

**Analysis of the Schools Mediation Programme of the Mediation
Boards Commission of Sri Lanka - An Assessment**

Draft Report

**Submitted by
Dr. Susil Liyanaarachchi**

**Submitted to
Supporting Effective Dispute Resolution (SEDR) Project
British Council Sri Lanka**

**12 December 2021
Colombo**

Analysis of the Schools Mediation Programme of the Mediation Boards Commission of Sri Lanka - An Assessment

1.0 Background

The School Mediation Program is an extension of the Community Mediation initiative in Sri Lanka spearheaded to mainstream the poor man's access to justice – a low-cost and fast way of providing access to alternative justice options to masses.

Community mediation was formally introduced to Sri Lanka in 1988 by an Act of Parliament, successfully establishing a robust system of mediating community level disputes. Today there are more than 330 Community Mediation Boards at Divisional Secretariat Divisions covering the entire country, staffed by more than 8,600 volunteer mediators who deal with more than 200,000 disputes each year. The Community mediation system is administered by the State through the Ministry of Justice and a semi-autonomous Mediation Boards Commission. The aim of establishing community mediation boards was to provide access to justice to those who found it difficult to access to formal justice system by ensuring an alternative justice option that was cheap, fast, locally available.

The SL model of mediation used at Community Mediation Boards, is called “Interest-Based Mediation” – an approach piloted by Dr. Chris Moore, a US based expert who helped to design the SL mediation model and approach. He has worked very closely over the years with TAF in their support to MoJ and MBC. There are important conceptual linkages between Restorative Justice (RJ) approaches and Interest based Mediation.

Despite limitations in public awareness and ambiguity regarding the effectiveness of the process in resolution of disputes adopting and resorting to a mediated settlement, the community mediation has been recognized as a success, and an effective process of dispute resolution with annual targets reaching 200,000-250,000 cases with around 70 percent settlement rate. It is in the backdrop of the above context the concept of school mediation was envisioned, launched and evolved during the 2004 – 2012 period as a pilot initiative. This nascent program was coordinated by the British Council Sri Lanka and implemented by the Ministry of Justice with the concurrence of the Ministry of Education. The financial assistance, coordination and technical support for the pilot initiative was provided by the British Council Sri Lanka. Technical support provided by Mediation-UK, a network of mediators and trainers was particularly for training and skill building of the first batch of mediation program officers (MPOs) recruited by the Mediation Board Commission (MBC) of the Ministry of Justice. At present the School Mediation Program is under the Mediation Boards Commission and is implemented through island wide network of schools facilitated by more than 300 officers recruited. On average, every divisional secretariat division in the country has at least one officer responsible for conducting mediation related activities albeit with different levels of skills, capacities and experiences. (See below for details)

The rationale and justification for the school mediation concept is twofold;

1. The use of mediation skills for the resolution of disputes in schools by adolescents and youth themselves to the extent possible without the involvement of higher-level authorities, parents and at times the wider community which complicate and jeopardize the resolution
2. Introduce the concept of mediation starting from the school so that adolescents and youth are well aware of the potential and the utility of mediation as a low cost and effective alternative for court procedures for dispute resolution, peacefully and amicably

1.1 The Assessment

The assessment of the school mediation program of the Mediation Boards Commission is undertaken as an integral part of the Supporting Effective Dispute Resolution (SEDR) program funded by the European Union and has been contracted to be implemented by the British Council in partnership with the Asia Foundation over a 4-year period 2021-2024. It is expected that the assessment reviews, analyses, extract key lessons and provide recommendations regarding the effectiveness and outcomes of the pilot project implemented during the 2004-2012 period and subsequent activities on school mediation. The outcomes of this consultancy report will be used to inform the revision and updating of the MBC's school mediation programme, with support from the SEDR project.

2.0 Why school mediation matter

Schools are filled with multiple types of conflicts. There are student/student conflicts, parent/school conflicts, parent/parent conflicts, teacher/student conflicts, teacher/teacher conflicts and teacher/administrator conflicts. However, the most significant attention has been given for student related conflicts as reflected in published literature on school mediation and managing school disputes constructively.

As highlighted in scholarly articles on school violence, the frequency of conflicts among students and the increasing severity of the ensuing violence makes managing such incidents very costly in terms of time lost to instructional, administrative and learning efforts. If schools are to be orderly and peaceful places in which high-quality education can take place, students must learn to manage conflicts constructively without physical or verbal violence. The general literature on school mediation points that dealing with conflict rather than avoiding it promotes personal growth and skill development if done with a constructive and restorative focus. Reports suggest that the use of school-based mediation embracing restorative justice and interest based mediation approaches to conflict resolution can help to improve the educational climate of the school and help teachers, administrators, students and parents communicate more effectively with each other.

According to a report released by UNICEF¹, physical fights and bullying disrupt the education of 150 million 13–15-year-old worldwide including Sri Lanka. While girls and boys are equally at risk of bullying, girls are more likely to become victims of psychological forms of bullying and boys are more at risk of physical violence and threats.

Adolescents in Sri Lanka constitute 20 percent of the total population² and available literature indicates that peer violence among adolescents is a major public health issue in Sri Lanka³. Studies highlighted that 43.8% of students aged 13 to 17 were involved in a physical fight one or more times in the past 12 months, out of which 54.9% of cases were boys. 39.4% of Sri Lankan students aged 13 to 15 had been bullied one or more days during the 30 days before the survey, out of which 50.2% were boys and 28.8% girls. A national survey on emerging issues among adolescents in Sri Lanka, 75% of the participants had experienced some form of peer harassment in school. The spectrum of violence characteristic to Sri Lanka⁴ compare to other countries indicates three broad categories of violent behaviours; “less severe violence,” “severe physical,” and “severe relational” violence. A regional study conducted in four LAMICs in Asia⁵, i.e., Laos, Mongolia, Nepal and Sri Lanka revealed that one third of children living in the four countries experience psychological distress partly attributed to the conflicts in schools.

It appears that the main strategy employed by the school authorities to combat school, violent behaviour is corporal punishment. The National Child Protection Authority found that, 80.4% of students reported having experienced at least one episode of corporal punishment in the past term. A study conducted⁶ to assess the various disciplinary methods used by 459 teachers, on 948 students, in six districts in Sri Lanka including national, provincial, special education, and private schools revealed that teachers used aversive disciplinary methods such as corporal punishment and psychological aggression. During the past term, 80.4% of students reported experiencing at least one strategy of corporal punishment and 72.5% reported experiencing psychological aggression. It was alarming to note that 53% of students reported experiencing at least one strategy of physical abuse in the schools in Sri Lanka. In all, 79.3% of students reported experiencing at least one strategy of positive discipline. Although teachers did use positive discipline, it was lesser than the use of aversive disciplinary methods. Hence, the use of force as a tool of discipline on young people in schools in Sri Lanka is widespread. This is despite the fact that Sri Lanka is a signatory to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, SAARC Colombo Declaration on the Rights of the Child 2009, and SAIEVAC - South Asian Initiatives for End Violence Against Children 2014. Sri

¹ UNICEF (2018 September)

² Department of Census and Statistics, 2009.

³ Hewamalage, 2010; UNICEF, 2004;

⁴ For example, gun violence is absent in Sri Lanka compare to USA. Also, the sexual aggression is not applicable to Sri Lankan schools. In contrast, non-verbal forms of violence are common in Sri Lankan schools.

⁵ Psychological distress among adolescents in Laos, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka. 2019, Asian Nursing Research, Volume 13, Issue 2, pages 147-153.

⁶ Piyanjali de Zoysa et.al, PubMed, 2018, <http://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518808851>

Lanka is obliged to respect, protect and fulfill International Conventions and Agreements to which it is party.

2.1 Statistics on school -based violence, its characteristics, surveillance system and prevention

At present there is no surveillance system adopted to monitor and record school statistics on violence in Sri Lanka. This is despite the availability of Sri Lankan Early Teenagers' Violence Inventory (SLETVI)⁷ developed by the Ministry of Health in partnership with the Department of Community Medicine of the Colombo Medical Faculty to assess peer violence among 13–15-year-old adolescents in Sri Lankan schools. Developed to suit the Sri Lankan cultural and social context, the SLETVI captures a wide range of violent acts in three categories (less severe violence, severe physical violence, and severe relational violence) among 13–15-year-old adolescents in schools. Altogether, 39 interpersonal violent activities belong to all three categories were identified and included in the SLETVI.

Research studies on school violence in Sri Lanka revealed some key insights into the nature, characteristics and the wider context of peer violence, which results from the interplay among the adolescent, others in the community, and the broader society. For example, a study⁸ conducted in Gampaha District Schools on peer violence among 13-15 years old revealed factors associated with physical and relational violence among adolescents occurred at different levels. Being 13 years old, male sex, having mental health difficulties, dating relationship(s), school absenteeism, witnessing physical fights among neighbours, and living in crime-dense neighbourhoods were correlates of both physical and relational violence. Being 14 years old, having a mother in foreign employment, poor parent-adolescent interaction, alcohol consumption by parents or guardians, aggressive friends, watching three or more movies per week during the school term, and preference for action movies were correlates only of physical violence. Low self-esteem, poor school performance, perceived poor family support, corporal punishments by parents/guardians, and using Internet > 2 hr/day were correlates only of relational violence. Thus, the study findings indicate that micro-, meso-, and macro-systems should be important targets for violence prevention among adolescents, and that interventions should involve multiple stakeholders.

Findings on school violence suggest that certain environmental factor may have an equal or greater effect on violence than individual-level factors. A more comprehensive school-based prevention program, including strategies for violence prevention needs to be designed, taking into account the modifiable individual, relationship, community and societal factors that were

⁷ Development of the Sri Lankan Early Teenagers' Violence Inventory: An Instrument to Measure Peer Violence in schools
Monika Wijeratne et.al, BioMed Research International Volume 2014, Article ID 563143, 11 pages
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2014/563143>

⁸ Correlates of Peer Violence Among 13- to 15-Year-Olds in Gampaha District Schools in Sri Lanka: Findings from a Comparison Between Violent and Non-Violent Adolescents. Monika Priyadarshani Wijeratne et.al. SAGE Open July-September 2014: 1– 14 © The Author(s) 2014 DOI: 10.1177/2158244014550616

found to be associated with peer violence. The school mediation training is only one aspect of that program on preventing school - based violence.

The international and local experience on school- based violence suggest that the general public, including parents, guardians, and teachers, should be educated on the family, community, and societal correlates of peer violence among adolescents to promote their support to address this important issue. Peer violence intervention programs need to target parenting behaviour and practices. Parents should interact with adolescents every day, and mothers should think twice before leaving their children for foreign employments. The social structure which compels parents, especially mothers, leaving their children for foreign employment, could be improved by increasing local employment opportunities for women and making policy decisions to reduce long work hours, thus allowing parents to have more interactions with their children.

Adolescents should be supervised by parents to limit Internet use and movie watching. Harmful alcohol consumption among parents/society needs to be discouraged. Parent education, family therapy, and psycho-dynamic art therapy could be used at the family level to prevent and reduce violence among adolescent peers. Introduction of legislation to ban corporal punishment by parents would likely also be beneficial.

Furthermore, as indicated in scholarly research on school - based violence, health sector involvement is pertinent in designing a violence prevention program as violence is related to mental health among the students. The existing health care system could be utilized for this purpose⁹; for example, adolescents could be screened for mental health problems by the primary health care team during the school health inspection. Teacher and parental support is also recommended to identify mental health problems among adolescents. In addition, school-based counselling programs designed to address violence should be established. The psychosocial environment of the school should also be monitored and programs should be developed to promote adolescents' mental health. School-based life skill programs may be implemented to help adolescents build good self-esteem, achieve effective communication skills, and develop stress coping/anger management strategies.

School policies and practices should advance relations between students and between students and teachers that are respectful, non-abusive, and non-discriminatory. In instances of abuse, violence, harassment, or discrimination among students or between staff and students, this should be condemned openly to promote appropriate social norms. Specifically, there should be a school policy to ban physical punishment by teachers to discipline

⁹ For example, the SELTVY system in Sri Lanka

adolescents¹⁰. Discipline does not derive from rules, punishments, and external control. It is more effectively learned from reinforcement and through experiencing consequences, which are fair, firm, and clearly communicated. Programs should be implemented to decrease the occurrence of neighbourhood violence and crimes. The media should be more responsible and avoid promoting violence among adolescents, and policy decisions should be taken to control presentation of violence through the media. Broadcasting companies should be encouraged to avoid showing violent programs early in the evening, and they could provide clear advice on how old teenagers should be to watch specific program, for example, minimum age 18 years. In conclusion, although there are a multitude of factors that contribute to peer violence in schools most of the factors identified in international research studies are potentially modifiable. Factors such as corporal punishment, exposure to violence through the media, watching movies, and/or Internet use for long hours could be modified in the short term, whereas others, such as values and socioeconomic conditions, will take longer time to change.

2.2. The school mediation process – theory and practise

Theoretical framework which the school mediation is based on is the Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Philosophy which is considered the general framework adopted for mediation programs. The focus of the BARJ approach is repairing the harm using restorative rather than a retributive approach to resolving conflicts¹¹. The BARJ approach emphasises the accountability and the mutual responsibility for resolving a conflict involving three customers – victim, offender and community, instead of the sole traditional offender as customer, and calls for a balance in the treatment of each of them.

The government and law enforcement see mediation boards as an integral part of a system of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). Lawyers often identify community mediation as being distinctly apart from the formal legal system unlike arbitration, where the involvement of lawyers and retired judges as arbitrators gives it a more formal justice sector identity than a component of an ADR system¹².

Utilization of Balanced and Restorative Justice approach make students take responsibility for their behaviours at school. The mediation process is facilitated by specially trained cadre of school mediators including both the children and teachers to help disputant students resolve

¹⁰ Sri Lanka is a signatory of the international treaty on banning the corporal punishment in schools. This however is not fully implemented. There is also a divide in the Sri Lankan society with regard to the rational and justification on the issue.

¹¹ Bazemore G., et.al 1995. The balanced restorative justice report. University of Minnesota, School of Social Work.

¹² The changing the face of mediation," Mediation of Commercial Disputes in Sri Lanka by Ramani Jayasundere, PhD, Attorney at Law, a mimeograph.

disagreements by listening to both parties and encouraging them to talk about their differences. The mediation process allows people to resolve conflicts in a nonthreatening and nonpunitive atmosphere through the use of effective communication and problem-solving skills.

Mediation has an inherent advantage in that it does not require the development of new skills. It exploits existing talents that are demonstrated by students in other settings in the school, especially in peer relationships, and builds on these talents to form the basic mediation process¹³. All students have the potential to be involved in the development of the school-based mediation program, not just students with athletic, academic or social talent.

2.3 School Mediation in Sri Lanka

The School Mediation concept was first piloted in Sri Lanka during the 2004-2012 period involving 30 schools with the financial assistance and coordination support provided by the British Council in partnership with the Asia Foundation. The Asia Foundation however was responsible only for the integration of its flagship program called Values Program into the SMP curricular. (See below for details of the Values program) The program was implemented by the Ministry of Justice with the technical inputs provided by a cadre of Mediation Program Officers of about 25, trained by a team of UK experts on school mediation facilitated by the British Council Sri Lanka. Details of the training programs provided through the technical assistance of the British Council are as follow;

1. Mediation Training program of 10 days duration conducted by Rif Sarif and Suki Bence of Mediation UK – A network Mediators and Mediator Trainers
2. Peer Mediation Training of 3 days duration conducted by Carroll Barrett from Scotland
3. Peer mediation and Leadership Training program of 3 -days duration conducted by Sage Training, Australia
4. Leadership Training of 3-days duration conducted by Mihirini de Zoysa, Sri Lanka

Although the program was designed with the concurrence of the Ministry of Education, the program was driven under the leadership of the Ministry of Justice. There was no documentary evidence available on the context, the problem analysis and a baseline study conducted as part of the project design. This is partly due to the fact that the pilot project was implemented far back in 2005 – 2012 period. However, the interviews conducted with key stakeholders revealed sufficient and relevant information to meet the expected outputs of the assignments to inform the design of the SEDR project. This is mainly because of the active

¹³ (Moriarty, 1991) Theoretical dimensions of school-based mediation. *Social Work in Education*, 13, 176.

involvement of MBC in implementing the SMP and it's scaling up to cover island wide network of schools through the recruitment of a new batch of mediation officers of around 300 in the year 2020.

The Asia Foundation is engaged with the MBC through a MOU to integrate the Values Curriculum to the SMP. The Values curriculum which was developed in 2012 and updated in 2019 is aimed at developing core humanitarian values among youth and introduce a value-based approach to the Education. There were 4 core areas to be covered under the MOU. These are;

1. Revision of the School Mediation Handbook and integrate core activities of the Values curriculum into the SMP
2. Training 150-200 SMOs as trainers on leadership, facilitation skills, cyber security and other soft skills to train the student leaders of the SMP
3. Develop Video tutorials – 5 steps of mediation
4. Conduct an island wide competition for students – postponed due to COVID

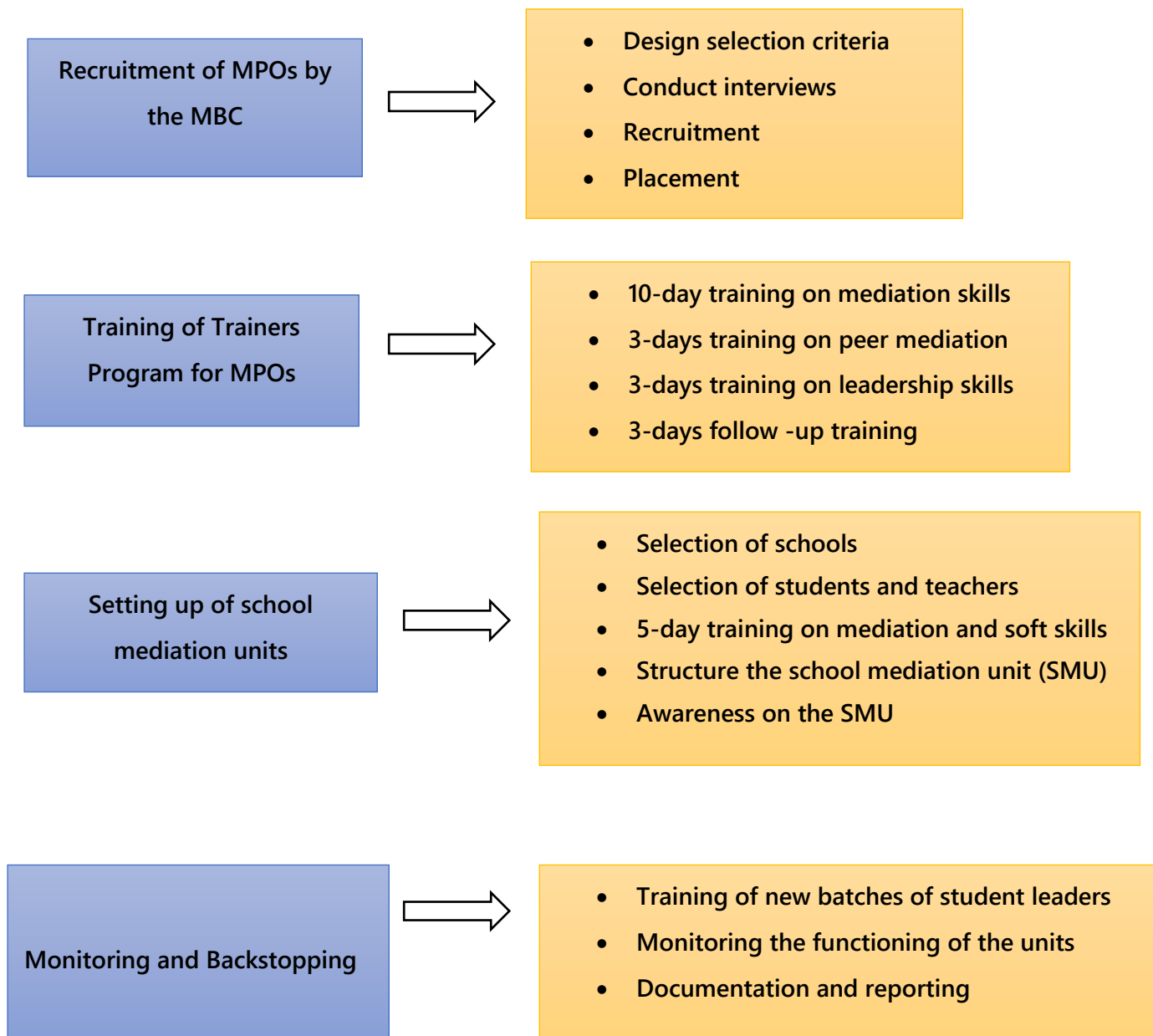
As mentioned by the former Secretary and the Senior Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, the two key officials involved in the design and supervision of the project, under the pilot initiative 30 school mediation units were set up covering 6 districts. The following activities were conducted during the pilot phase. Most of those activities served as the foundations on which the sustenance of the SMP was ensured.

As part of the pilot project 30 school mediation units were established covering 5 districts, namely, Rathnapura, Anuradhapura, Galle, Kandy and Kalutara. In each school 25 students and 5 teachers were trained as part of the program. Overall, the project benefited 30 schools, 750 students and 150 teachers as direct beneficiaries. Northern and Eastern Districts could not be covered due to the civil war.

Design the SMP in Sri Lanka based on the experience gained from the schools in the UK but adapted to suit the local conditions and context

- A series of awareness programs to the school principals and teachers
- Trained a cadre of 25 School Mediation program officers by a team of experts from UK
- Organize national level competitions to motivate the students and for cross learning
- Develop the exit strategy – the SMP was transferred to the Mediation Boards Commission (MBC) for scaling up, coordination and monitoring

A schematic diagram of setting up of School mediation units



All the activities related to mediation in the country is under the purview of the MBC. All ground level activities are implemented by a cadre of mediation officers as follows;

1. Mediation Training Officers (MTOs) – MTOs work at district level. For every district there is a designated MTO officer, one or two. Altogether, there are 28 MTOs. Their main responsibility is to train the Mediation Board Members on mediation skills and monitoring.

2. Mediation Program Officers (MPOs) – there are three batches of MPOs with varying degrees of capacities based on the trainings they received and the level of professional experience. Their main responsibilities include conducting public awareness programs, implementing the school mediation program, monitoring and backstopping.

- 2005 batch – This is the very first batch recruited by the MBC during the pilot project. They are well trained by national and international trainers¹⁴ and the most experienced in terms of implementing the SMP. They are actively involved in training to new recruits.
- 2012 batch – This is the second batch of MPOs of around 29 recruited by the MBC and trained by the first batch
- 2012 batch – This is the third batch of around 70, but their designation differs from the previous batches and are called Development Officer¹⁵(Mediation)
- 2020 batch – This is the most recent batch of Development Officers (Mediation) of around 300 in numbers.

As can be seen, over the years the MBC expanded its cadre of mediation officers and as a result there are least one mediation officer available for each Divisional Secretariat Division for promoting the SMP. The MBC receives monthly reports from Mediation Program Officers and Development

During 2018 and 2019 period, The Presidential Secretariat in partnership and collaboration with the MBC initiated and implemented a special program called “Daruwan Surakimu” (Let us Protect Our Children) under which school mediation units were set up in 100 schools representing both national and provincial schools covering 25 districts. The proposal for the project was developed by the MBC and the program was allocated 10 million SLR. Four schools per district were included in the program. It is evident that the experience gained during the pilot project and lessons learned have been incorporated into the design of this program. For example, the 100-school program was well structured and there was an active involvement on the part of the Ministry of Education in terms of organizing awareness programs for

¹⁴ By professional trainers drawn from Mediation-UK network through British Council Sri Lanka and national trainers on leadership and other soft skills.

¹⁵ They have been recruited through the government program known as the graduate employment scheme. In general, they are given the title Development Officers and after an initial induction program, they were assigned to different areas such as probation and child care, business/enterprise development, mediation, women development, community development etc.,

education officers at all levels within the administrative hierarchy of the education system starting from the Provincial Education Office up to the School Principals and teachers. The Program was coordinated by 57 MPOs.

A recent development in the area of mediation, particularly targeting the youth is the private sector involvement in training and advocacy. An example is the U-Decide initiative¹⁶. These developments indicate a need for accreditation and standardization of the mediation training curricular and to have a certification system to ensure the quality of training and its delivery.

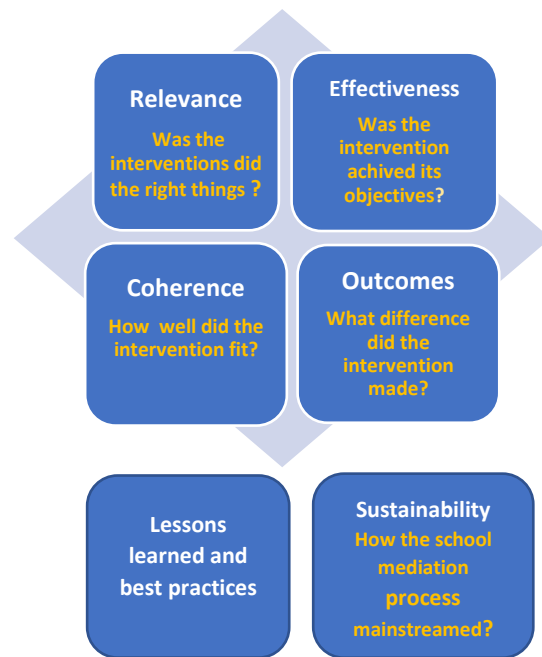
3. Methodology

A distinctive feature of the method adopted in the assessment is that the data collection and the analysis was completely based on the narratives of the key stakeholders interviewed which captured their experiences in the field of school mediation and the tacit knowledge generated through their involvement in the school mediation process at different levels. i.e., policy, practice, training, and monitoring. This is mainly because, written documents/secondary sources of information related to the school mediation project implemented in 2004-2012 period, i.e., baseline studies, context analysis, project documents, log frames/theory of change, monitoring and evaluation reports, workshops and events reports and published documents regarding the lessons learned etc., could not be accessed. Same is true for the situation in the aftermath of the pilot project during which the Mediation Boards Commission took over the responsibility for the continuation of the school mediation process – scaling up the school mediation concept and practices through island wide network of schools providing bare minimum inputs to maintain and sustain such a process. Other than routine monitoring reports submitted by the school mediation officers working at the district level, the MBC does not have any other documents (similar to the above mentioned) pertaining to school mediation.

3.1 The framework adopted for data collection and data analysis

As mentioned in the inception report the following framework was used for data collection and analysis.

¹⁶ UDecide is a Mediation Platform and is a Mediation service provider that promotes and encourages the use of Mediation as an amicable, mutually beneficial form of dispute resolution in any area of society. UDecide Sri Lanka was established in 2018.



3.2 Key stakeholders

A diverse set of stakeholders drawn from various institutions directly and indirectly affecting and influencing the school mediation process were selected for interviews. They were related to the administration, management, coordination, policy development, monitoring, funding, and filed level implementation of the school mediation process. A detailed list of stakeholders interviewed is annexed. (Annexure 1.)

3.3 Data collection

Given the above circumstances, the main tool used for data collection was virtually conducted individual interviews, except two interviews conducted face to face at the MBC in Colombo. The evolving COVID situation and the closure of schools during the assessment period prevented field visits to districts to have face to face individual interviews and/or FGDs. A secondary literature survey was done in order to document the concept, theory and global practises related to school mediation.

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis was guided by the elements of the framework designed for the purpose. (See above) The overall method used for data analysis was primarily qualitative. It provided insights into in-depth information about attitudes, values, motives, behaviours of key stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the school mediation program. It also allowed to uncover deviations, both positive and negative, to compare to usual behaviours and attitudes, particularly in relation to how the stakeholders addressed and

overcame challenges they faced in the implementation process including specific strategies used. These findings are mentioned in the report.

The data analysis primarily used three methods, i.e., content analysis to evaluate patterns and frequency of ideas shared or spoken about the design, implementation, monitoring and outcomes of the school mediation program; narrative analysis of telling stories about the outcomes/changes happened as the result of the introduction of school mediation program and the challenges faced; phenomenological analysis to derive personal experiences participating in the school mediation process.

Raw information and data were categorized according to themes or topics emerged from the discussions had with the interviewers which helped identifying the common themes and/or patterns to build a logical chain of evidence related to the framework of the analysis.

3.5 Structure of the report

Reporting structure was informed and guided by the data analysis framework adopted for the assessment and included commonly use format.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Relevance

All the participants from among different stakeholders interviewed were of the opinion that the school mediation is relevant. How and the way the mediation at school level is relevant was answered as follows and contain the most commonly used explanations, views and perceptions.

- The school mediation Program (SMP) effectively addresses a key problem and an important issue faced by the school, the students, teachers, and administrators related to the violent behaviours of students
- The approach adopted in the implementation of SMP is innovative, practical and effective. It reduces the energies and time consumed by school authorities in resolving many disputes that are happen among the students which can be easily resolved by the students themselves once they are trained on dispute resolution through mediation and given the responsibility to do so. Also, the approach is not a mere extension of the community mediation model. It adopted an approach which considered the school context and peculiarities.

“The school mediation program is designed taking into account the school context and students as its customers. The British Council facilitated the inputs from key international experts to design the training package for SMPOs and trained them as trainers. This has been very effective”. Anusha Munasinghe, former senior assistant secretary, Ministry of Justice.

- SMP process empowers students, and provide them with opportunities to express themselves and compel them to understand the importance of listening to other and appreciate the views other than their own.
- The mediation training curriculum developed for students seems to be highly relevant since it supplements the school curriculum which is based on subject matter to include the soft skills and social skill

Despite the relevance, there is no policy related to the SMP developed and endorsed by educational authorities. Therefore, the SMP seems to be an ad-hoc initiative. The decision regarding its implementation or not in the school system is under the sole discretion of the school principal. The Ministry of Education provides only a nominal approval or endorsement but not a directive.

Also, there is no comprehensive problem analysis conducted as part of the SMP design. While there are some empirical researches conducted on the school violence in Sri Lankan context, to what extent the findings of academic research and other related work is unknown.

4.2 Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the program i.e., the degree to which the school mediation program produced desired results was assessed primarily through three key stakeholders involved in the implementation process, namely; the Mediation Program Officers (MPOs), school principals, school teachers, Provincial Educational Officers, and former students who are now employed and over 18 years of age¹⁷. It should be noted however that the anecdotal evidence on the effectiveness of the program is presented here without any baseline information with regard to the status of violence inside the schools and without policy directives on the part of the Department of Education responsible for mainstreaming and administering such a program at school level.

From the interviews held it was evident that the driving force behind the effectiveness of the school mediation program were the commitment and leadership of the Mediation Program Officers. They were the catalysts and advocates for promoting the program at the school level. The program is driven by the Ministry of Justice without any direct involvement on the part of the Ministry of Education.

¹⁷ Interviews with former students were conducted with their consensus and prior approval obtained through the Mediation Program Officers who worked with them while they were in school

4.2.1 The effectiveness of the Process

On average, the budget of the MBC for the promotion of the school mediation program is to set up two school mediation units per district per annum which the MBC has been continuing up until the outbreak of COVID pandemic. Selection of schools is done by MPOs. They are usually given a letter of consensus from the Ministry of Education giving permission to hold such programs at the school level. Since the SMP is not a mandatory activity, the final decision for conducting the program is purely under the discretion of the school principal which in turn depend on the persuasive ability and the drive of the MPOs. Once the school principal agrees to let the mediation program happen the first step is the selection of around 30 students and 5 teachers for a five-day training program. The curriculum covers not only the theory and practice of mediation but also include the associated topics such as leadership and effective communication and active listening. The overall approach of the training process is participatory, based on activities that reflect the real-life situations, action learning and personal reflections. The process also encourages cross learning and interaction. Students who are trained become the student leaders coordinating and conducting the school mediation process.

There is evidence from the different stakeholders, i.e., school principals, teachers and student leaders as to the effectiveness of the training process and the applicability and relevance of the training curricula. The main feedback was about the approach adopted in the training process which is participatory and activity based. Also, the practical utility of the training module and its content. The training also provided a safe space for individual expressions and present student voices through the development of presentation skills among student participants. The process enabled a two-way communication and mutually respectful active interaction compare to the one-way communication, from teacher to the student, prevalent in the typical school environment. It was mentioned that the 5-day training program provided the hitherto silent, inactive, and somewhat timid students to express themselves which resulted in inculcating the feeling of self-worth and enabled students to identify the talents and skills that were dormant due to lack of opportunities to explore them.

The SMP influenced the social inclusion of different groups of students. For example, there is a division between English medium and Sinhala medium students. There is a stigma for reserved and students with sudden emotional outbreaks. All these groups and types of students come for the training and they were given a different exposure to the aspects of diversity, the need and the importance for respect etc., The knowledge and skills gained through the training make them to think differently. This new thinking is having a transformative effect.

After the 5 -day training program conducted with the help of trained teachers and the MPOs, a school mediation unit is set up. The school mediation unit is led by a teacher who is trained

on mediation skills. The unit normally consist of a student leader and a group of students who were provided with 5 -day training on mediation and soft skills. The school administrative system ensures that students are aware of the existence of such a system and encourage students to bring any conflicting issues or violent behaviours to the attention of the school mediation unit either directly or through a designated teacher in charge. Over and above, there is also a complaint box set up in the school premises and once in two weeks the box is opened and the written complaints are analysed by the student leaders where they decide the future actions depending on the severity of issues. In general, more than 80 percent of the cases are handled by the student leaders. This process makes the work of school administration and students affairs much easier relieving the higher authorities from the burden of and time spent on attending even petty disputes and concentrate more on academic and other matters that are of importance to the school.

There is evidence which indicate the effectiveness of the SMP in preventing potentially major violent conflicts at community level triggered by disputes between individual students or among student groups or clicks in the school. These are not sporadic and exceptional events and examples. In general, the SMP inflicted considerable and tangible impact on the mindset of students to behave responsibly, to be accountable and empathetic towards each other. It caused transformations in attitudes and behaviours of students participated in the training.

In summary, the effectiveness of the SMP is characterized by observable changes and transformations in attitudes and behaviours of students who have undergone the mediation training, the impact of the program in terms of its contribution in resolving student conflicts without resorting to higher authorities, reduction of violent behavioural acts¹⁸ in the school, and strengthening the link and relationship between the school and the wider community

4.2.2 Enabling factors contributed to the effectiveness of the SMP

There are a number of enabling factors contributed to the effectiveness and success of the SMP. These factors are based on individual efforts, commitments and leadership of catalysts who were instrumental in driving the process, but are not driven by mainstreamed and policy-based interventions.

- The leadership and catalytic role played by the MPOs
- The school leadership – principals
- The role played by trained student leaders and trained teachers
- Awareness of the parents about the relevance and rationale of the school mediation program

¹⁸ As mentioned elsewhere, there is no systematic and methodical monitoring and documentation of violent acts in schools.

- Awareness of the teachers in the school about the rationale and objectives of the SMP

An important aspect of the SMP is that it allows the cooperative learning among various groups of students which create a sense of belonging and enhances student's self-esteem and sense of security. The international experience in this regard points that one of the ways that schools can promote higher achievement and greater competence in the use of higher-level reasoning skills by students is to emphasize cooperative learning more than competitive or individualistic learning. This helps to keep children from feeling alienated or rejected and increases their skills in sharing and working cooperatively with others. Students who have the opportunity to pursue meaningful activity in school are less likely to feel estranged or alienated from that system. The solution to many problems in contemporary education

4.3 Coherence

Coherence looks at how well the SMP fits with other activities in the school. The international experience of school mediation process points to the fact that the SMP should seek to do more than changing individual student attitudes and behaviours in relation to conflict resolution. The process should try to transform the total school environment into a learning community in which nonviolence is the norm and an important guiding principal in school administration. SMP process ideally should catalyse the cooperative learning to create a sense of belonging and enhance student's self-esteem and sense of security. International experience also points that an effective school mediation program must be embraced by all of the school community. It is important to students to observe teachers, administrators and support staff reinforcing and modelling good conflict resolution skills. Some research proposes that an effective school-based mediation program must be embraced by all of the school community. It is important for students to observe teachers, administrators and support staff reinforcing and modelling good conflict resolution skills.

The data collected through the interviews revealed that the SMP in Sri Lankan schools are still at the very elementary stage limited to training and setting up of mediation units in schools. It seems that the SMP in Sri Lankan schools is a standalone initiative and there is a long way to go in mainstreaming the process to embrace the concept by the whole school community and transforming the total school environment. The sustainability in terms of continuation of the functioning of mediation units is also conditional and depend primarily on the leadership and the commitment of the school principal.

4.4 Outcomes

The training process caused positive transformations in student behaviours and attitudes, on the importance of active listening, respect and right to have diverse opinions, appreciate the diversity, importance of team work and negotiated settlements etc., School Principals and

teachers who have undergone the mediation training got involved in the setting up and managing the school mediation units.

There were evidences as to the effect of training on preventing suicidal attempts and on avoiding attempt to elope a teenage girl. The above could be interpreted as exceptional, but clearly points to the potency of the SMP training galvanizing transformative effects on attitudes and behaviours of adolescents and youth. There also were anecdotal evidences as to the effect of training on better planning and purposefully managing personal lives and resolving inter-personal and inter-communal conflicts through negotiated settlements at wider level in families and communities applying the principals and practices of mediation training.

"I am now an adult working in a private firm. The 5-day mediation program undergone at the school had an impressive impact on my behaviour and attitude towards life with all its complications. It helped me in my private and professional life. For example, using the approaches and techniques learned in the training program I was able to amicably resolve a sever and long-standing conflict I had with one of my close family members"- Rihanna¹⁹ former student leader.

"I have witnessed the change in attitudes and behaviours in two girls participated in the training program. One was planning to commit suicide and the insights, skills and knowledge generated through this training caused changes in the way she was thinking and articulating the life situations. The second was ready for leaving home with her clothes and belongings packed. After the training not only she stayed back, now happily married and employed."- Ramani²⁰, former student leader

"Our school implement the SMP now continuously for more than 6 years. I see a very good impact on students' behaviour and attitudes. Those who undergone the training are now quite methodical, set goals and monitor the progress. All the teachers and parents were made aware of the importance of the 5-day training program. There is evidence on positive outcomes of the training on academic progress as well. This is because the development of knowledge and skills on academic subjects are reinforced through the integration of soft skills. Due to those positive outcomes, parents are very keen participating their children in mediation training. There were some challenges in the beginning but these can be overcome with better planning and awareness raising. What matters is the leadership. Mrs.Lilanthi Perera/ Methodist High School, Moratuwa

"The school mediation process relieves me from attending dispute resolution within the school which is in most cases are between students based on petty issues. Given the fact that these issues, however petty they are important for the students in seeking justice. Therefore, these issues cannot be ignored. Myself and sometimes the principal has to spend quite a considerable time on attending those matters. The SMP process is and efficient and effective mechanism for resolving disputes among students. This

¹⁹ Real name was changed.

²⁰ Real name was changed

also empowers students and contribute to mould them as responsible citizens.” Mrs. K.K. Hemalatha, Deputy Principal/ Siddhartha Maha Vidyalaya, Ranna

“We saw the two groups of villagers outside the school gate gathering. They requested the principal to come out and announce the final decision. Instead, the two disputant students with hand in hand came out of the school and announced to the two groups that the dispute has now been resolved, that they are now friends and there will be no grudge between them hereafter. They also advised the communities not to rush towards conclusions without consultations and listening to each other. The two groups were stunned and dispersed with their heads down.” Samantha Abeysinghe/Mediation Program Officer/Elapatha

4.5 Sustainability

The SMP is anchored under the purview of the Ministry of Justice – Apparently, the technical service provider. It is not clear, who is responsible for policy making in relation to mainstreaming the school mediation process and the system. Both the MBC and the Ministry of Education are of the view that the policy making should be a joint initiative. Apparently, the school mediation is the only program which is completely under the control of an independent entity in the area of public education system outside the purview of the Ministry of Education - the custodian of the public education system in the country. Presumably, due to the power vested in the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education is not in a position not to collaborate with the initiative which was spearheaded by the Ministry of Justice. However, it is of importance to get the maximum collaboration and leadership from the Ministry of Education in order to streamline and mainstream the School Mediation Program to effectuate a lasting and transformative changes in the entire education system in the country. The annual allocation for the SMP is only 30 percent from the total annual allocation of SLR.10 million for the MBC . 30 percent is allocated to the community mediation. . If there is a national policy for promoting the school mediation concept the annual budget for SMP could be increased further.

5. Lessons Learned and Conclusions

- The Schools Mediation Program unequivocally produced tangible and positive impacts. The program has a positive transformative effect on the lives of students who undergo the mediation training enriched with the values curriculum. The school principals interviewed expressed their satisfaction with regard to the outcomes the program generated which were reflected in student behaviours, attitudes and exam results. In some schools the positive effects of the program affected the wider community and in strengthening the school – community relations.

- All the stakeholders interviewed²¹ was unanimous on the need to have a strong partnership, collaboration and interaction between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education in implementing the SMP process. While the consensual leadership of both Ministries is of paramount importance for the quality outputs and outcomes, specific roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the two ministries need to be clearly spelled out albeit some inevitable overlaps. It looks like that the Ministry of Justice is the technical service provider while the Ministry of Education is the administrator and coordinator. Both entities should be responsible for monitoring, quality assurance and impact.

"I am of the opinion that two ministries need to get together and have some kind of a planning workshop to streamline and mainstream the School Mediation Program and the Process. We envisaged that, but the COVID situation prevented our interactions." Mrs. G.S.K Hewage, Deputy Director Education, Ministry of Education

"I see there is some kind of lethargy on the part of the Ministry of Education on the SMP. This is mainly due to their ignorance about the program content and its potential in generating educational outcomes. The Education Ministry is most concerned about the educational outcomes in terms of subjects. As we have seen the SMP adds value to achieve the same and at the same time the program makes students more responsible and accountable citizens through integrating the soft skills part as well. These subtleties needs to be clearly understood. The only way to achieve that is through close interaction between the two Ministries." Mrs. Chamila Edirisooriya, Development Officer, MBC.

- In the whole process of the SMP, the bedrock is the 5-day training program having a transformative effect on the minds of student participants. An important enabling factor for the success of the 5- day training program is the content of the training module having both technical and soft skills embedded in the curriculum. The implementation modality of the curriculum is activity based so that the students are given opportunities to practice what they learn ensuring the applicability of theory they learn. The approach adopted in conducting the training is participatory and is embedded in team work and collaboration, which results in cross learning while subtly imposing the need for active listening, appreciate the diversity and the importance of respecting diverse opinions.
- At the moment it appears that the whole SMP process is driven by the SMPOs. They are instrumental in selecting and negotiating with school principals the rationale of the SMP, the implementation modality through sharing their experiences the success stories etc., The SMP does not have a legally binding responsibility on the part of the school system since there is no policy and implementing procedures clearly spelled out, including the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the two ministries. MPOs are also the main hub monitoring the process. In short, they are the group who

²¹ This included officials of both the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education

market the concept of SMP. While the MBC is coordinating the process, the Ministry of Education is not at all involved in the SMP process except issuing letters endorsing the program. However, given the above situation, the ultimate decision regarding the implementation of the SMP is in the hands of principals.

- There are three batches of MPOs with varying degrees of capacities in terms of trainers of the 5-day program. Only the very first batch of around 25 Program Officers were given a comprehensive training on School Mediation exposing them to international experience and trained by international experts facilitated by the British Council. However, the current practice is the most senior officers train the new batches. While the intention is good, this practice tends to dilute the quality of trainers which will have a negative impact. It should be recognized that the quality of trainings by international experts received by the first batch of MPOs and their capacities as skilful trainers made the difference and due to that the SMP achieved the recognition among the school community and the parents.
- The curriculum of the 5-day training needs some revision and updating in the light of new developments happening, for example the cyber security. As mentioned by the MPOs, the nature of the disputes among students is changing and at times become more complex and nuanced. Therefore, training methods and approaches may need to be looked at from a fresh perspective. There may be a need to introduce new types of activities etc.,
- The curriculum also needs to be standardized and if possible accredited so that the SMP process become more professional and recognized. This will also help popularize the concept and the importance of the SMP.
- There is a scarcity of Tamil speaking SMPOs. It appears that due to language some provinces and districts are neglected. This aspect needs to be addressed.
- An enabling and contributory factor for the success of the 5-day mediation training for school children is the incorporation of the Values curriculum developed by the Asia Foundation to the school mediation training package. Values curriculum covers leadership and social skills that are not covered under the traditional school curriculum but are essential life skills for students. Former students interviewed were of the opinion that the social/soft skills that were incorporated in the 5-day training program has been extremely useful for their career development as well as for personality development.
- Lack of baseline data on school violence is a major impediment to assess the effectiveness of the SMP as well as to customize and improve the training curriculum to effectively respond to the student needs and realities in relation conflicts. This

situation is despite the availability of a system to monitor the teenage violence Sri Lanka developed by the Ministry of Health and the Faculty of Community Medicine Sri Lankan Early Teenagers' Violence Inventory (SLETVI).

- Lack of baseline data also prevents the development of a monitoring, evaluation and learning system to monitor the progress and evaluate the outcomes and impacts of the SMP.
- The 5-day training program as mentioned in elsewhere is an interactive and practical exercise. It requires digital equipment such as computers, multimedia projectors etc., The SMPOs find it difficult to get access to such equipment since most of the rural schools do not have them. Although the flip charts and boards can be used as substitutes, its effectiveness is low. On the other hand, without digital equipment it is not possible to use video clips and other such material.
- It was mentioned in the interviews that there are schools who have mainstreamed and integrate the SMP concept in various school activities. Moratuwa Methodist High School, Bishops Collage and Maliyadeva College were mentioned as examples.
- Absence of an effective system to retain the institutional memory and a comprehensive information management system make it difficult to access vital information that are crucial for decision making and to provide insights into new strategic directions. For example, it was not possible to access information regarding the number of schools having functional school mediation units at a given time and number of schools where the mediation units have set up. Same is true related to other information such as studies, evaluations etc.,

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are to inform attempts by Mediation Bords Commission to revise and update it's own Schools Mediation Programme, with financial and technical support from the SEDR project. This will have a particular focus on the development of a training manual, data collection on conflicts at the school level and the set-up of mediation units in school across SEDR's 6 target districts. However, the study findings revealed other important areas that would serve as enabling conditions to be incorporated and addressed through the SEDR interventions, particularly to ensure the sustainability of the school mediation system

1. The most important intervention which would potentially galvanize the school mediation concept and the school mediation program as a mainstreamed activity in the Sri Lankan educational system is the "mediation" of a constructive and functional dialogue between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education

leading to a school mediation policy, and legally binding agreement with regard to the structure, system, roles & responsibilities and accountabilities of the two entities in relation to the implementation, monitoring, funding and coordinating the SMP covering island wide network of schools.

2. From the literature survey conducted in relation to the SMP in Sri Lanka and the interviews conducted with different stakeholders, it is evident that the school mediation is linked to other sectors as well (other than the Education and Judiciary) such as health, sexual and reproductive health and even nutrition. For example, it is the ministry of health and the faculty of community medicine developed the SELTVY which is directly linked to the SMP but is detached from the current discourse on SMP. Therefore, it is recommended that the SEDR facilitate the formation of interdisciplinary team representing relevant ministries and authorities to steer the school mediation process in order to reap the maximum benefit in terms of improving the academic, personal and professional lives of adolescents and youth who are the target group of the SMP. This also facilitate the change of prevalent attitudes among the parents, teachers and the department of education of chasing children and their schools solely for academic achievements at the expense of children's mental health, personality and leadership development having serious implications for the Sri Lankan youth and adolescents²² in the country.
3. It is recommended to inform the design of the MBC's school mediation programme based on a comprehensive context analysis in relation to school violence in Sri Lanka. This will not only legitimize the interventions but will also enable identification of specific strategies and key interventions to be included in the project design. This analysis will also facilitate identification of key stakeholders to be included and consulted in order to influence the government and the ministry of education of the relevance, the need and the value added of such a program and also to demonstrate the implications for the education system in Sri Lanka if policy support and required resource allocations are not provided, both in terms of costs as well as the well- being of children.
3. It is recommended that all newly recruited batches of MPOs²³, along with previous batches are given a comprehensive training on school mediation by international

²² Sri Lanka which had recorded the highest suicide rate in the world among adolescents in late 90s is still among the countries having highest suicide rates among youth, particularly girls. The reason is not pathological conditions but uncontrolled and sudden emotional outbreaks which indicates that even Sri Lankan students excel in their academic and subject knowledge, their emotional intelligence is weak. Both aspects are vital 21st century skills for youth. In this respect the SMP is quite relevant and value-added program.

²³ Here we use a common name – MPO. But, as mentioned in the report there are two categories of mediation officers, MPOs recruited and employed by the MBC, and Development Officers(mediation) recruited and employed by the district and divisional secretariat division offices of the central government.

experts, like the one conducted for the very first batch of trainers who became the SMPOs. Since the training of the first batch of school mediation program officers (SMPOs) of about 28, the cadre of core SMPOs have now increased to more than 300 in two batches, at least one SMPO per divisional secretariat division. However, their capacities to work as trainers to train students and teachers differ. This is not conducive to the scaling up of the SMP. As mentioned in the report, it is the quality and outcomes of the 5-day training at schools initially conducted by the very first batch of trainers trained by the UK experts was instrumental in gaining the recognition for the SMP in schools. If this level of competency demonstrated by the first batch is getting diluted there is an inherent danger in downgrading the quality of training which result in lesser demand and criticism on the SMP.

4. There is a lack of empirically based research on school - based mediation in Sri Lanka. The existing findings such as the information generated through this study is anecdotal and is inconclusive as to the effects of school-based mediation on reducing conflict and violence in the schools. More research is needed to determine and validate the overall effectiveness of school-based mediation. Absence of baseline data further complicate the design of such research.
4. The training curriculum is outdated and need revision an upgrading, particularly in the light of changes in patterns and causes of violent behaviour among adolescents and youth. The new patterns of violence seem to relate to the cyber security and cyber safety. There are other areas that need to revise such as the content related to social skills and 21st century skills. The school - based mediation model is based on the community mediation model, which does not always take into account the need to have total school support for the program, support systems for student (peer) mediators, or funding for the program. Therefore, it is of importance to assess if the current curriculum covers and take into account the specific needs of the Sri Lankan school Community.
5. The MoJ and MoE should mediate a process to asses why the SETLVY is not implemented in Schools to monitor and record school violence. From this assessment a mechanism should be developed to mainstream the application of this tool which is specifically designed for Sr Lankan schools and institutionalize a system to record school violence. This will facilitate the understanding of root causes for such violent behaviours and devise strategies to overcome the problem instead of resorting to “punishments” and “disciplinary actions”, the routine but outdated practice for preventing violent behaviours in schools.
6. Using the SELTVY methodology or by any other means, the schools should be capacitated to record and maintain a database on school violence. The

methodology for setting up of such a data base should be done in consultation with relevant authorities having expertise not only for recording but also in facilitating the analysis of data for the development of strategies to address the problem.

7. Despite the problems and issues faced by the school authorities i.e., principals in introducing and implementing the SMP in schools, there are positive deviants, principals who overcome external obstacles and through mobilizing and capitalizing the internal capacities within the school they were able to produce exceptional results. Those principals, capitalizing the positive results generated in the process of implementing the SMP and the motivation and interest of the students able to transform the entire school system including the parents and the wider community to embrace the concept and demonstrating clearly how the students perform better in every aspect in their school lives and in private lives, the impact. As a result, the teachers were convinced, same was with the parents. They are the catalysts of the SMP on the ground and who are capable of demonstrating the impact to the wider society and relevant authorities.

Therefore, it is recommended that the SEDR program identify such school which can be easily done through the MPOs and organize experience sharing, inter-provincial exchange visits, lessons learned and other advocacy initiatives involving the higher-level authorities of the MBC, Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education to promote the SMP concept and influence the authorities to integrate the SMP into the school curriculum.

8. The SMP process needs to be formally structured to include step by step activities to include all relevant stakeholders in the process so that they are fully aware of the rational the potential outcomes and relevance of the SMP to enhance educational outcomes as well as its potential to empower students and their leadership qualities. The 100-school program implemented by the presidential secretariat had adopted such a concept. The structured process should include awareness raising of educational authorities at all level; Provincial, Zonal, school principals, teachers etc., and then introduce the SMP to the schools. Involvement of educational officers and leadership at all levels is crucial for SMP. Awareness for parents and teachers are important elements in the proposed structure
9. The school mediation should be linked to the Community Mediation Process through applying the same Interest-Based mediation approaches, as those used in CMB's . The students who are trained by a standardized and accredited training as recommended above should be given opportunities to become community mediators. This would encourage schools and students to participate in the process

and in return the wider community also get benefited. The same process can be applied to the teachers as well.

10. It is recommended that SEDR from its inception design a robust monitoring, evaluation and learning system to capture the results, establish feedback loops and inform the strategies adopted in the SMP implementation.
11. MBC should introduce a system to retain the institutional memory, and information management system with a built-in mechanism for easy access to vital information. This information management system can have links to the island wide network of mediation officers involved in school mediation. They can upload the monthly progress directly to the system using specific formats. This will make the system efficient, cost effective, accountable and user -friendly. The utility of this kind of a system is quite comprehensive.
12. It is proposed to hold an annual review of work done MPOs and all the other key stakeholders together to one platform to discuss the progress, main issues, what they have learned and provide recommendations to the future strategic directions. This event needs to be structured properly and should aim at facilitating direct as well as indirect benefits that could potentially be derived from such an event.
13. The information generated through the systems mentioned above should be used strategically to demonstrate the educational and other developmental outcomes of students while demonstrating the reduction of violence in the school system. This should help advocate for the mainstreaming of the school mediation system through the development of policies and allocate more resources to promote the concept.
14. It is recommended to design incentive system for both the schools participate in the SMP as well as to recognize the service provided and contributions made by the SMPOs. During the pilot phase there were some events organized for schools such as inter-school competitions. However, the COVID situation prevented such events taking place.
15. The school mediation program should be embraced by the whole school community to practice the concept of violence free schools. At the moment the SMP is limited to conflicts among the students only. There are other conflicts within the school. The SEDR should promote this concept as the next of the SMP. This will also give new legitimacy for the SMP and a greater recognition for the concept among the students and the parents as well.

16. Schools in Eastern and Northern provinces could get involved in the pilot project. On the other hand, there is a scarcity of Tamil speaking MPOs. Therefore, it is recommended that the SEDR provide some support, assistance and guidance to fill that gap. Since there is a quite comprehensive experiences in the South in terms of implementing the SMP at ground level and the already experienced MPOs in South could be used as a catalysts and facilitators to promote the school mediation concept in the North and the East.
17. Funding for SMP is minimal. As mentioned by the MBC of the total annual allocation of 10 million per annum, only 30 percent is allocated for the SMP. This seems to be the bare minimum. The annual allocation for setting up of school mediation units is 2 per district. The main reason for this may be the outcomes and impacts of the SMP relevant to the overall school educational outcomes is not available. Without such data and evidence on impact one cannot advocate for more allocations from the government coffers. For specific recommendations related to the generation of such data and information, please refer to recommendations under 11,12 and 13.

In conclusion there are a number of enabling factors for the SMP to thrive and contribute to the well-being of schools;

- The involvement and the policy leadership of the Department of Education
 - The role and the implementation strategy of the MBC
 - The priority given for the SMP by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education
 - School data base on violence and the implementation of SELTVY
 - Systematically collected evidence on the effectiveness of the SMP
 - The school leadership
 - The catalytic role of SMPOs
 - The role of teachers trained on the school mediation
 - Role of the students who have undergone the training on mediation
 - Awareness of the teachers in the school about the rationale and objectives of the SMP
 - Awareness of the parents about the relevance and rationale of the school mediation program
 - Integration of the school mediation concept by the whole school community
-

