



## PROFILE

# Mediators Beyond Borders International (MBB)

Charlie Pillsbury

### ■ Abstract

Mediators Beyond Borders International is a tax-exempt not-for-profit corporation which brings together mediators and allied professionals to volunteer worldwide to collaborate on building conflict resolution capacity in underserved areas to make local peacebuilding more effective and sustainable.

### ■ Keywords

mediation

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

“Building sustainable conflict resolution capacity for a more peace ‘able’ world”

Mediators Beyond Borders International’s Vision Statement

**Mediators Beyond Borders International (MBB)** is a tax-exempt not-for-profit corporation which brings together mediators and allied professionals to volunteer worldwide to collaborate on building conflict resolution capacity in underserved areas to make local peacebuilding more effective and sustainable. MBB also advocates the advancement of mediation to resolve public policy disputes and other conflicts.

MBB works in partnership with local organizations and leaders in each area where it has 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.

MBB currently has seven active projects:

- **Climate Change** (UNFCCC Observer Project)
- **Colombia**
- **Ecuador**
- **Israel** (Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam)
- **Liberian Initiative** (“*Women Hold Up Half the Sky*”)
- **Sierra Leone**
- **Zimbabwe**

The main characteristics of the organization are:

- Projects typically staffed exclusively with trained volunteers who are MBB members.
- “Core” teams of volunteers who travel to project locations and engage actively with local grass roots groups, as well as organizations including the UN, international and local NGOs, local governments, professionals and community leaders.
- MBB generally makes a three to five year commitment to its local partners.



- MBB tries not to work in areas already adequately served by local and other international conflict resolution professionals and NGOs.
- MBB does not act as a first-responder organization in any area, and does not work in areas where there is active war or other major violent conflict.

The two main objectives of MBB are 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. MBB projects are carried out by trained, skilled conflict resolution volunteers in areas where longer-term, but not necessarily continuous, involvement is beneficial.

MBB works at the invitation of and in partnership with local partners, training or, whenever possible, training the trainers; acting as mentors; creating networks; and setting up systems.

The projects are always in direct collaboration with the efforts of one or more local organizations, including local communities, universities, professional groups, not-for-profit organizations and others. This collaboration typically takes a different form in each project. Ultimately, the success of any MBB project depends on the effectiveness of its partnerships and the local groups and leaders with whom it works.

Each proposed project progresses through three phases: exploration, assessment and implementation.

MBB Board approval is required for each project to proceed to the next stage. The evaluation of the project proposal takes different criteria into consideration. These include the team's cultural and language competence, sufficient contextual research (cultural, conflict, political, economic), the feasibility of the initial project idea, the potential for sustainability, the team commitment to MBB principles, and security – sufficient knowledge and mitigation of physical safety risks and plans for responding to emergencies.

When a project reaches the assessment stage, the MBB Board assigns a Board member to liaise with the project leadership. Project members, particularly “core” (traveling) volunteers, are expected to serve for the entire duration of the project (on average 3-5 years), traveling 1-3 weeks per year or more. 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.

MBB is primarily funded by its volunteer members and other individual donors, but has partners and external funding sources for some of its projects. For example, the Ecuador Project is a collaboration between MBB and JAMS, and is partially funded by the JAMS Foundation. The Liberian Initiative is a collaboration between MBB and the Public Conversations Project, and is partially funded by Humanity United.

MBB's strengths include strong organizational experience and maturity due to long-term, highly successful projects such as the Liberian Initiative. The Board and all-volunteer members are highly dedicated, motivated and experienced. This results in few external commitments that might lead to priority conflicts or conflicts of interest, as well as in minimal expenditures on non-project overheads.

MBB also has some limitations. The all-volunteer project organization severely limits the time that members can spend on-site for any project and projects are therefore challenged to maintain continuity with on-site organizations. Certain types of project activities requiring material time on-site are impractical, even when it is desirable. Another problem is the limited funding sources outside of membership dues and donations, which means that volunteers often have to cover a sizeable portion of project costs themselves.

## CASE EXEMPLAR: THE LIBERIAN INITIATIVE

MBB's multidisciplinary Liberia project team has already been working in Liberia and Ghana for four years and has made a 10-year commitment to rebuilding personal and systemic capacity to coexist peacefully, such that a return to civil war atrocities would be unthinkable. Based on five assessment visits, we have established relationships – in communities and with a wide range of local and international partners, covering all sectors, from the grass roots up to the government – that serve as the center of our work.



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.

Building on the widely accepted principle that reintegration of ex-combatants is critical to sustainable peace, MBB expanded to provide a multimodal program for former child soldiers living at the camp. The project trained these youths in conflict resolution and construction skills, supported them, through counseling, to build resilience in the face of their trauma, and provided mentoring by former soldiers now successful in society. While negotiating their repatriation, the project prepared the ground for the youths' return, working through traditional leaders and civil society to bring community concerns to the surface and begin the long process of forgiveness. Project partners lived in the community during the months of transition, bridging the inevitable divides arising from unfamiliar groups sharing space and extremely limited resources. The group has repatriated and safely reintegrated into society, with more than half having steady work in a country with 85% unemployment.

MBB then replicated the program, adapting it to the needs of women who fought in the civil war or were forced into sexual slavery. Stigmatized and with few marketable skills, these women live on the margins of society. This group, alongside other women in the community, is now learning sustainable farming side-by-side and participating in dialogues in addition to the original program.

MBB learns tremendous amounts from local partners about peacebuilding techniques, community sensitization, cultural practices, and translating methods into practical, contextual applications. MBB offers them mentoring through trust-building dialogue, trauma support and resilience building, grant-writing, fiscal management, and other aspects of organizational development.

The invitations grew, and MBB has trained peacebuilding NGOs, churches, and even graduate students at the country's largest university. In so doing, MBB expresses its value of intervening at many levels of society, weaving together diverse peacebuilders to form the fabric necessary to support each other and sustain the practice.

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. ■

### ■ Recommended citation

PILLSBURY, Charlie (2011). "Mediators Beyond Borders International (MBB)" [online profile]. *Journal of Conflictology*. Vol. 2, Iss. 2, pp. 66-69. Campus for Peace, UOC. [Consulted: dd/mm/yy].

<<http://www.uoc.edu/ojs/index.php/journal-of-conflictology/article/view/vol2iss2-pillsbury/vol2iss2-pillsbury>>

ISSN 2013-8857



This work is subject to a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivative-Works 3.0 Spain licence. It may be copied, distributed and broadcasted provided that the author and the source (*Journal of Conflictology*) are cited. Commercial use and derivative works are not permitted. The full licence can be consulted at: <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/es/deed.en>>



## ☐ Contact details

**Charlie Pillsbury**  
**Executive Director**

Mediators Beyond Borders International

347 5th Avenue, Suite 703

New York, NY 10016

General contact: Phone: 646-490-2758; Fax: 646-417-6378

General email: [info@mediatorsbeyondborders.org](mailto:info@mediatorsbeyondborders.org)

Direct contact: Phone: 203-582-8145; Cell: 203-640-3889

Direct email: [cpillsbury@mediatorsbeyondborders.org](mailto:cpillsbury@mediatorsbeyondborders.org)

Website: [www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org](http://www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org)



**CAMPUS  
FOR PEACE**

