Women's Mediator Networks: Reflections on an Emerging Global Trend <1>
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Introduction <2>

It is a well-acknowledged fact that women are underrepresented in the ranks of high-level peace mediators. One recent study, conducted by the Council on Foreign Relations (2019), found that women accounted for only 2% of all mediators appointed between 1992 and 2017. Further research by Aggestam and Svensson (2018) has also sought to map the presence of women mediators in Track I negotiations. According to their research, which adopted a slightly broader definition of mediator, only 8% of these positions were filled by women.

The persistent underrepresentation of women in Track I mediation has recently prompted a response from a number of states. Seeking to address the apparent invisibility of women in the field of mediation, several new Networks have been created with the aim of increasing the representation of women in high-level mediation and the visibility of women mediators at all levels.[i] The creation of these Networks globally is rooted in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325(2000) (UNSCR 1325) that made normative commitments to increase women's participation in peace and security. Since UNSCR 1325 was adopted in October 2000, successive resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) have called for an increase in the number of women in high-level mediation roles (Turner, 2018). This commitment was reinforced in 2017 by the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres who pledged to expand the pool of UN Envoys and senior mediators, with a particular focus on women (UN, 2017). Whereas policy in relation to women in mediation originates primarily in the field of WPS, this particular commitment from the Secretary-General was made in the context of a report on strengthening the UN mediation support capacity and as such, originates in the field of mediation, rather than WPS- creating a potential bridge between the two professional spheres that have traditionally remained separate. The international environment therefore appears supportive of the emergence of initiatives such as Networks.

Given the relative infancy of the Networks, and the absence of much scholarly scrutiny of their creation, this chapter does three things. First, it provides an introduction to the Networks, focusing on the legal basis for their creation and locating them within the broader foreign policy context. Second, it distils the core aims and objectives of the different Networks, paying particular attention to the relationship between women mediators and gender advocacy. Finally, it offers an initial critique of some of the conceptual and practical difficulties facing the Networks as they set about achieving their aims. In particular, it considers the origin of the Networks in the field of WPS, and what this means for their ability to impact meaningfully in the field of mediation. In presenting these arguments the chapter advances two core aims. The first is to provide a contemporaneous and insider account of the creation of the Networks. The chapter brings together disparate sources information on the Networks and presents nuanced insight into the negotiations that led to their creation. In this way it aims to create a resource for understanding the Networks, their origins and the historical global context in which they emerged. The second aim is to provide some food for thought for the Networks and those interested in their study as they develop into established mechanisms of foreign policy and engage in the peace mediation field.

The Networks <2>

Since the announcement of the creation of a new Network of Nordic Women Mediators at the Nordic African Foreign Ministers' meeting in Oslo in April 2015[ii], there has been a rapid increase in the number of official Networks created. In only four years, four additional Networks were established,[iii] and an increasing number of countries and multilateral organisations are expressing interest in setting up or supporting similar initiatives.[iv] The Networks aim to more closely connect the work of women in the fields of mediation and peacebuilding with governmental level policy and practice. They are therefore not simply grassroots Networks of women practitioners,[v] but have a common political genesis and have been created in support of a specific (foreign) policy agenda.

With the exception of FemWise-Africa, which is an organ of the African Union (AU), the other Networks are created at the State level, funded by Ministries of Foreign

Affairs, with the operational responsibility devolved to national partners, mainly from civil society.[vi] Yet, despite being unified by a seemingly common goal, there are substantive differences between the nature and the approaches of the Networks. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their composition and approach reflect existing national or regional experiences of conflict and mediation. The following section provides an overview of the creation of each of the Networks, locating them within the existing foreign policy priorities of the states and regions in which they have been created, and the history of engagement with conflict and mediation in those regions. Understanding these dynamics helps to better understand the aims of states in creating the Networks, and as such can help assess their relative impact going forward.

Nordic Women Mediators <3>

The first regional Network to be created was the Nordic Women Mediators (NWM). The NWM was launched in Oslo in November 2015, taking its inspiration from a South African initiative that brought together women with mediation experience from Southern Africa for skills development and exchange of experience (Norwegian Ministries, 2019: 16).

The mission of the NWM is to enable its members to advance the inclusion and meaningful participation of women in all phases of peace processes in order to contribute to achieving and sustaining peace. The creation of the NWM builds on the extensive experience of Nordic countries in peace mediation, and their associated reputation as peace brokers. For instance, Norway has played a key role in peace processes since the 1990s when it helped facilitate peace agreements in countries such as Guatemala, Mali and Sudan. In the most recent period, the country has been involved in a number of peace initiatives in different parts of the world, including formal peace processes, such as in Colombia and the Philippines, in addition to dialogue initiatives with one or more parties to a conflict where the goal is to bring the parties to the negotiating table (Norwegian Ministries, 2019: 14). In these engagements Norway pays particular attention to the inclusive dimension of the process. The Norwegian facilitative style of mediation is known for being based on an 'ownership' approach to peace efforts, meaning that only the conflicting parties and their constituencies can ultimately resolve conflict (Norad, 2018). Building on its well

established efforts to support the implementation of peace agreements, in its Fourth NAP on WPS (2019-2022), Norway declared its intention to have a more systematic focus on WPS and on strengthening the gender perspective in international operations and missions[vii]. The creation of the NWM flows from this commitment.

If Norway can be defined as a pioneer of new peace diplomacy, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland have all, in one form or another, adopted peacemaking and conflict resolution as a key dimension of their foreign policy agendas (Lehti and Saarinen, 2014: 13). In the case of Sweden it has become a core element of the 'Feminist Foreign Policy' adopted and promoted by the country. This high-level expertise in mediation is reflected in the membership of the Network.[viii] For example, each of the women recruited to the national Networks has professional expertise in a related field, such as multilateral organisations, diplomacy or civil society, and on a variety of issues relevant to all phases of peace processes, including mediation, ceasefire agreements, constitutional reforms, communication and inclusive strategies.

Finnish efforts to develop a distinct profile and capacity in the sphere of peace mediation are of relatively recent origin although the promotion of mediation as an integral part of the country's foreign policy leans on previous experiences (Joenniemi, 2014: 110). Finland has accumulated a vast experience and expertise engaging Finnish peace mediators in various peace processes including, inter alia, Northern Ireland, the Western Balkans, Aceh, the Horn of Africa and the South Caucasus. Internationally renowned for its commitment in promoting the use of mediation as a tool for addressing the entire peace cycle, starting from conflict prevention to its control and resolution, in 2010 Finland established in partnership with Turkey the Group of Friends of Mediation active within the framework of the UN, succeeding in its objective to strengthen mediation in practice. Since its establishment the Group has drafted and negotiated four mediation resolutions (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, n. d.).

The NWM is therefore a collaborative forum that builds on national women mediators' Networks and associated expertise in all five Nordic states. The Network itself operates at the inter-state level, with a governmental level contact group comprised of representatives of each of the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs

providing strategic level oversight and co-ordination for the regional Network. Operationally the Network is supported by a number of in-country partner organisations who are responsible for the implementation of the Network's activities. The NWM meets once a year with some ten representatives participating from each country.

Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN) <3>

Acknowledging the need to foster women's participation in a key region for global peace and stability, Italy decided to establish the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN). Launched in October 2017 during the Italian mandate as non-permanent member of the UNSC, the MWMN is an initiative inspired by the NWM. It has its basis in the Third Italian NAP in accordance with UNSCR 1325(2000), falling under the first strategic goal of 'strengthening the role of women in peace processes and in all decision-making processes', which underpins the support for the creation of a Network of women mediators (Ministero degli Affari Esteri della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2016: 16). The MWMN initiative was developed and launched by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) in conjunction with the Rome-based Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Women in International Security (WIIS) Italy and it is funded under the umbrella of the national Women, Peace and Security funding.

Like the Nordic Network, the MWMN aims to increase the number of women involved in peacemaking efforts, and to facilitate the appointment of women mediators at the local and global level. This initiative combines Italy's top priorities within the UNSC and its role in a strategic area such as the Mediterranean: it keeps the focus on the stability of the region, it supports preventive diplomacy and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and it commits to bolster the role of women, especially in conflict prevention and resolution processes with a focus on high-level political positions (Track I mediation). The MWMN includes members across all 25 countries from both shores of the Mediterranean represented in the initiative. Members of the Network have been identified through a mixed procedure that included the support of the Permanent Representations to the UN of the various countries involved, as well as the through civil society organisations to ensure the

involvement of a diverse group of women. The number of members, 44 at its foundation, is increasing due to the consolidation of the Network locally.

The MWMN also strives to become a catalyst for peace mediation efforts in ongoing and potential crises and post-conflict stabilisation processes. To achieve that, the Network works as a community of practice and provides opportunities for women mediators to strengthen their existing capacities through peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and targeted training. Further, the scope of the Network's activities is consolidated locally through the establishment of 'Antennas' in the various Mediterranean countries. In 2019, the first Antennas were launched in Cyprus and in Turkey (MWMN, 2019). Through the structure of these local satellites, the Network aims not only to increase the numbers of members, but also to foster synergies, build opportunities and coordinate with existing initiatives, connecting practice on the ground and supporting local initiatives.

The Network is designed specifically to connect local actors with the global reality of peace mediation. Specifically, it aims to address the disconnection between the work that women do at the local level and the world of international mediation processes to which women do not enjoy access. At the policy level it works in close cooperation with the UN, the OSCE and more recently the EU to support their mediation activities. It also liaises with initiatives developed and promoted at the local level, for example in Libya and Cyprus where its effectiveness is bolstered through close cooperation with civil society.

The African Network of Women in Conflict Prevention and Peace Mediation (FemWise-Africa) <3>

Officially launched in July 2017, Femwise-Africa was created as a subsidiary body of the five-member Panel of the Wise and the expanded Pan-African Network of the Wise,[ix] placing it in a strategic location for influencing policy formulation on women's inclusion and advocating for narrowing the gap between the commitments for women's inclusion and their implementation. The Network itself builds on a stronger tradition of grassroots and local Networks of women mediators in Africa.

Women's Mediator Networks

Established pursuant to an initiative of the African Union and endorsed by the UNSC, FemWise-Africa aims to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the context of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).[x]

The Network provides a platform for strategic advocacy, capacity building and Networking aimed at enhancing the implementation of the commitments for the inclusion of women in peacemaking in Africa (Limo, 2019). Femwise-Africa has a clear governance strategy that allocates responsibility for strategic direction and operational implementation of the initiative. A Steering Committee, a high-level panel, gives guidance to the Network and approves matters of membership and accreditation. The membership of this committee includes the members of the Panel of the Wise as well as notable African women who have proven mediation skills. In addition to the high-level members, the Committee also includes, on a non-voting basis, representatives of the relevant departments of the Commission, of international organisations, and thematic experts who can provide expert guidance to support the work of the Network (Secretariat of the Panel of the Wise, n. d.). The operational work is supported by a dedicated Secretariat that is responsible for the coordination, monitoring and reporting of Network activities. It also manages relations with external bodies, such as other Networks. Finally, the Assembly of FemWise-Africa comprises all the members of the Network. Membership is open to both institutions and individual women and girls, with either a proven track record in mediation or who aspire to serve in mediation initiatives, including in the field of election observation missions across Africa.

Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth (WMC) <3>

In 2018, the UK government announced funding to support the work of women peacebuilders, including mediators[xi]. This commitment arose from the UK's NAP on WPS for the period 2018 – 2022 which includes the following strategic outcome: '[t]o increase women's meaningful and representative participation in decision making processes, including conflict prevention and peacebuilding at community and national levels' (UK Government, 2018: 6). This strategic outcome in the NAP underpins funding and support for the creation of a looser Network called Women Mediators

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Across the Commonwealth (WMC). The geographical scope of the Network - being Commonwealth-wide - reflects the UK's position as Chair in Office of the Commonwealth (during the two-years mandate 2018 – 2019), with the funding being announced at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting hosted in London in 2018. As with the other Networks, the operational running of WMC has been devolved to a civil society partner, in this case the UK-based peacebuilding organisation Conciliation Resources.[xii]

As WMC remains in its infancy it does not yet have a separate governance structure. Conciliation Resources has overseen the initial recruitment of members and continues to act as the Secretariat for the Network. After an initial round of recruitment in 2018, which increased the initial number of five founding members to 37, the WMC counts today 46 members[xiii], recruited from among activists and peacebuilding practitioners who engage in mediation and dialogue from the community level to official processes. The Network plans to expand its numbers to include 50 women by the end of November 2019. WMC aims to provide a platform for peer-to-peer learning across the different areas of mediation activity and across the diversity of the Commonwealth which is reflected in its recruitment procedures.

The Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks <3>

The mushrooming of Regional Women Mediator Networks across the globe is a clear reflection of the need to find effective mechanisms for ensuring that women's common aspirations to participate in and lead peace processes is fulfilled. It reflects a belief that women are equal stakeholders in society and, therefore, they should have a place at every table where peace is being discussed, negotiated or brokered, including as mediators. In the past few years, Networks have emerged as key actors in the quest for fair and meaningful representation of women across the whole peace cycle. Following several months of informal collaboration, the Networks identified a need to embody a collective voice to amplify their common goals while maintaining their respective independence and characteristics.

As a result, since March 2018 the Networks have worked together towards the launch of a Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks (Global Alliance). The

specific aims of the Global Alliance are to provide visibility to women mediators, to organise Networking and capacity building opportunities and, most notably, to facilitate the deployment on the field for its members. The Global Alliance was launched in the Seventy Fourth Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2019. As part of the launch, a list of deployable women mediators was handed to the UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, in a direct challenge to the persistent myth that there are simply not enough qualified women mediators.

The initial idea of formalising an already existing collaboration was developed within the framework of the NWM and in close dialogue with the UN, back in early 2018, when Norway invited representatives of all the established Networks to an initial meeting. The meeting, which was held in Oslo in March of the same year, demonstrated the benefits of getting together, sharing experiences and learning from each other (Norwegian Ministries, 2019: 18). The event gathered together more than 80 women and men, including representatives from the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation as well as representatives of UN entities (including the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Department of Political Affairs and UN Women). Other multilateral actors also attended the meeting: the AU, the EU, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN), as well as delegates from several countries and representatives of civil society and academia.

Considering that all the Networks were in the very initial stages of their activities (and that, at that time, the WMC had not yet been launched), the Networks agreed to postpone the establishment of a Global Alliance and take some more time to strengthen their respective individual capacities before engaging with a broader initiative at the global level. The Oslo meeting was then followed by a second event in New York at the margins of the General Assembly Open Debate on UNSCR 1325(2000) in October 2018. The open event, organised in collaboration with UN Women and Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations, was followed by an internal meeting of Network members aimed at sharing experiences between their members on mediation issues and as an opportunity for further strategising the development of a Global Alliance. As an output of the event, an advocacy letter was sent to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on behalf

of the four regional Networks stressing the importance of recognising the work done at many levels by women mediators and the urgency of appointing women mediators at the highest position.[xiv]

The Global Alliance is a collective of voices demanding policy and decision-makers alike hasten the implementation of UNSCR 1325(2000) and consciously create spaces for more women to participate in and lead peace processes. During the Launch, discussions went beyond the achievements and barriers to access, focusing more on opportunities and possible modalities through which women's participation can be facilitated and enhanced and what kind of support can Networks provide to their members for engaging with key policy makers in the mediation field.

The Global Alliance has four main objectives for its activities. First, it aims to create awareness of the respective Networks, showcasing the work being done by them and by their members to promote and enhance women's participation in peace processes in pursuit of the broader WPS Agenda. Second, it aims to engage with key policy makers to leverage support from the UN, the AU, the EU, the OSCE and UN Member States, to build partnerships to advance the roles and participation of women in mediation processes at the global, regional and national levels. Third, it aims to identify opportunities for collaboration with, among and between the respective Networks represented within the Global Alliance and other stakeholders. And last, but not least, it aims to expand and reinforce the connections among the members and key stakeholders, including policy makers, identifying Networking and relationship-building opportunities.

Aims and objectives of the Networks <2>

The new Regional Women Mediator Networks have an explicit goal to address the underrepresentation of women in mediation. But their intellectual genesis in the field of WPS means that they are not exclusively focused on the individual role of mediator. Rather, they take a broader approach to the capacity of women mediators to amplify the voices of women peacebuilders across the spectrum of the WPS agenda and to address the relative invisibility of women's peace work at institutional level. The emphasis placed on each activity varies according to the individual Network and

the geographical and political context in which it was created. Nevertheless, there are core common objectives that can be distilled across all initiatives.

The first objective is increasing the visibility of women mediators. The low numbers of women achieving high-level mediation positions internationally is symptomatic of a broader trend whereby women's contribution to the field of peace and security is not recognised. It is common to hear, by way of justification of the failure to appoint more women, that there are simply not enough qualified women. Women's contribution to sub-national and local mediation initiatives go largely unrecognised and weakly supported (African Union, 2018b; Turner, 2018). This problem arises for both conceptual and practical reasons. Conceptually, the way in which women's skills, experiences and career trajectories are assessed do not easily match with the traditional 'career' path in international mediation. The lower representation of women in high-levels in the peace mediation field is symptomatic of the way in which the requirements of the job have evolved over time. In particular, Envoys and Special Representatives are traditionally drawn from the ranks of former Heads of State, Ambassadors, or UN officials. These professions themselves are male dominated, meaning that the numbers of women coming through are relatively low (Heyworth and Turner, 2019; Aggestam and Svensson, 2018). What the Networks seek to do is to fill this gap that is created by the exclusion of women from the traditional spaces of peace and security. They create new networking opportunities to bring qualified women together and to enhance their visibility and facilitate access to key decision-making spaces and actors. For example, the NWM aims to 'facilitat[e] access and provid[e] Networking opportunities with mediating and peacebuilding actors globally' (PRIO, 2015). Similarly, the MWMN is clear that it aims to facilitate the appointment of high-level women,[xv] and WMC cites profile-raising as one of its key activities, including enhancing the visibility of women qualified for high–level appointment (Conciliation Resources, n.d). Networks can directly counter the claim that there are no qualified women by maintaining rosters of such qualified women, matching women with opportunities as they arise. Promoting the visibility of women who have achieved high-level positions is also important as it helps to build a leadership brand for women mediators and can create mentoring opportunities for younger women - a stated goal of FemWise in particular (African Union, 2018b). This frames the development of a new positive narrative around women mediators, one

that highlights the achievements and successes of women actively involved in mediation efforts at different levels all around the world.

The second common objective is the development of skills and capacity of women in mediation. With this objective there is a slight difference in approach between the Networks. All of them build in a peer-to-peer learning and support function, including drawing on the expertise of members through knowledge exchange. FemWise-Africa is the most clearly focused on skills development, with a core objective of professionalising the role of women in mediation across all Tracks. One of the expected outcomes of the Network is the 'enhanced capacity of African women engaged in conflict prevention and mediation…' (African Union, 2018b). This derives from the premise that to contribute more effectively to mediation and negotiation in Africa, women's capacity in mediation and negotiation skills needs to be improved and extended to all areas of work (African Union, 2018b). The other Networks take a slightly less direct approach to skills development. Rather than focusing specifically on training and capacity building, their narrative centres the importance of peer-to-peer learning and support whereby women's existing expertise can be more effectively shared. The very purpose of a Network is to enable the wealth of expertise to be more efficiently disseminated.

The third common objective is using the Networks to make more effective connections between both global actors and local initiatives to enhance women's visibility in mediation. There are two aspects to this. The first speaks to the 'Networking' function, in that more effective connections need to be made with international organisations and global actors to ensure women's expertise in mediation is made visible. One of the roles of the Networks is therefore to facilitate access and Networking opportunities with global actors. The other side of this is to make connections not only 'up' to the global actors but also 'down' to local organisations, including civil society organisations. The role of the Networks in this regard is to create clear links between the different tracks of mediation practice and to provide channels of communication between local actors and global processes. FemWise-Africa, for example, names as an explicit priority '[b]ridging the gap between Tracks 1, 2 and 3 mediation…' (African Union, 2018b). Similarly, the MWMN aims to foster synergies and coordination with other actors, including

globally, with institutions such as the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN-DPPA) and locally with civil society. WMC builds this function into its design, with the membership of the Network including grassroots women mediators and peacebuilders as well as women with national and international experience as a way of fostering peer learning.

Finally, the Networks aim to contribute to the broader goal of strengthening inclusive mediation and promoting the sustainability of peace agreements. Through their work, all of the Networks seek to contribute to the sustainability of mediation and peace agreements. For some, such as the MWMN and FemWise-Africa, there is a specific regional connection and an aim to contribute to sustainable peace in their own region. For the NWM, a region less afflicted by violent political conflict than others, the ambition relates to international peace and security. One of the key ways in which the Networks seek to pursue this goal is through advocacy on the importance of women's participation in peace processes. This can be achieved through direct support for local grassroots women's organisations, through providing access to local women's organisations to national and international actors, or through amplifying both the voices and the message of women's civil society in international processes. All of these activities form part of a broader goal of advocacy in favour of inclusive processes that seek to enhance women's access to and participation in mediation.

What is clear from these objectives is that the Networks are not narrowly focused on increasing the representation of a small number of women in high-level international processes, but rather on increasing the visibility of all women's voices in mediation, from grassroots peacebuilding organisations focused on women's participation right up to UN Special Envoys. They sit clearly within the much bigger normative frame of WPS and adopt a holistic approach to mediation and to women's roles in mediation that enables a multi-level approach to both mediation and leadership. They seek to amplify women's voices in peace processes not only through their own work, but by actively bringing the experiences of grassroots women's organisations to the attention of mediation support organisations and making connections between the local and the global.

These are clearly important objectives which are coherent within the broader context of WPS. It is too early to evaluate, in a technical sense, the success of the Networks. Most are only recently established and have not had time to embed their work. Moreover, with the exception of FemWise-Africa, the Networks have not developed comprehensive governance structures or performance indicators that would enable technical evaluation outside the parameters of the National Actions Plans under which they are created. Much will depend on the directions the Networks take in their early years and how they set their own priorities. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting some conceptual and practical challenges faced by the Networks as mediation support actors.

Conceptual questions that remain <2>

Exploring the role of Networks through the lens of mediation support offers some insight into the first conceptual difficulty faced. From a mediation perspective, the mediation support function of the Networks lies in three potential areas: first, the identification of more female mediators to be included in the selection pool, thus redressing the gender balance of mediation and mediation support activities. Second, the promotion of inclusive models of mediation, with a particular focus on the inclusion of women in all roles in the mediation process, including as negotiators and advisors. Finally, the provision of technical expertise in gender sensitive mediation and support to women and women's groups who are invited to participate in mediation is a key function of mediation support. Yet there remains a gap between mediation actors and the Networks that suggests that more will need to be done to bridge it.

In relation to the identification of women mediators, the Networks face the challenge of identifying appropriate women for the role. The questions of *which* women should be included in peace processes, including in the role of conflict mediators, is a key one for WPS scholars and practitioners. Whether women should be included simply on the basis of representation, or whether their participation is the means to the end of gender sensitivity is a recurrent theme in the literature (Charlesworth, 2008). This is particularly salient when it comes to mediation, where there is an underlying tension between gender and mediation (Palmiano-Federer, 2018; Turner, 2020). It can be

argued that the fundamental 'logics' of WPS and mediation do not sit easily together. WPS scholars identified mediation early on as a site of exclusion for women and one where advocacy for greater inclusion was needed. There has been a strong push in WPS circles to develop normative commitments relating to the participation of women in mediation. Norms have been deployed as a means of putting pressure on mediators to include women and to adopt a gender sensitive approach to conflict analysis and process design. For many WPS advocates these norms are non-negotiable. However this normative approach is not one which has been fully embraced within the mediation field, and indeed there are potentially conflicting understandings of norms at play. Where WPS has focused on substantive norms related to the substance of negotiations, mediation has tended to look more closely at process related norms and how they shape the activity of the mediator (Hellmuller, 2019). Mediation as a form of conflict resolution is a voluntary activity which relies on the consent of the parties (United Nations, 2012). It is not unusual for mediation to occur in contexts where social and political norms exclude women from public life. These social norms then also exclude women from having a role in political negotiations. In these circumstances the participation of women may conflict with religious or social norms of the parties to the mediation, making it less likely that they will consent to women's participation. When this occurs, mediators face the choice of pushing a normative agenda that challenges the parties and risks alienating them, on one hand, or marginalising women and gender on the other. Palmiano-Federer (2018) highlights how 'gender' has not been accepted as a core norm of mediation, but rather exists as a non-core norm that can be displaced in favour of other (core) considerations, such as consent. There is therefore a fundamental absence of agreement between the WPS and mediation communities of practice related to the purpose of women's participation and the extent to which mediation is an appropriate vehicle for advancing gender equality during and after conflict (Standfield, 2020). This creates a particular difficulty for women mediators, who find themselves caught between the professional logics of mediation on one hand, and pressure to advance gender sensitivity on the other (Turner, 2020).

This tension is one which must be navigated by the Networks if they are to be effective. In particular, as a starting point, recognising that women play a range of different roles in processes and that each role needs to be appropriately developed is

key. There is a risk with a gender focused approach that the Networks will replicate existing structures which equate 'women' with 'gender' and sideline women into 'soft' or gendered portfolios. It also risks overlooking women who are experienced mediators but who do not have any gender expertise, who remain less visible in the WPS sphere (Turner, 2020). This is a core questions that the Networks will need to address – are they promoting mediators, or WPS experts? And how can the Networks help to reduce the gap between the two by integrating WPS into mediation thinking? There are differences of approach between the Networks in this regard. The NWM draws from a relatively large pool of women with direct experience in mediation, who are also supportive of inclusive mediation. The MWMN, on the other hand, has prioritised the recruitment of women with high-level political experience or experience related to gender but not necessarily to mediation. While it is clear that the Networks have attempted to address this very divide, recruiting both mediators and thematic experts to advise on the work of the Network, a lack of cross over between Networks and the mediation support community of practice remains.[xvi]

As outlined in the first section of this chapter, the Networks have, with the exception of FemWise-Africa, been adopted nationally as commitments on WPS included in NAPs on Resolution 1325(2000). This means that nationally the Networks exist primarily as gender-focused policy commitments. Policy and financial support for the Networks comes nationally, but also internationally, from Departments with responsibility for gender equality, including WPS, and not those with the broader mandate of political affairs or peace and security, including mediation support. This gap has potential implications for effective collaboration between the different bodies. The Networks risk falling into a chasm that already exists at the UN level between mediation and gender (Turner, 2018), and despite the desire for co-ordination and being a possible solution to the problem, they have not yet succeeded in bridging this gap. Establishing effective working relationships with mediation support actors and governments will be key to finding entry points for women mediators. Yet the differences in approach create a conceptual question surrounding the understanding of mediation and mediators being advanced by the Networks and how this will either enable or hinder effective relationships within the broader professional field of mediation support.

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While it is still too early to fully assess the impact the Networks can have in the broader field of mediation and mediation support, it is nevertheless worth asking where the influence of the Networks should be felt the most. Where, and to whom, should their activities be directed? At the global level, the Networks have gained an impressive popularity among international and regional organisations that provide them with regular support. Yet, none of the Networks has succeeded thus far in having one of its members appointed as a UN Special Envoy or in any other high-level position in an international or regional organisation, nor on the mediation support teams of the non-governmental providers.

Another way for the Networks to have a more innovative approach could be by supporting local buy-in to mediation processes. The UN are no longer the only, nor indeed even the principal, actor in the mediation field. While they may take the lead in coordinating activities, they are simply one of an increasing constellation of mediation actors. With their stated objectives of forging more effective connections between global mediation actors and mediation and peacebuilding work that takes place locally, the Networks could be well-placed to collaborate more deeply with mediation support actors in pursuit of this particular aim, enhancing the capacity of mediation support actors to engage more meaningfully with women and with gender in their work.

More time is required to evaluate whether Networks present the right tools for increasing the representation, and indeed the recognition, of women in peace and security. Early indications show that that the Networks, widely acclaimed as innovative initiatives, still align themselves with the current mainstream model of conflict mediation (Track I, II, III) - a model which itself creates gendered hierarchies that tend to marginalise and exclude women. With their focus on skills development and capacity building, it seems that the Networks are inviting women to make additional efforts to adapt to a system that is putting them at the periphery of the debate. Is there a role for the Networks to disrupt current understandings of mediation, and to advocate a fundamentally different way of listening? Why not challenge the system with a different and innovative approach to inclusive peace mediation?

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Practical difficulties <2>

During the first years of activity of the Networks a number of obstacles emerged which need to be addressed to maximise the benefits of their activities.

One of the most critical issues is the medium to long-term sustainability of the initiatives, both in terms of economic resources and political commitments. The Networks require core and regular funding to be sustainable. As noted, a number of the Networks are funded within the frameworks of NAPs concerning UN Resolution 1325(2000), and their commitments can vary from one period to another, depending, on the one hand, on political will of the sponsoring state, and, on the other, on the number of competing projects demanding funding through the same mechanism. Experience shows that Networks require efficient Secretariats in support of their work and enough funding for organising the initiatives. If the Networks are to be sustainable, and to make a discernible difference to women's participation in peace processes, there needs to be a secure commitment to funding that allows not only response to immediate needs or requests but longer term strategic planning that extends beyond the temporal scope of the relevant NAP. One way to address this would be to establish a dedicated financial mechanism, enabling the Networks to bring their activities forward independently from political choices.

A second, related, aspect is the chronic undervaluing of women's peace work. It is often cited that women carry out mediation roles as part of their function within families or communities (El-Bushra, 2007). This translates into a problematic assumption that the women involved in the Networks are available and willing to work for free. To make a meaningful difference to women's capacity to participate in these initiatives, funding needs to be not only sustainable but also set at a level that recognises the professional nature of the work the women are undertaking, as well as the financial burden incurred in doing it, whether through direct expense or the loss of other employment opportunities. This is particularly true where women from civil society are being asked to dedicate substantial amounts of time to the Network.

Finally, the rapid growth of the number of Networks, and the positioning of these initiatives in relation to current foreign policy priorities creates a risk that the

Networks will not develop independently of government priorities. If Networks remain tools for the projection of soft power, for example, will this distract from the core work of delivering meaningful change in mediation processes? Will the funding and support be directed where they are most needed? The nature of the relationship between the sponsoring governments and the operational activities of the Networks is one which will shape the success of the Networks for better or for worse.

Conclusion <2>

Although the Networks remain in their infancy, the rate at which they have become established suggests that they are tapping into a clear perceived need to make more effective connections between gender and mediation. Some concluding observations can be offered for the Networks. First, they need to be clear regarding their aims and objectives, and where they want their impact to be most felt. Most include a dual function of helping to promote women as mediators as well as amplifying the voice of women in mediation processes. These are complementary goals but not necessarily the same thing, and Networks need to be clear how these aims work together rather than conflating the two. Second, Networks can help to bridge the gap between the professional fields of mediation and WPS. They can help to define the skills necessary to be a good mediator and maintain rosters of suitably qualified women from different professional backgrounds, enhancing the diversity of the pool of candidates from which mediators are drawn.

Third, Networks are uniquely placed to begin to bridge the divide between women's mediation work at the local and civic society levels with that of intergovernmental bodies. Access to government is crucial to bridge the problematic divide between local and global work that has characterised efforts to increase the role of women in mediation to date. The role of Networks is therefore to reach out and forge connections, - connections between the local and the global - but also between the WPS community of practice and the mediation support community of practice, and between civil society and governments. These connections are at the heart of attempts to increase women's meaningful participation in mediation at all levels.

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Ultimately, establishing mechanisms for in-depth and effective co-ordination between Networks, states and international organisations will be key to their long-term success.

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[i] In this context Networks are a mechanism for enhancing the visibility of women in mediation, and creating opportunities for women to engage in mediation.
[ii] https://gps.prio.org/Events/Event/?x=11
[iii] For more information about the Networks, visit the Global Alliance page: https://globalwomenmediators.org/
[iv] For example work is ongoing to create an Arab Network of Women Mediators. An ASEAN Women for Peace Registry is also being created.
[v] In this regard, they can be distinguished from, for example, the Network of women mediators in Colombia. See: United States Institute of Peace, 2016.
[vi] The case is different for Femwise-Africa whose secretariat is part of the African Union structure, and for the Nordic Women Mediators Sweden whose operational partner is the Folke Bernadotte Academy, the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development.
[vii] The Norwegian Government's Action Plan , Women, Peace and Security (2019-2022), p. 14-19 https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/actionplan_wps2019.pdf
[viii] https://fba.se/contentassets/eb9af971a0954bb5b09f1b7c0ab30859/swedish-womens-mediation-Network.pdf
As of September 2019, the respective national Networks have the following numbers of members: Denmark has 18; Finland has 7; Iceland has 10; Norway has 50; and Sweden has 15 members.
[ix] The Panel of the Wise is one of the critical pillars of the Peace and Security Architecture of the African Union (APSA). Article 11 of the Protocol establishing the Peace and Security Council (PSC), sets up a five-person panel of 'highly respected African personalities from various segments of society

who have made outstanding contributions to the cause of peace, security and development on the continent' with a task 'to support the efforts of the PSC and those of the Chairperson of the Commission, particularly in the area of conflict prevention' (African Union Peace and Security, 2018). Strengthening African Women's Participation in Conflict Prevention, Mediation Processes and Peace Stabilisation Efforts Operationalisation of "FemWise-Africa", p.1
http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/final-concept-note-femwise-sept-15-short-version-clean-4-flyer.pdf
[x] FemWise-Africa was officially established through a decision of the AU Assembly of Heads of State (AU Summit) on 4 July 2017 (Assembly/AU/Draft/Dec.21(XXIX)). See
http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/final-concept-note-femwise-sept-15-short-version-clean-4-flyer.pdf
[xi] https://globalwomenmediators.org/wmc/

[xii] https://www.c-r.org/programme/women-mediators-across-commonwealth

[xiii] As of September 2019 (Conciliation Resources, n. d.)

[xiv] On file with lead author.

[xv] https://womenmediators.net/

[xvi] https://themediateur.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EEAS-CoP-mediation-Report.pdf