, it is reasonable that the majority of the MYA budget is directed to the employment staff and consultants, and the transport of these people to conflict-affected areas when needed.
3. Travel expenses appear to be managed efficiently within the MYA portfolio, allowing high-value rapid

intervention of DPPA staff and envoys to prevent the escalation of conflict.

4. Close to USD 565,000 of MYA funds were applied in 2020 to training for DPPA staff. By contrast, UN Regular Budget funding for DPPA's staff training and development needs totalled just USD 25,000 in 2020. To make the MYA investment in training more efficient, DPPA should prioritize low-cost peer-to-peer learning, which will deliver the most valuable and immediate operational benefits for MYA projects.
5. DPPA maintains a simple project proposal and funding process for the MYA, which helps reduce the costs associated with administering the MYA portfolio.
6. The MYA project cycle model could potentially be improved by applying the ethos of the existing 'rapid-

response' funding window across the whole portfolio. By introducing a preliminary phase for rapid assessment and scoping in all new projects, the MYA could cultivate more rapid,

adaptive and risk-responsive DPPA projects, while ensuring an appropriate level of oversight and reporting for continuing projects.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To support the strategic alignment and evaluability of the MYA portfolio, DPPA could:

- Adopt an **MYA value-proposition** as a succinct statement of the MYA's unique value.
- Adopt a simple **one-line ultimate objective** for the Department.
- Consider adopting a **schematic diagram for senior management use, showing the strategic logic** of the Department's activities
- Create a one-page **results 'taxonomy'** showing the typical categories of DPPA's interim and final results.

2. To measure the progress and value-creation of the MYA portfolio, DPPA could:

- Report on the **degree to which the MYA is responsive to the risk of violent conflict**, which is a core element of the MYA value-proposition.
- Report on the **degree to which the MYA accelerates the response of DPPA**, which is a core element of the MYA value-proposition.
- Report on **valued interim results**.
- Consider using a **simple portfolio mapping tool** to support ongoing efforts to align the MYA portfolio with its value-proposition.

3. To refine the MYA portfolio's systems and processes, DPPA could:

- Introduce a '**low burden' assessment/scoping phase for all new MYA initiatives**', designed to favour the cultivation of more rapid, adaptive and risk-responsive MYA projects, while lowering barriers for new initiatives that fall outside the usual planning cycle. This would embed

the ‘rapid response’ rationale of the MYA more firmly in the entire project cycle.

- Consider **consolidating the various criteria for MYA project selection, project quality assessment, and the various MYA funding windows.**
- Continue to invest in enhancing its **monitoring and evaluation processes** and consider using an Adaptive M&E model.
- Consider assigning the role of ‘critical peer’ to one or two colleagues at each meeting of the **XB Committee**, to promote critical reflection and the introduction of divergent perspectives.

4. To address high-value themes in the MYA’s operational focus, DPPA could:

- **Maintain its investment in innovative initiatives** within the MYA, and continue to support the scaling up and launch of innovative approaches.
- Consider assigning a **‘Women and Youth’** advisor to each Special Political Mission to drive forward DPPA’s operational goals related to inclusion in the MYA portfolio.
- Consider prioritizing training and professional development activities that employ a low-cost **peer-to-peer learning** approach, anchored in immediate operational needs of the MYA portfolio.
- Consider a number of subjects for **possible further evaluation.**



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