

# MEDIATION CAPACITY BUILDING WITH LIBERIAN DIASPORA COMMUNITIES: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Mediation has been a method of conflict resolution for millennia, but since the 1970s, it has become progressively more widely recognized and established as an essential component of efforts to peaceably resolve conflicts in the U.S. and many other countries. Countless mediation scholars, practitioners, trainers, and program administrators have contributed to this trend by exploring ways to expand the use of their knowledge and skills in a wide range of diverse contexts.

In his book, *Beyond Neutrality*, Bernard Mayer has encouraged those interested in conflict resolution work to think beyond their role as neutrals and to challenge themselves and their purpose.<sup>1</sup> This article will address one unique mediation initiative that propelled the trainers to think creatively and stretch their comfort zones in order to conduct mediation trainings requested by members of the Liberian diaspora community in the greater New York City regional area. While engagement with this group occurred recently, there was a preexisting relationship with other Liberian community members for over a decade in both the United States and Liberia. The various aspects of the longstanding connections involved different mediators at different times. Collec-

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\* This article arose out of a panel discussion, Local to Global to Local, at the *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2017 Jed D. Melnick Symposium, Persistent Human Divides: Creative Initiatives for Communication, Collaboration and Cohesion, held at Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law on November 13, 2017. The panel was moderated by Charlie J. Moxley Jr., Distinguished ADR Practitioner in Residence, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, and consisted of participants who have been involved in the Liberian initiatives discussed in this article: Prabha Sankaranarayan, President and CEO of Mediators Beyond Borders International; Rev. Philip Blamo, Eastern Regional Vice President for the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas; and the authors, Maria R. Volpe, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology and Director of the CUNY Dispute Resolution Center at John Jay College; and Bradley L. Roth, J.D., co-founder and Chair of Mediators Beyond Borders International—New York. The authors would like to thank Prabha Sankaranarayan, Rev. Blamo, and Janet O'Keefe for enriching the discussion for this article.

<sup>1</sup> See generally BERNARD MAYER, *BEYOND NEUTRALITY: CONFRONTING THE CRISIS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION* (2004).

tively, the diverse engagements have provided an opportunity to reflect on the practices, possibilities and challenges of how mediators can apply their knowledge and skills at the grassroots level, both locally in the United States and internationally.

The focus of this article will be on elucidating an initiative<sup>2</sup> that has involved multiple partnerships, sensitivity to cultural differences, local-global interactions, work with diaspora communities, adaptation of mediation training programs, dedicated volunteerism, and concerns about sustainability. Central to all of the activities is an explicit resolve by the mediators involved to understand and appropriately respond to the parties' contexts when providing mediation expertise. John Paul Lederach has referred to this method as a mix of prescriptive and elicitive approaches.<sup>3</sup> In sum, the trainers used their expertise as both mediators and trainers to be conscious of and sensitive to the trainees' cultural traditions and familiar approaches to dispute resolution. The participants have a rich tradition of managing conflicts informally but were eager to learn how they could better assist parties in resolving their disputes. Overall, the approach used resonated with the question Lederach raised when working across different cultures: "How do we foster a pedagogical project that empowers people to participate in creating appropriate models for handling conflict in their own context?"<sup>4</sup>

### A. *Making a Difference: Beyond Borders*

As the mediation field has matured, mediators have sought to find ways to expand their reach, to volunteer their services in heretofore unknown contexts, and to emulate far-reaching ventures of other more established professions, such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and engineers in reaching out to communities in need of their services.<sup>5</sup> Inspired by a vision of mediators joining together to

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<sup>2</sup> This Article will focus primarily on the New York-based component of the initiative, while providing background on aspects pre-dating the authors' direct involvement.

<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL LEDERACH, *PREPARING FOR PEACE: CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION ACROSS CULTURES* 65 (1995).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 39.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g., DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS, <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018); LAWYERS WITHOUT BORDERS, <http://www.lwob.org> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018); TEACHERS WITHOUT BORDERS, <https://teacherswithoutborders.org> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018); ENGINEERS WITHOUT BORDERS USA, <https://www.ewb-usa.org> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018); see also *Guide to Organizations Without/Beyond Borders in Social Change*, PCDN, <https://>

“create conversations across battle lines” in order “to have an impact on people’s willingness to participate in war or terrorism by organizing alternative ways of expressing, negotiating, and resolving differences,”<sup>6</sup> a group of experienced mediators began meeting to “prepare *people at every level* for participation in state of the art peacebuilding processes that are multidisciplinary and collaborative.”<sup>7</sup> By 2006, the result of these discussions was the creation of a new nonprofit organization,<sup>8</sup> initially referred to as Mediators Beyond Borders (MBB), then renamed Mediators Beyond Borders International (MBBI) in 2011.<sup>9</sup> MBBI is an organization that “builds local capacities for peace and promotes mediation worldwide . . . by enhancing local capacity upon invitation, advocating for mediation in all arenas and providing consultancy services that promote peaceful conflict resolution.”<sup>10</sup>

From the outset, MBBI members have proceeded with caution in all of their undertakings, especially since their initial focus was on working with communities abroad,<sup>11</sup> many of which had experienced trauma. Their approach was never to helicopter into a com-

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pednetwork.org/resources/guide-to-organizations-withoutbeyond-borders (last visited Mar. 20, 2018) (estimating there are more than one hundred organizations worldwide using the “beyond/without borders” name).

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Cloke, *Mediators Without Borders: A Proposal to Resolve Political Conflicts*, BEYOND INTRACTABILITY (Dec. 2005), [https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/mediators\\_without\\_borders](https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/mediators_without_borders).

<sup>7</sup> *Organization*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/who-we-are/organization> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> See PEACE & RECONCILIATION REPORT, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS (Jan. 14, 2008), [http://www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org/reports/PR\\_Report.1.14.2008.pdf](http://www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org/reports/PR_Report.1.14.2008.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> *Organization*, *supra* note 7. Mediators Beyond Borders changed its name to Mediators Beyond Borders International in 2011. Telephone Interview with Prabha Sankaranarayan, President and CEO, Mediators Beyond Borders International (Mar. 5, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Since its founding, MBBI has also worked within the U.S. See *United States*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/united-states-america> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018) (detailing its Hurricane Katrina and Somali Refugee projects) and *Citizen Mediators*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/citizen-mediator> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018) (describing its support of a democracy-building effort). In addition, MBBI works on initiatives beyond the borders of any one country (see e.g. *Capacity-Building Projects & Initiatives*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/what-we-do/projects> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018); *Working Groups*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/working-groups> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018); *Women in Mediation*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/what-we-do/women-in-mediation> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018)); see also *Trauma-Informed Peacebuilding & Development Assistance*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/what-we-do/trauma-informed-peacebuilding> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

munity to serve as external mediators.<sup>12</sup> They deliberately aimed to work “in partnership with local organizations and leaders in each area where MBBI worked on a project. It generally serves groups located in areas where there are difficulties as a result of war, major civil conflict, or a significant natural disaster.”<sup>13</sup> More specifically, MBBI’s main objectives:

[A]re to engage in projects that build local conflict-resolution skills or peacemaking capacity, or projects that advance the use of appropriate conflict resolution processes in public policy arenas. MBBI projects are carried out by trained, skilled conflict resolution volunteers in areas where longer-term, but not necessarily continuous, involvement is beneficial.<sup>14</sup>

### B. *Making a Difference: Locally*

Historically, when mediators in the United States sought to volunteer their services, most of the opportunities available were associated with local community mediation programs. In its 2011 State of Community Mediation in the United States report,<sup>15</sup> the National Association for Community Mediation (NACFM)<sup>16</sup> noted that there were “approximately 400 U.S. based programs, 1,300 full-time equivalent staff members, and over 20,000 volunteer mediators.”<sup>17</sup> These thousands of volunteer mediators come from all walks of life<sup>18</sup> and have helped resolve a wide range of conflicts in their neighborhoods, workplaces, organizations and other local

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<sup>12</sup> This was reaffirmed by Prabha Sankaranarayan at the Cardozo conference when she noted that “the model we used is that all decisions need to be made by people at the heart of the conflict and not by those who are peripheral to it.” Prabha Sankaranarayan, CEO, Mediators Beyond Borders Int’l, Address at the *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2017 Jed D. Melnick Symposium: Persistent Human Divides: Creative Initiatives for Communication, Collaboration, and Cohesion (Nov. 13, 2017), <https://cardozolaw.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=280a8b47-de40-4c7d-a361-5dc96bcf1f1f>, at time stamp 58.36.

<sup>13</sup> Charlie Pillsbury, *Mediators Beyond Borders International MBB*, 2 J. CONFLICTOLOGY 66 (2011). For most of its existence, MBBI only initiated a project where there was an invitation by an individual or group and after an assessment of its ability to meet certain criteria. See *Projects*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/what-we-do/projects> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Pillsbury, *supra* note 13.

<sup>15</sup> JUSTIN CORBETT & WENDY CORBETT, 2011 THE STATE OF COMMUNITY MEDIATION (2012), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2030467](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2030467).

<sup>16</sup> See NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY MEDIATION, <http://www.nafcm.org> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> CORBETT & CORBETT, *supra* note 15, at 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 26.

contexts. The NAFCM report noted that there were 400,000 cases and 900,000 recipients each year.<sup>19</sup>

For mediators interested in undertaking international work, the opportunities have been much more limited and not readily identifiable or accessible.<sup>20</sup> Historically, doing mediation-related work in international settings has largely been confined to diplomats or others doing work associated with some faith-based initiatives, community organizing, business ventures, and other endeavors that were not specifically focused on peace-related efforts, but resulted in improving relationships between individuals and groups that were at odds with each other.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of this dearth of opportunities, MBBI was positioned to play an important role for mediators seeking ways to work with international audiences. Having international venues where mediators could participate was a welcome opportunity for those interested in traveling to MBBI project sites abroad.<sup>22</sup> In addition, there were opportunities to assist in international initiatives from one's home country, since most of the work to plan, administer, and facilitate MBBI capacity building and advocacy projects was conducted remotely.<sup>23</sup>

Mediators in New York City who were interested in MBBI's work started to explore a complementary model. They formed Mediators Beyond Borders International-New York (MBBI-NY)<sup>24</sup> in 2011 and began meeting on a regular basis to connect local mediators to MBBI's international<sup>25</sup> and UN-related projects.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 9.

<sup>20</sup> In his book, *Beyond Neutrality*, Bernie Mayer noted that with few exceptions and speaking in general, "conflict resolution professionals are not significantly involved in the major conflicts of our time." See MAYER, *supra* note 1, at 4. For sure, there are those who have gone abroad to do training programs, to build conflict competency capacity, and to mediate. Nonetheless, it is extremely challenging for a mediator to secure opportunities abroad.

<sup>21</sup> Pillsbury, *supra* note 13, at 68.

<sup>22</sup> See PEACE & RECONCILIATION REPORT, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS 5 (2007), [http://www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org/reports/PR\\_Report.12.17.2007.pdf](http://www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org/reports/PR_Report.12.17.2007.pdf) [hereinafter 2007 PEACE & RECONCILIATION REPORT].

<sup>23</sup> Pillsbury, *supra* note 13, at 68 (in 2011, Charlie Pillsbury noted: "An estimated 80% of material hours are worked at home, maintaining partner and community relationships, continuing the interventions and adjusting them, researching conflict drivers and mitigating influences, preparing for future trips, and other activities").

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Araujo and Brad Roth co-founded MBBI-NY (which was initially called the New York Professional Chapter of Mediators Beyond Borders).

<sup>25</sup> See 2007 PEACE & RECONCILIATION REPORT, *supra* note 22. Opportunities exist for MBBI volunteers to participate in projects without traveling. One of the initial objectives in establishing MBBI-NY was to connect interested New York City mediators, lawyers, students and others to these projects.

Recognizing that New York City's incredibly diverse population afforded ample opportunities to work "beyond borders" of race, nationality, ethnicity, religion and gender, MBBI-NY members also engaged in discussions about how to undertake an international initiative locally in order to positively contribute to local as well as international conflict resolution efforts. Beginning in 2014, MBBI-NY reached out to members of a local diaspora community from an African country in which MBBI had an ongoing project. However, after numerous meetings to discuss potential conflict resolution related projects, their outreach efforts did not result in feasible initiatives.

In 2016, a welcome breakthrough occurred. Several months earlier, a member of the Liberian community in New Haven, Connecticut, the Eastern Regional Vice President for the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA),<sup>27</sup> Rev. Philip Blamo, attended a jointly sponsored Quinnipiac/Yale Workshop on Dispute Resolution at Yale Law School, where he met MBBI Treasurer (and previously, MBBI's first Executive Director) Charlie Pillsbury. Rev. Blamo expressed his eagerness to learn how to obtain low-cost or free mediation and conflict resolution training for ULAA leaders and members so they could better resolve organizational and factional conflicts within the local diaspora population and in Liberia. Pillsbury aware of MBBI's interest in facilitating dialogues with U.S. Liberian diaspora communities<sup>28</sup> as well as ongoing efforts by MBBI-NY members to engage with members of West African diaspora communities located in New York City. He referred Rev. Blamo to Bradley Roth, co-founder and Chair of

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<sup>26</sup> MBBI has participated in numerous U.N. related projects. *See generally United Nations Working Group, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT'L*, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/unity-nations-working-group> (detailing e.g. MBBI's Climate Change Policy Project, its special consultative status with ECOSOC (*see* Letter from Sam K. Kutesa, President of the General Assembly, to All Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations 14 (Sept. 1, 2015), *available at* [https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/09/010915\\_Post-2015-Summit-NGOs-in-consultative-status-with-ECOSOC-list.pdf](https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/09/010915_Post-2015-Summit-NGOs-in-consultative-status-with-ECOSOC-list.pdf)), and its work with the Commission on the Status of Women, among others).

<sup>27</sup> *About Us: Who We Are*, ULAA—UNION OF LIBERIAN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE AM., <http://ulaalib.org/index.php/about-us/ulaa-overview> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018) (founded in 1974, ULAA is "an umbrella group of Liberians and their various organizations in the Americas." Moreover, "The mission of ULAA is to advance the just causes of Liberians and Liberia at home and abroad.").

<sup>28</sup> *See* Pillsbury, *supra* note 13, at 68 ("the Liberia team is embarking on its newest project, facilitating dialogues in US cities hosting large Liberian diaspora communities. In the run-up to national elections, the goal is to use the diaspora's influence as leverage to promote peaceful electoral advocacy and reduce the divisiveness that can reignite violence").

MBBI-NY, who had been convening the New York-based diaspora-related meetings.

What emerged was an innovative project that grew out of a partnership between MBBI-NY,<sup>29</sup> the City University of New York Dispute Resolution Center at John Jay College (CUNY DRC),<sup>30</sup> and leaders of ULAA<sup>31</sup> based in the greater New York City region.

To date, this partnership has resulted in two well-received offerings provided to ULAA leaders and members free of charge: a five-day Introduction to Basic Mediation Training in July and August 2016, and a two-day Introduction to Conflict Resolution Workshop in June 2017. The partnership continues, with a new workshop in the planning stage for the summer of 2018.

While the trainings were for leaders of the Liberian diaspora in the greater New York City area, in fact, they were in some ways the continuation of an MBBI initiative that began more than a decade earlier in Liberia and that has the potential to have a positive impact on Liberia in the future.

## II. DISCUSSION

MBBI's work with the worldwide Liberian community began in 2007, when it responded to a request from a resident of a Liberian refugee camp in Ghana.<sup>32</sup> MBBI partnered with several local Liberian peace building organizations<sup>33</sup> to help successfully re-integrate former Liberian child soldiers into Liberian society<sup>34</sup> and "brought together women of nine tribes to reweave the social

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<sup>29</sup> *MBBI-New York*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT'L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/mbbi-new-york>.

<sup>30</sup> *Dispute Resolution Center*, JOHN JAY C. CRIM. JUST., <http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/disputeresolution> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

<sup>31</sup> ULAA—UNION OF LIBERIAN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE Am., <http://ulaalib.org> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Pillsbury, *supra* note 13, at 66–69 ("In 2007, after an invitation from a Liberian resident of the largest Liberian refugee camp in Ghana, MBB began to contribute to the rebuilding of Liberia by training and advising camp residents in setting up a community and peer mediation services"). At the time MBBI's Liberia Initiative began, the Buduburam refugee camp housed more than 25,000 Liberian refugees, who had fled to Ghana as a result of the Liberian Civil Wars, which occurred between 1989 and 2003. See PEACE & RECONCILIATION REPORT, *supra* note 22.

<sup>33</sup> See *Liberia*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT'L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/liberia> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Pillsbury, *supra* note 13, at 66–69.

fabric in their fractured society.”<sup>35</sup> This “Liberian Initiative” spanned seven years<sup>36</sup> and included a broad range of “training, rehabilitation and re-integration”<sup>37</sup> initiatives, including dialogue and mediation workshops, the establishment of a refugee-led mediation service, vocational training, and trauma counseling.<sup>38</sup> Over the years, MBBI has continued to be involved in additional capacity- and peace-building initiatives in Liberia.<sup>39</sup>

### A. *Laying the Groundwork for a Partnership*

How to optimally use volunteers in a mediation initiative always presents some challenges. For MBBI-NY, questions arose about where to hold trainings, how to find available mediators who would volunteer their time, and how to fund expenses that might be incurred. Since MBBI-NY members had an established partnership with the CUNY Dispute Resolution Center, they approached Maria Volpe, a professor at John Jay College and Director of the CUNY DRC to discuss the possibility of a collaborative project. The next step was to identify and contact mediators who would be interested in volunteering their time to prepare for and help conduct the training. MBBI-NY members who had been pursuing this type of opportunity were quick to volunteer, and others who had previously indicated an interest subsequently joined the team.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Liberia*, *supra* note 33; *see also* *Woman Rebuild Community in Liberia*, ESSENTIAL PARTNERS, <https://www.whatisessential.org/impact-stories/women-rebuild-community-liberia> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

<sup>36</sup> 2013 MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INTERNATIONAL (MBB) ANNUAL REPORT, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L 1 (2014), <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/2013-MBB-Accomplishments-03-14-141.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> *Women in Mediation: Advanced Peace Building Training: In Partnership with TIDES, Belfast*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L 3 (Nov. 10, 2014), <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ITI-Belfast-Trianer-bios-11-10-14.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> *Liberia*, *supra* note 33; *see also* Pillsbury, *supra* note 13, at 66–69.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., in December 2017, an MBBI trainer, Scott Martin, worked with a UNDP-funded project of Messengers of Peace, Liberia (“MOP”) “to train youth of the 15 counties of Liberia in conflict resolution, mediation and dialogue.” *See Youth Play A Key Role in Transition of Power*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/youth-dialogue-mediation-training-liberia>; *see also* Pillsbury, *supra* note 13.

<sup>40</sup> Team members included Patricia Araujo, Niki Borofsky, Karolina Galecki, Alan Gross, Bradley Roth, and Maria Volpe. Alan Gross, a founding member of MBBI, had also served as a team member in the Liberia Initiative. *See* PEACE & RECONCILIATION REPORT, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L (June 6, 2008) [http://www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org/reports/PR\\_Report.6.6.2008.pdf](http://www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org/reports/PR_Report.6.6.2008.pdf) [hereinafter 2008 PEACE & RECONCILIATION REPORT].

The foundation for the undertaking evolved deliberately. Rev. Blamo and Bradley Roth began the preparations by holding a series of phone and in-person<sup>41</sup> meetings to discuss the respective interests of ULAA and MBBI-NY. These meetings also had the benefit of helping to build trust, increasing cultural awareness and competencies, and determining necessary resources. MBBI-NY leaders indicated that they had been seeking just such an opportunity to partner with members of a local diaspora community to provide free mediation training in order to bring about positive change locally and internationally. They asked questions about the types of conflicts that were of most concern, how these were typically addressed locally and in Liberia, and asked for guidance regarding cultural norms so they could create and present a curriculum that would effectively and respectfully meet the needs and interests of participants. Rev. Blamo shared his interest in ULAA leaders gaining skills to help better resolve disputed ULAA elections and a range of community conflicts that frequently led to drawn out lawsuits. He indicated that the divisions that gave rise to the civil war still existed both in Liberia and the diaspora communities in the U.S., and expressed his concern of violence re-erupting if these concerns were not addressed through peaceful conflict resolution.

Everyone who participated in the preparatory discussions was committed to finding ways to make the training possible. MBBI-NY's partnership with the CUNY DRC and the enlistment of volunteer trainers to plan and deliver the mediation workshops enabled the trainings to be provided free of charge. The trainees, which included a group of diverse, English speaking leaders of the Liberian diaspora located in the New York City area, were eager to learn how to mediate the conflicts in their diaspora community as well as with family members and co-workers. All were appreciative of the opportunity to participate in a free training since there is a dearth of such mediation training in the greater New York City region.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In-person meetings also included Patricia Araujo, Rev. Tanya Hudson Blamo, and Karolina Galecki, Secretary of MBBI-NY. In order to gain additional understanding of Liberian cultural norms and MBBI's prior work with Liberian communities, Brad also met with Klubosumo Johnson Borh, whose organization Network for Empowerment and Progressive Initiatives (NEPI) partnered with MBBI in Liberia (*supra* note 33), and spoke with Ginny Morrison, co-leader of MBBI's Liberia Initiative. *Id.* In addition, Patricia Araujo and Brad attended the ULAA Red Carpet Inaugural Ball in Essington, Pennsylvania in March 2016, where they met newly elected ULAA officers as well as ULAA members. See *ULAA Inaugural 2016*, FACEBOOK (Jan. 2, 2016), <https://www.facebook.com/ULAAInaugural2016-1501923390112991/>.

<sup>42</sup> Recent postings on the New York City Dispute Resolution (NYC-DR) listserv and on program websites indicate a range of fees for mediation trainings open to the general public in

B. *The 2016 New York City Summer Project Introduction  
to Basic Mediation Training*

In thinking about how to proceed with the initial basic mediation training, the trainers had to take into account three major factors.

The first factor was the need to understand the context in which the participants would be using their mediation skills. The immediate application of their new tools would be to manage conflicts as indigenous interveners in their diaspora communities. They were fully knowledgeable about their traditions and ways of resolving matters informally, usually through elders, but also had firsthand experience in managing their own organizational election conflicts that resulted in litigation.<sup>43</sup> As immigrants, they also experienced all of the usual concerns and conflicts faced by people coming to the United States from abroad as some of their cultural practices posed a challenge to integrating into new socio-cultural contexts. Additionally, for some, being in the U.S. meant that they were facing intergenerational and cultural conflicts with their children. The children of immigrants are ordinarily more immersed in American culture than their parents, especially children who were born and raised in the U.S. without any first-hand experience of the homeland.

Although the participants had come from a country torn by civil war where some of them had experienced all kinds of conflict situations, the new experience with race relations in American so-

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New York City, including offerings by the Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution (IMCR): \$850 (posting of Yoerlin Jimenez to the NYC-DR listserv, IMCR's Upcoming Mediation Training) (March 12, 2018 20:39 EDT) (on file with authors); Community Mediation Services (CMS): \$950 (posting of Leslie Funk to the NYC-DR listserv, CMS Basic Mediation Training: 13 Days to Go!!) (October 14, 2016 14:32 EST) (on file with authors); New York Center for Interpersonal Development (NYCID): \$1,350 (Last Call to Register! NYCID 4 Day Basic Mediation Training . . . ) (Feb. 26, 2018 13:10 EST); New York Peace Institute: \$1,625 (*see* Internet Archive: Wayback Machine (Oct. 8, 2017), Basic Mediation Training); New York City Bar Association: \$1,795 for members and \$1,995 for nonmembers (posting of Rosan Dacres to the NYC-DR listserv, Basic Mediation Training: Conflict Resolution Theory & Techniques - Register Now to Attend) (Jan. 31, 2018 9:42 EST) (on file with authors). NYCID has offered free trainings to residents of Staten Island, *see e.g.*, "NYCID announces two opportunities for residents and those that work in the Stapleton and/or Staten Island community to attend a 4 Day Basic Mediation Training at no cost. (Value \$1,350)." (Posting of Elizabeth Bonici to the NYC-DR listserv, Apply today for this free training opportunity - 4 Day - Basic Mediation Training - Open to Staten Island Residents Only . . . ) (Oct. 31, 2018 11:54 EST) (on file with authors).

<sup>43</sup> Osman Antwi-Boateng, *The Promise and Perils of Diaspora Partnerships for Peace: The Case of the U.S.-Based Liberian Diaspora*, ÌRÌNKÈRÌNDÒ, Dec. 2012, at 6, <http://africamigration.com/issue/dec2012/case-of-the-US-Based-Liberian-Diaspora-Osman-Antwi-Boateng.pdf>.

ciety differed from what they had dealt with in Liberia and presented them with new kinds of challenges and trauma.<sup>44</sup> Ongoing relations with friends and relatives in Liberia that resulted in disagreements and misunderstandings. The trainees wanted to add new tools to their toolbox. Relatedly for the trainers, there was the need to taking into consideration that the participants' use of mediation which would likely be primarily in an unstructured context; this consideration helped to identify what aspects of the mediation process would be most relevant for them to concentrate on.

The second factor was the need for trainers to be flexible. While many of them were seasoned mediation instructors and practitioners, they were coming together for the first time as a team with different styles and experiences. What we brought was a wealth of experiences, styles, and approaches as well as a commitment to delivering a meaningful mediation training program. Ever mindful that they were Caucasian westerners who came to the training not sharing the same background, culture, and race of the participants, they drew from their collective experience and trainees' input to collaborate on a variety of approaches that they thought would work informally in the trainees' communities. The trainers had ongoing discussions prior to and throughout the training about key concepts that were relevant for mediators and what materials, exercises, scenarios, and roleplays would work. Their overarching guiding principle was to remain flexible so they could be creative, which many times required them to revise their styles and approaches and go beyond their comfort zones.

The third factor was that the mediation training would not be tailored to meet a specific program's or agency's requirements, so trainers could not resort to easily referenced policies, practices, or procedures. As the trainers thought through what to share with the trainees, they carefully considered what they had learned from all of their trainings and mediations. Interestingly, while they were able to agree upon concepts that were essential, as expected, the thinking about what emphasis to place on different concepts varied. The complex circumstances of blending a vast variety of training content in some ways mirrored the state of the mediation

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<sup>44</sup> For example, some alluded to the stigmatization they and their family members and communities experienced as a result of being associated with the recent Ebola outbreak in Liberia. See generally Josh Sanburn, *Ebola Brings Another Fear: Xenophobia*, TIME (Oct. 29, 2014), <http://time.com/3544130/ebola-panic-xenophobia>; Joyce Hackel, *The 'I am Liberian, not a Virus' Campaign Confronts the Stigma of Ebola*, PRI (Oct. 23, 2014), <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-10-23/i-am-liberian-not-virus-campaign-confronts-stigma-ebola>.

field. A recent American Bar Association Task Force Report regarding research on mediator techniques confirmed all that the trainers were experiencing first-hand. The Task Force found that after reviewing forty-seven studies, of which thirty-nine focused solely on mediation and eight on mediation plus other processes, “none of the categories of mediator actions has clear, uniform effects across the studies—that is, none consistently has negative effects, positive effects, or no effects—on any of the three sets of mediation outcomes.”<sup>45</sup> The three sets of outcomes included “(1) settlement and related outcomes, (2) disputants’ perceptions and relationships, and (3) attorneys’ perceptions.”<sup>46</sup>

Given these three factors, the trainers were reluctant to rely exclusively on mediation manuals tailored for other programs in which they had served as trainers. The result was ongoing curriculum development that included a mix of publicly available online mediation guides and videos, training materials provided by helpful colleagues, and original materials created by the trainers.<sup>47</sup>

### 1. Training Emphasis

Of paramount importance throughout the training was an emphasis on party self-determination, one of the major pillars of the Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators.<sup>48</sup> This was a most important concept for this training since the trainees were accustomed to elders giving advice, making decisions in the context of their informal conflict resolution approaches,<sup>49</sup> or resorting to litigation regarding their organizational elections. In effect, using mediation as a way of intervening in conflict situations would require a significant paradigm shift for the trainees.

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<sup>45</sup> REPORT ON THE TASK FORCE ON RESEARCH ON MEDIATOR TECHNIQUES, AM. B. ASS’N, SECTION OF DISPUTE RESOLUTION 2, (June 12, 2017) [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/dispute\\_resolution/med\\_techniques\\_tf\\_report.authcheckdam.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/dispute_resolution/med_techniques_tf_report.authcheckdam.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>47</sup> Once the trainers decided on the topics they would cover, each would contribute roleplays, exercises or videos they thought would work.

<sup>48</sup> MODEL STANDARDS OF CONDUCT FOR MEDIATORS, AM. B. ASS’N (2005), [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/migrated/2011\\_build/dispute\\_resolution/model\\_standards\\_conduct\\_april2007.authcheckdam.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/migrated/2011_build/dispute_resolution/model_standards_conduct_april2007.authcheckdam.pdf) (Standard I of the Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators, entitled Self-Determination, states: “Self-determination is the act of coming to a voluntary, uncoerced decision in which each party makes free and informed choices as to process and outcome”).

<sup>49</sup> In traditional Liberian culture, elders play a central role in resolving disputes, including in “the palava hut process . . . a justice method” . . . “under the supervision of community elders” and “rooted in mediation and dialogue.” Jonathan Compton, *The Peril of Imposing the Rule of Law: Lessons from Liberia*, 23 MINN. J. INT’L L. 47, 60 (2014).

From the outset, it was clear that the trainees were accustomed to relating to each other based on organizational titles and cultural affiliations, so the trainers began the training with suggested guidelines designed to create a respectful learning space where different and potentially conflicting tribal, religious, political, ethnic and community divisions might exist. The trainees agreed to leave their titles and affiliations at the door, to not speak on behalf of any group, to maintain non-attribution (confidentiality) in sharing statements and stories with non-participants, to strive to “not already know” and to freely ask questions.

Additionally, the trainers also started off by providing numerous disclaimers: they acknowledged that there might be traumas and conflicts, as well as certain cultural norms, that they were not aware of, and that they were prepared to and wished to learn from the participants. They also acknowledged that all of the trainers, who were Caucasian westerners, did not share the same background, culture, and race of the Liberians. They indicated that the approach shared would be drawn and adapted from their experiences with a western model of mediation, which was just one of a range of valid and valuable approaches to conflict resolution.

The trainers also indicated that even though a five-day training was a significant time commitment, it would likely only scratch the surface of what could be shared and learned. Using a new process such as mediation required much practice and constant attention, much like exercising new muscles.

Finally, since trainees were to receive certificates at the conclusion of the program, trainers had to be clear about the role of certificates in the mediation field. Certificates can have many meanings and there is no shortage of how they are understood by mediators. A discussion followed about the state of the mediation field and the lack of universal certification.<sup>50</sup> The certificates that would be awarded would signify completion of a training program and not a measure of competency. Certification is usually left up to court jurisdictions, private programs, and local mediation programs, among others. For example, in New York State, the Unified Court System’s ADR Program states, “Please note that New York State does not ‘certify’ mediators. Mediators who volunteer for CDRCs [Community Dispute Resolution Centers] or belong to

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<sup>50</sup> The International Mediation Institute has started a mediation certification program that transcends borders. See *Become IMI Certified*, INT’L MEDIATION INST., <https://www.imimeditation.org/practitioners/becoming-imi-certified> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

ADR member organizations may be certified to mediate only through the particular CDRC or member organization.”<sup>51</sup>

The trainers were mindful of and familiar with the essential components of typical mediation training curricula. There is a body of knowledge and set of skills that are considered to be important pillars of the field and are reflected in the codes of conduct<sup>52</sup> and guidelines provided by different programs.<sup>53</sup> Yet, depending on the context in which the mediation is conducted (e.g. family, education, workplace and commercial, among others), and depending on what mediation style is used (e.g. facilitative, transformative, or evaluative), more or less emphasis is placed on the different mediation skills and techniques used. For this training, the trainers attempted to identify core concepts that would resonate with the trainees’ context and their proposed informal use of mediation as indigenous conflict resolvers in their communities. The trainers attempted to address the range of topics typically discussed in any basic mediation training including the qualities of a mediator; conflict styles; communication skills with particular emphasis on active listening and “I” statements; mediation stages including convening a mediation session; introducing the parties to the mediation process; generating discussion; considering options; and bringing closure. In addition, they covered techniques for handling barriers in reaching an understanding; the value and challenges of caucusing; the benefits of mediation as well as potential drawbacks; and ethical issues and standards of conduct for mediators. What was distinctly different was how the materials

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<sup>51</sup> See *Become a Mediator/Arbitrator*, N.Y. ST. UNIFIED CT. SYS., [https://www.nycourts.gov/ip/adr/Info\\_for\\_prospective\\_neutrals.shtml](https://www.nycourts.gov/ip/adr/Info_for_prospective_neutrals.shtml) (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> There are countless codes of conduct at the national, state and local levels, for court programs and professional associations. For example, in 1994, the Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators was prepared by the American Arbitration Association, the American Bar Association’s Section of Dispute Resolution, and the Association for Conflict Resolution (then known as the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution). The Model Standards were revised in 2005 by the same three organizations. The New York State Council on Divorce Mediation adopted Model Standards of Practice for Family and Divorce Mediation in 2002 and updated them in 2012. See *Model Standards of Practice for family and Divorce Mediation*, NYS COUNCIL ON DIVORCE MEDIATION, <http://www.nysmediate.org/model-standards> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018); AM. B. ASS’N, *supra* note 48.

<sup>53</sup> For example, the New York State Unified Court System provides “guidelines for the approval of mediation training programs, and guidelines for defining recent mediation experience.” *Alternative Dispute Resolution*, N.Y. ST. UNIFIED CT. SYS., <https://www.nycourts.gov/ip/adr/Part146.shtml> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018). It also provides detailed mediation training curriculum guidelines. *Mediation Training Curriculum Guidelines*, N.Y. ST. UNIFIED CT. SYS., [http://nycourts.gov/ip/adr/Part146\\_Curriculum.pdf](http://nycourts.gov/ip/adr/Part146_Curriculum.pdf) (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

were delivered and the discussions about how to apply the new information.

## 2. Elicitive Training

The prescriptive practices that usually prevail in the more common mediation training contexts such as those provided by community programs, organizations, courts, or workplaces were not totally applicable since the participants were going to be assuming the role of mediator in largely informal settings. The trainers spent considerable time stressing the utmost importance of self-determination of the parties in a mediation, and the need to give up providing advice to parties and making decisions for them. Among the core concepts that emerged were the need to listen, and to distinguish between positions and interests. While the trainers noted the importance of confidentiality in mediation, they focused on the significance of building and maintaining trust. When one is a member of the community and also a conflict resolver, virtually all that one does or says can impact on the trust that others in the community will have in that individual when it comes to getting in the middle of problems.

To culturally adapt the training initiative, the trainers relied on the participants to engage the knowledge and skills that were imparted. Throughout the sessions, the trainees were encouraged to ask questions and share their stories. A major lesson learned is that for concepts to be relevant and useful, they have to fit the context in which the trainees are going to be using them. As previously noted, unlike many training programs where the trainees are being prepared to become a part of a context where mediation is conducted with a specific set of rules and protocols, the trainers introduced general mediation concepts and interacted with the participants to help make them applicable for their context. As a result, the trainees played a greater role in the training than is common in many traditional mediation training programs. In the process, the trainers also learned more about their culture than we likely otherwise would have had they restricted the program to a more prescriptive format.

The trainers had to step out of their own comfort zones and to remain flexible throughout the training program since mediation was being considered for use not only in the diaspora community but also in the trainees' relationship with those in their homeland. Discussions were peppered with references to experiences that were culturally relevant to the trainees. This ongoing interaction

regarding circumstances in Liberia generated lively discussions throughout the training. Moreover, what became evident is that this type of training could have a positive impact not only on their communities in the U.S., but also in Liberia. Unlike immigrant groups in the past which relied largely on snail mail to communicate, the use of electronic communication keeps contemporary diaspora communities closely connected with events abroad as well as abreast of all circumstances with family and friends back home in real time.

The modes of teaching included mini-lectures with discussion, exercises, role plays, videos, and question-and-answer sessions. Of particular note, the trainers adjusted the training as they proceeded, using an elicitive style that enabled them to adapt the curriculum and engage in spirited discussions about a broad range of topics related to conflict resolution in general and conflicts arising in both the Liberian community in the U.S. and in Liberia. Due to the wide range of questions raised by the trainees and the interest they generated, the training became increasingly interactive.<sup>54</sup>

At the start of each session, the trainees were asked to complete an anonymous survey containing a range of short answer essay-like questions, including what they sought to learn from the training, the conflict resolution topics of most interest to them, what they found most and least valuable in previous sessions, what they had put into practice during the previous week, what was the easiest and most challenging part of mediation, and what they thought could be improved in future sessions. The trainers also asked them to specifically address questions about whether what they were learning seemed to resonate with Liberian culture. At different points, the trainers asked the trainees to share their thoughts about what would be useful to mediators to know about Liberian culture, identify what they had used with someone in their Liberian community, and to discuss what they had learned that had contributed to their interactions with the Liberian-American community. After reviewing these surveys, trainers made further adjustments to the curriculum in order to meet the needs and wishes that the participants shared.

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<sup>54</sup> The trainers had agreed in advance they would be flexible in adhering to the planned timeline and curriculum to meet the learning styles and needs of the trainees and to respond to unforeseen questions and interests. Even so, during certain points in the training sessions, the trainers used breaks as opportunities to revisit their approach so that they could adapt while staying on point to adequately cover certain basic topics.

The trainings were deliberately interactive because the willingness to learn was so clearly mutual. The trainers were transparent about their lack of first-hand knowledge regarding the challenges faced by the trainees and their communities in the U.S. and Liberia and conveyed their interest in learning more. The trainees responded by sharing stories of incidents they had faced in the past or that were currently preoccupying them. The openness on the part of both the trainers and trainees helped foster an atmosphere of trust, respect and mutual regard and furthered the creation of a space where the trainees could freely discuss concerns and conflicts as experienced in the U.S. and in Liberia. Sessions were frequently permeated by a sense of good will and feelings of camaraderie that further enabled sharing and reciprocal learning.

A highlight of the sessions was trainees shared stories regarding how they applied lessons learned to challenges faced during the previous week. For example, a participant shared his experience of applying some of the communication skills he had learned in response to a request for funds from a friend in Liberia to whom he had frequently given money. He indicated that whereas in the past he would have castigated his friend for requesting money, which in turn would likely have led to a heated argument, he was able to share his feelings about the request given his own financial difficulties. He noted that by sharing rather than accusing, the dynamic changed from an adversarial exchange to one of mutual empathy and concern. This willingness to try new approaches, such as sharing feelings, stimulated discussion regarding what the participants described as traditional patriarchal norms in the U.S. and Liberia. The spirit of trust engendered in the room enabled the trainees to more freely experiment with these new approaches and to share in a vulnerable way their experiences.

### 3. Broader Mediation Training Addressing Community Issues

Since there was interest in addressing the broader concerns facing the Liberian community in American society where race relations were different than those experienced in their homeland, the trainers invited Matthew Lattimer, a Conciliation Specialist with the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Relations Service (CRS),<sup>55</sup> to attend one of the training programs. He shared how his agency works in communities where there have been tensions around racial matters. He also discussed CRS's mediation

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<sup>55</sup> See *Community Relations Service*, U.S. DEP'T OF JUST., <https://www.justice.gov/crs> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

and peacebuilding initiatives and answered a variety of questions from participants regarding community-police relations.<sup>56</sup> This latter topic highlighted how members of the Liberian diaspora community faced not only issues related to their identity as immigrant members of an African country but also those shared with U.S.-born African-Americans related to their identities as persons of color. This topic was especially timely for one participant who had come to the session directly after visiting his son whom he said had been arrested the night before and had spent the night in jail as a result of his participation in a protest related to the Black Lives Matter movement.

#### 4. Ongoing Feedback

In their responses to a final evaluation completed anonymously at the end of the training, participants provided feedback which was distinctly positive. Many mentioned that they appreciated the opportunity to learn new mediation skills and several indicated they planned to further their training in mediation so that they could utilize these skills to resolve conflicts and build peace within their communities in the U.S. and in Liberia.<sup>57</sup> Representative comments included: “I have begun to apply what I have learned to conflict situations. Great class, and I will seek further understanding of mediation . . . .”; “[The training] has help[ed] me to settle internal and community disputes”; “It change[d] my method of mediation in the African community here in the USA”; “I now know how to ask questions and discuss consequences each party may face if each party does not allow peace to prevail”; “I hope . . . to make use of this training in Liberia as my contribution to peace in the war-torn country.”<sup>58</sup>

At the conclusion of the training, ULAA members invited the trainers to join them at a gala hosted by the Liberian Community Organization of New York (a member organization of ULAA) celebrating Liberia’s 129th anniversary of independence in Harlem. At the event, the official program included recognition of the training program. ULAA members who participated in the training expressed high praise about their mediation training and presented the MBBI-NY—CUNY DRC team with the 2016 Peace

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<sup>56</sup> *MBBI-NY’s Peacebuilding Partnership with the Liberian Diaspora*, MEDIATORS BEYOND BORDERS INT’L, <http://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/mbbi-nys-peacebuilding-partnership-liberian-diaspora> (last visited Mar. 20, 2018).

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

and Mediation Award in recognition of the success of the training.<sup>59</sup>

C. *The 2017 New York City Summer Project—Rethinking the Conflict Resolution Training*

In the months after the training, the organic nature of the project continued and gave rise to its next stage. Rev. Blamo asked if the trainers could provide another summer training since there was significant interest in the Liberian community. In response, MBBI-NY and the CUNY DRC partnered again in June 2017 to consider a conflict resolution initiative. Not only was the second ULAA group larger and more diverse<sup>60</sup> than the first group, but it was also too geographically dispersed to conduct a protracted training over multiple weekends. Participants came from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.<sup>61</sup> After some discussion, the trainers agreed that two days was too short a time period to refer to the new initiative as a “training” and chose the title of “Introduction to Conflict Resolution Workshop” in order to temper expectations and to underscore that only the most basic topics would be covered. As in the previous initiative, questions were encouraged, but given the tighter timeframe, there was a more deliberate adherence to the curriculum. As in the first initiative, role play exercises were designed to reflect conflict scenarios familiar to participants<sup>62</sup> and feedback was very positive.<sup>63</sup> All partners agreed that they were interested in continuing their involvement with a similar initiative in the future.

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<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> The second group of fifteen participants included two women as well as younger attendees.

<sup>61</sup> See *MBBI-NY's Expanding Peacebuilding Partnership with the Liberian Diaspora*, *supra* note 56. With two women participating, gender diversity was only marginally better than in the 2016 training, where only one woman attended.

<sup>62</sup> Role playing exercises and significant portions of the curriculum were drafted by MBBI-NY trainers. See 2008 PEACE & RECONCILIATION REPORT, *supra* note 40.

<sup>63</sup> Survey responses included: “I learn(ed) a lot from the workshop. It was very important, having gone through fourteen years of civil war in Liberia.”; “Our differences are not too vast; with better understanding, we can solve our problems. . .through the process of mediation.”; “I can take this in my community and be of great help to people of various ages and ethnicity.” *MBBI-NY's Expanding Peacebuilding Partnership with the Liberian Diaspora*, *supra* note 56.

#### D. Lessons Learned

The mediation initiatives were designed for indigenous conflict resolvers—individuals who were principally going to use the mediation knowledge and skills they learned to manage conflicts in their communities, among those with whom they shared the same culture. Hence, the major lesson for the trainers was to share the essentials of what mediators do without all of the trappings of prescriptive programmatic protocols.

For training programs to succeed when working with communities that are distinctly different from those of the trainers, it is most advantageous to have a liaison to the group who assumes the role of identifying participants, recruiting them, and promoting the program. Credibility is important. The go-between person has to be able to communicate with his/her cultural community as well as the organizers of the training.<sup>64</sup> While many of the participants had been accustomed to the informal resolution of conflicts in their country of origin, the elders on whom they relied were most likely to be decision makers.<sup>65</sup> The training program helped to distinguish how empowering disputing parties and guiding them toward self-determination required different skills than when one is in the role of conflict resolver and making decisions for the parties. This differentiation resonated with the trainees not only when they practiced their new skills in the sessions, but also reportedly when they used them in their personal lives after they left the training context. The lesson learned here is to pay attention to what is ‘normal’ for the trainees, and to discuss how mediation means being in the middle in a different way.

#### E. Sustaining Informal Initiatives

Among the most prominent challenges has been how to sustain an exciting initiative. The trainers carefully examined what is needed to sustain a program. Three key needs surfaced: funding, evaluation, and scaling up, all which are intertwined. Funding allows for personnel to dedicate time to the initiative and prepare for, deliver, and follow-up on the training. Funding also allows for resources needed to undertake an initiative, such as instructional

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<sup>64</sup> For this initiative, Rev. Blamo was the intermediary between the diaspora community and the mediators.

<sup>65</sup> See Christian-Radu Chereji & Charles Wratto King, *West Africa. A Comparative Study of Traditional Conflict Resolution Methods in Liberia and Ghana*, 5 CONFLICT STUD. Q. 3, 9 (2013), <http://www.csq.ro/wp-content/uploads/CSQ-5.-Chereji-Wratto.pdf>.

materials and refreshments to help enhance the training experience.

Related to funding is the importance of measuring what impact the training has had on participants and their communities. It is important to know if, where, and when mediation skills have been used by the trainees as well as what worked for them and what could be improved. Enthusiasm is not enough. It would also be significant to track more closely the management of conflicts between the diaspora communities and their home country.

And finally, funding is crucial for any efforts to scale up the initiative. As trainees share their experience with others in their community about the relevance of the training program, enthusiasm and interest are generated for additional programs. As mentioned earlier, for this initiative, the trainers conducted one follow up program consisting of a two-day workshop and are planning another modest program for the summer of 2018. Without funding, all of these programmatic efforts rely on the good will and resources of volunteers who have contributed many hours in planning and delivering the programs. Ideally, the partners in these initiatives would develop programs that integrate the work undertaken over the past two summers and create networks of conflict resolvers who can share concerns that arise for them.

### III. CONCLUSION

What makes conflict resolution training for relatively homogeneous diaspora communities possible is the historical pattern whereby immigrants tend to locate near family and people they knew from their homelands. The result is concentrations of people who share commonalities such as language, religion, race, foods, traditions, and holidays, among others. The growth of these immigrant communities, the expanding interest in finding constructive ways to manage conflicts, and the increased use of technology to communicate globally have created new opportunities for mediators to collaborate with members of diaspora communities interested in further developing their capacity for conflict resolution.

As with others working to facilitate diaspora dialogues,<sup>66</sup> the mediation field has the ability and potential to build indigenous capacity in diaspora communities to constructively manage conflicts. While mediation is not a panacea, it is another useful tool that can provide a constructive, inexpensive way of managing the challenges of participating in a multicultural society where conflicts are experienced not only within the diaspora communities but also with those external to their communities.

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<sup>66</sup> See generally, *DIASPORAS IN DIALOGUE: CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND RECONCILIATION IN WORLDWIDE REFUGEE COMMITTEES 1* (Barbara Tint ed., 2017).