



# **Regional Organisations and International Mediation: The Effectiveness of Insider Mediators**

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## **Abstract**

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, the world witnessed an increasing number of regional conflict management efforts undertaken by regional inter-governmental organisations. There are therefore strong reasons to study the advantages and disadvantages of mediation efforts by regional

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organisations, and compare these with initiatives taken by the United Nations (UN). In this article, we argue that regional organisations have certain characteristics that in principle make them effective mediators. They are ‘insiders’, closely connected to the conflict at hand, with an intimate knowledge about local conditions, and a stake in the outcome. This article builds on experience from ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) interventions in West Africa to analyse the pros and cons of regional mediation. We find that the interventions did indeed produce beneficial results, but that ECOWAS mediation efforts were disturbed by the fact that its activities were seen as highly partial. We recommend regional mediators to be ‘impartial insiders’, paying special attention to creating relations of trust with all actors involved.

## **Introduction**

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, the world witnessed an increasing number of mediation and other forms of peaceful intervention efforts undertaken by regional intergovernmental organisations (IGOs). In Central America, for example, peace agreements were negotiated in El Salvador and Nicaragua with the help of the Organization of American States (OAS). In West Africa, ECOWAS intervened in the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Arab League tried – unsuccessfully as it turned out – to mediate in the Iraq-Kuwait conflict. The European Union (EU) was involved in numerous intervention activities, ranging from good offices to peacekeeping, in the former Yugoslavia. At times, such regional initiatives were conducted in conjunction with the UN; at other times such initiatives were undertaken unilaterally, and independently of the UN.

There are good reasons to believe that regional conflict management efforts in the Third World will become even more frequent. Great powers and supra-national institutions have demonstrated a diminishing desire to become physically and financially involved in far-away conflicts. Discussions have started on how to create a division of labour between the global organisation, the UN, and regional organisations, with respect to responsibility for conflict resolution. In Chapter VIII of the UN Charter regional organisations are encouraged to deal with conflicts in their ‘own back-yard’, provided their activities are consistent with the principles of the UN. Such actions must be approved by the Security Council, and the regional organisation must then

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report to the Council on those actions. There are thus strong reasons to study the advantages and disadvantages of mediation efforts by regional organisations, and compare these with initiatives undertaken by the UN.

We argue that regional organisations have certain advantages *vis-à-vis* the UN. We wish here to utilise research by Paul Wehr and John Paul Lederach (1996), and suggest that regional organisations have characteristics that in principle make them effective mediators. They are 'partial insiders', closely connected to the conflict at hand, with an intimate knowledge about local conditions, shared norms or experiences with the parties in conflict, and a stake in the outcome of the conflict. Geographical proximity and deep knowledge about the conflict arguably create favourable conditions for effective mediation.

This article builds on experience from ECOWAS interventions in West Africa to analyse the pros and cons of regional mediation and to test this argument. What lessons can be drawn and what recommendations can be derived from these cases? We find that the ECOWAS interventions did indeed produce beneficial results, but that its mediation efforts were disturbed and distorted by the fact that its activities were seen as highly partial. We recommend regional organisations to be 'impartial insiders', paying special attention to creating relations of trust with all actors involved in the conflict.

We commence by first outlining our theoretical ideas concerning insider-partial vs. outsider-neutral mediators. In the following section, the increasingly important role of regional mediation initiatives is described. The empirical part first highlights the positive aspects of the ECOWAS mission by presenting important functions that its activities fulfilled. Thereafter, the problems ECOWAS experienced, which created severe obstacles for its ambition to solve the conflicts, are analysed. We end by discussing what role (im)partiality plays in international mediation efforts and what the implications are for future regional peace initiatives.

### Outsider-neutral vs. Insider-partial Mediators

The answer to the question 'who should be selected as a third party?' was traditionally that the mediator should be a *neutral outsider* (Hopmann 1996:223; Wehr & Lederach 1996). According to this view, neutrality (or impartiality – these terms being used here as synonyms) is seen as a necessary tool in the armoury of the successful mediator (Carnevale & Arad

1996:40-41; Young 1967:309). The third party should preferably have no ties to any of the parties and no stake whatsoever in the conflict outcome; he or she is ideally '*not connected* to either disputant, is *not biased* toward either side, has *no investment* in any outcome... and does *not expect any special reward from either side*' (Wehr & Lederach 1996:57). These traits were supposed to increase the credibility of the mediator and make him or her acceptable to all parties, but also to enhance his or her possibilities of getting information from the disputants and increase the legitimacy of the proposed solutions (Kleiboer 1998:29; Carnevale & Arad 1996:41).

Today, this assumption is questioned by many mediation scholars. The idea of mediator neutrality is puzzling, as 'any intervention that turns a dyad into a triad simply cannot be neutral' (Bercovitch 1992:6). Active intervention by a third party affects both the substance and the likelihood of an agreement (Gibson et al. 1996:70-71). If mediation is conceived as an extension of negotiation, as 'three-cornered bargaining' with the mediator as one of the players (Carnevale & Arad 1996:41; cf. Princen 1992:23), it is difficult to associate mediation closely with neutrality. Indeed, there seems to exist a consensus that 'it is the mediators' resources and ability to effect change, rather than their perceived impartiality, that determine their acceptability and effectiveness (Jönsson 2002:222; cf. Zartman & Touval 1985:255). In brief, mediation analysts today assert that neutrality is problematic and that the effectiveness of impartiality is contingent: under some circumstances, impartiality results in efficiency, but this may not be true in other contexts. Often, the best one can hope for is a third party that is not biased in the sense that she or he is willing to sacrifice the interests of one of the parties in favour of those of the other (Hopmann 1996:225).

In an influential article, Paul Wehr and John Paul Lederach (1996) suggested that effective mediation may also be performed by what they call 'insider-partials'. Based on their observations of Central American mediation, they proposed that internality and partiality may under certain circumstances lead to successful mediation outcomes. The insider-partials are mediators from the conflict area. They have a stake in the outcome and will have to live with the consequences of their work. The trust that parties feel for the insider mediator is a result not of perceived neutrality, but of the intimate knowledge of and connections to the disputants that the mediator has. Interpersonal, face-to-face relationships are important in ensuring that the parties to the conflict will accept the mediator. Previous experiences result in expectations that the insider mediator will work for a just and durable settlement. Wehr

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and Lederach contend that the effectiveness of insider-neutrals may be particular to 'more traditional societies' who rely heavily on interpersonal trust and personal relationships. They further suggest that this type of mediation should be seen as a positive complement to intervention by outsider-neutrals.

Wehr and Lederach closely link being an insider to partiality, but they are not very clear in their usage of the latter term. For them, partiality seems to rest in the closeness and previous ties a mediator has to the disputants. This is, however, only one among several possible meanings of partiality, the one that we would call *relational partiality*. Equally important is *processual partiality*, where the mediator favours one party during the negotiation process, for example by listening more closely to that party, and *outcome partiality*, which means that the mediator deliberately favours one of the conflicting parties in its proposals for settlements (cf. Elgström 2001). As these types of partiality are not necessarily associated, any discussion on the usefulness of impartiality should clearly stake out what type is being debated.

### Regional vs. Global Mediators

International conflict management is conducted by many actors, undertaking different forms of conflict management. Mediation is undoubtedly one of the most common forms of conflict management. Mediation can be undertaken by numerous actors, not the least of which are regional and international organisations. In a study of formal conflict management in international disputes from 1945 to 1995, a total of 3 737 different conflict management efforts (negotiation, arbitration, mediation, etc.) were identified (Bercovitch & Diehl 1997). Over 2 100 of these efforts involved mediation. The UN and other regional organisations engaged in close to 1 300 of these efforts. The UN and regional organisations clearly outnumber mediation efforts by states or individuals. We should not lose sight of just how often regional organisations and/or the UN initiate and undertake mediation.

In Table 1 (see page 16) we show the geographical distribution of 160 disputes in the 1945-1995 period which experienced regional or UN mediation, and the frequency of mediation efforts by each body.

Mediation by regional organisations or the UN is a popular method of conflict management because it allows the parties to retain control over the outcome, while gaining more flexibility over the process. Whether undertaken

**Table 1: Geographic Distribution of International Disputes and Mediation Activities**

Region	Dispute Frequency	Mediation Frequency	UN	Regional Organisations
Central & South America	30	179 (13.8%)	86 (6.6%)	92 (7.1%)
Africa	43	342 (26.4%)	223 (17.2%)	97 (7.5%)
South West Asia	7	73 (5.6%)	71 (5.5%)	-
East Asia & the Pacific	20	80 (6.2%)	77 (6.0%)	2 (0.2%)
Middle East	46	247 (19.1%)	188 (14.5%)	59 (4.6%)
Europe	14	373 (28.8%)	173 (13.4%)	116 (9.0%)
Total	160	1294 (100.0%)	818 (63.2%)	366 (28.3%)

**Table 2: Regional vs. Global Mediation**

**Organisation Mediator and Success**

Organisation Mediator	Number of Managed Disputes	Number of Mediation Attempts	Successful Mediation	Success Rate
United Nations	117	818	307	37.5%
Regional Organisations	85	366	154	42.1%
Co-operative Mediation: Combined attempts by the UN and Regional Organisations	15	110	42	38.2%
Total		1294	503	

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by regional actors or other bodies, mediation's goals are: to stop violence and hostility, reduce fatalities, and achieve a political settlement. These are the criteria of successful mediation. In Table 2 we offer information on the extent of mediation involvement by regional organisations and the UN, and a comparative analysis of their rate of success, e.g. the extent to which each mediation effort contributed to achieving any of the objectives above (For further details on operationalisations and measurement, see Bercovitch & Diehl 1997). The data suggest that regional organisations are more successful mediators than the UN. As our data do not distinguish between different types of conflict, this result must, however, be interpreted cautiously.

In Table 3 we offer more specific information on the extent to which regional organisations or the UN achieve any of the specific objectives of mediation. We can see from the information below that mediation by regional organisations achieved a full settlement in 8.2 per cent of the cases in which they were involved, compared to only 3.1 per cent by the UN. Regional organisations achieved some success with their mediation (that is a cease-fire, partial or full settlement) in 42.1 per cent of cases; the UN achieved success in 32.1 per cent only.

**Table 3: Categories of Mediation Outcome**

Grouped Organisations	Mediation offered only	Un-successful	Cease-fire	Partial Settlement	Full Settlement
UN	3.3%	59.2%	8.4%	26.0%	3.1%
Regional Organisations	6.3%	51.6%	12.6%	21.3%	8.2%

Regional organisations are co-operative organisations based on geographical proximity, social and political similarity, interdependence, and a commitment to regional security. As such, regional organisations are more likely to be familiar with local issues, the situation and the parties in conflict. We maintain that regional organisations that intervene in regionally bounded conflicts often share the characteristics of insider-partials. Their members are often immediately affected by the conflict and they cannot leave the post-negotiation situation. This makes them take a greater interest in managing or

mitigating a conflict, lest it escalate and engulf the whole region. Regional organisations thus have a vested interest in managing a regional conflict. Their closeness to, and knowledge of, the local context give them an advantage as conflict managers compared to an outsider, like the UN.

Relational partiality is probably an inherent trait in regional insider mediators, as they have asymmetrical historical ties and bonds to the conflicting parties. This does not mean, however, that they are necessarily less effective than neutral outsiders. Furthermore, a regional mediator may well demonstrate both processual and outcome impartiality. How regional mediators have behaved in this respect is a matter for empirical research.

Regional organisations have a further advantage over outside third parties or the UN in the area of mediation: getting the UN involved internationalises a conflict; having a regional organisation, mediating from within, as it were, keeps the conflict local. Most parties in conflict would rather keep a conflict localised, rather than face the prospect of some form of international intervention. They would regard regionalisation as preferable to internationalisation.

Thus our argument here is that in most international conflicts, a regional organisation would be preferable as a mediator to the UN, because of (a) its superior knowledge of local conflicts, and strong incentives to resolve them, (b) proximity to a conflict, and ability to react faster, and (c) the ability of a regional organisation to provide forums for formal discussions and informal dialogues (Black 1996; Diehl 1994; Jones & Duffey 1996; Marnika 1996).

## **Lessons from ECOWAS Intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone**

### **A brief background**

Established in 1975, ECOWAS was designed to promote economic development and political unity within the West African region through an integration of the economies of its members. Since its inception, ECOWAS has striven to promote the economic growth of the region and to guarantee economic and political stability, but also to further social and cultural integration (Obiozor et al. 1991). Goal attainment has, however, been hampered by economic constraints and by regional insecurity. Trying to reach the goals of integration in an environment characterised by violence and enmity is clearly a daunting task.



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In order to reconceptualise its role concerning regional security, ECOWAS in 1981 agreed on a 'Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defence' (Yoroms 1999). But it was not until the early 1990s that ECOWAS became actively involved in regional security affairs. The civil wars that erupted in Liberia in 1989 and subsequently in Sierra Leone in 1991 soon revealed how easily internal conflict could lead to a destabilisation of the entire region. The members of ECOWAS were directly affected by the instability in the two countries and this constituted a powerful motivation for them to engage in regional peace efforts. The result was mediation initiatives and intervention in both cases.

To detail the history of the two conflicts, and the role of ECOWAS in them, is well beyond the scope of this article (see Adebajo 2002a and b; Berman & Sams 2000; Tudor 2000; Barclay 1999; Hutchful 1999). Instead, we first delineate what contributions ECOWAS made to the peace processes and what major functions it fulfilled, alone or in conjunction with the UN. Thereafter, we analyse what weak spots can be detected in its mediation efforts and the reasons for these deficiencies. In both sections, we refer to the insider-partial mediation model to explain our findings.

### **The Benefits of Insider-partial Mediation**

To begin with, it should be emphasised that peace accords have been concluded in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. This is at least partly due to external mediation and pressure, where the ECOWAS mission has been the most prominent actor (Berman & Sams 2000:108; Hutchful 1999:8; Morrison Taw & Grant-Thomas 1999). Great power pressure and UN intervention also contributed, but mainly by lending additional strength and legitimacy to the efforts by the regional organisation (Adebajo 2002a:51). The fairness and durability of the peace agreements may be rightfully disputed, but the fact remains that ECOWAS intervention helped to bring about at least temporary solutions in situations that were highly unfavourable to negotiated settlements. The disputes were long drawn-out and complex, and had not reached obvious stalemates at the time of intervention. There was a large number of parties, often internally divided, whose representatives had not always sufficient authority to speak for their members (Such characteristics are seen as indicating a low likelihood of negotiated peace by negotiation theorists; cf. Bercovitch 1992:8; Susskind & Babbitt 1992:48). By the time ECOWAS became involved in Liberia, 90 per cent of the country was already occupied

by the rebel forces. In Sierra Leone, the military had already overtaken the government when ECOWAS was asked to intervene (Tudor 2000; Clapham 2000). Nevertheless, ECOWAS managed to draft peace plans as the leading mediator, plans that were later implemented, even if not in their original form.

Secondly, the probability is high that no substantial external intervention at all would have taken place in the absence of regional initiatives (Berman & Sams 2000:148). Great powers were quite willing to issue statements and official condemnations, but were extremely reluctant to engage in actual fighting (Adebajo 2002a). When UN troops were after all sent to Sierra Leone – primarily because of the withdrawal of Nigerian ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group) troops from the country – they were ‘dramatically under-equipped and ill-trained’ (Malone & Thakur 2001:16; cf. Adebajo 2002a:99-101). The United Kingdom did indeed provide a contingent of military personnel (besides its diplomatic and humanitarian assistance), but only briefly and mainly to protect European civilians and UN personnel (Adebajo 2002a:93-94). US and EU logistical support after the rapprochement between Nigeria and the main rebel leader, Charles Taylor, in 1996 did significantly help ECOMOG in its efforts to disarm Liberia’s factions (Adebajo 2002a:62-63). Still, only committed regional actors seem to have the motivation to employ sufficient numbers of troops for longer time-periods (We will return to the material conditions that prevent them from actually doing so). Thus, ECOWAS was the only actor who had the *political will* necessary to assume primary responsibility for regional peacekeeping (Berman & Sams 2000:148; Morrison-Taw & Grant-Thomas 1999).

Thirdly, ECOWAS performed a number of important tasks that contributed to the negotiated outcomes. In its mediating role, it functioned both as a facilitator and a manipulator. ECOWAS was the convenor, or co-convenor, of most of the peace conferences arranged in both conflicts (Tudor 2000; Clapham 2000). In this way, it forced the conflicting parties to the negotiating table (even if all parties did not always participate) and compelled them to take an official stance on the issues at hand. Combined with its monitoring function, where ECOWAS reacted if actors did not follow previous agreements – for example by breaking cease-fires, this meant that the warring parties were put under constant pressure and could not abandon their commitments at will. ECOWAS also made it clear that its members would not recognise any government that came to power through force: ‘military successes will not win the rebels legitimacy or recognition’ (UN Special Report 1999:5). Denying any victorious rebel regime legitimacy was

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a significant weapon for ECOWAS and the international community. This instrument fulfilled the first condition for successful mediation put up by mediation scholars Susskind and Babbitt (1992:48): 'disputants must realise that they are unlikely to get what they want through unilateral action'. According to some observers, threats of non-recognition were what made the rebel factions come to the negotiating table (Haygood 1996).

The position of ECOWAS as a committed and knowledgeable insider certainly helped the organisation in its mediator performance. The organisation had, through its members, a functioning communication network with all disputing parties and reliable information on developments both in the field and on the political arena. This was despite, or perhaps because of, the splits within ECOWAS itself, with different member states supporting different parties to the conflicts (see below). Personal relations with all leading figures were established, although trust was not always present. Its closeness to the conflict arena and its connectedness to the disputants made it a privileged mediator.

Fourth, ECOWAS acted as a peace enforcer and an active protector of peace agreements. Through ECOMOG, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group, the organisation became an active part of the military struggle. In Liberia, ECOMOG tried by force to protect its objectives in the peace process. ECOMOG from time to time engaged in regular fighting with what it considered rebel forces (Adebajo 2002b; Tudor 2000:626; Haygood 1996). This was motivated as a necessary step to defend the peace initiatives ECOWAS had taken. In Sierra Leone, ECOMOG intervened to oust the military regime, which had overthrown the previous elected government, that ECOWAS wanted to reinstall (Clapham 2000). Although unable to defeat the rebels in either country, the military engagement demonstrated resolve and sometimes prevented coup makers from carrying out their intentions. By becoming a military actor, siding with some factions against others, ECOWAS clearly abandoned its pretensions of neutrality. This created, as we will demonstrate, serious problems for ECOWAS in its mediator role. However, it may be argued that partiality against non-democratic or lawless forces is at times necessary for a regional intervener. In the words of Malone and Thakur (2001:13), 'the need for impartial peacekeeping should not automatically translate into moral equivalence among the conflict parties on the ground'. A committed regional insider might be indispensable in order to protect democratic forces against stronger autocratic opponents, when the UN is unlikely to engage in such action.

### **The Problems of Insider-partial Mediation**

Although the work of ECOWAS has in the UN been heralded as ‘an important example of a successful African peace-keeping mission’ (UN Press Release 1996), and as a ‘model for African peace-keeping’ (Rowe 1998), the Liberian and Sierra Leone missions have both been fraught with difficulties and even failures. One major problem, which they share with many UN interventions, had to do with *resources* (Berman & Sams 2000:104-105; Hirsch 1999b). Neither ECOWAS nor the UN mission had the financial resources or the trained peacekeeping personnel necessary to properly carry out their tasks. The ECOWAS members did not have the economic capacity to fund the peacekeeping effort by their own means. The problems were somewhat alleviated by contributions from the UN and individual members of the international community (Adebajo 2002a:141), but still the amount available for the missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone was far from sufficient. This, together with a sometimes alarming lack of professionalism among the ECOMOG troops (Yoroms 1999), had repercussions on the efficiency of the interventions that were in fact marked by bad organisation and discipline.

Another serious obstacle for effective conflict management was the *lack of unity* within ECOWAS. It turns out that established interpersonal relations, a defining characteristic of mediation attempts by an insider-partial according to Wehr and Lederach, can obstruct as well as facilitate co-operation. In the Liberian case, personal ties between the leaders of the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso and members of the Liberian ruling elite that was ousted early on in the conflict, made these two ECOWAS members fund the rebel army and help it with ammunitions and weapons – contrary to the policy of ECOWAS as such (Adebajo 2002a:48; Clapham 1994; Inegbedion 1994). In Sierra Leone, Liberia and Burkina Faso morally and financially supported rebel groups as ECOWAS struggled to convince the same rebels to respect the cease-fire they had agreed upon. ‘The ECOWAS consensus on regional peace has been fractured as Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana and Mali are contributing peacekeeping troops in Sierra Leone to a peacekeeping effort seemingly opposed by Liberia and Burkina Faso’ (Hirsch 1999a:3; cf. Clapham 2000). The infamous ‘diamonds-for-guns trade’ gave many actors powerful economic incentives to prolong the fighting. Fragmentation within ECOWAS weakened its peace efforts and its credibility in general. Towards the end of the Liberian conflict, when agreement on the necessity to end the

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fighting increased dramatically, not least because of the costs engendered by refugee flows to many countries in the region, the pressure on the fighting parties also increased and ECOWAS mediation became more effective (Tudor 2000). Nigeria's decision to make peace with Taylor resulted in a more positive approach from the francophone ECOWAS members, including troop contributions, thereby strengthening subregional unity (Adebajo 2002a:17, 44).

Finally, and especially important in this context, ECOWAS *partiality* has been a major stumbling block hindering successful mediation. ECOWAS has since its creation been associated with fears of Nigerian domination (Adibe 1994:197; Adebajo 2002b). Not least, the francophone countries have at times been suspicious of the intentions of the regional great power. As both the interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone were prompted by Nigeria, and to a large extent relied on Nigerian troops (Inegbedion 1994; Yoroms 1999), they were by some observers seen as expressions of Nigerian foreign policy, rather than as West African peace initiatives (cf. Adebajo 2002b:245-247). It was furthermore claimed that the Nigerian president, Babangida, had friendly ties with one of the actors involved in the Liberian power struggle (cf. Adibe 1994:197). There was thus ample evidence of relational partiality.

But the ECOWAS experience is also full of examples of processual and outcome partiality (Berman & Sams 2000:148-149; Hutchful 1999). As indicated above, ECOMOG troops took part in actual fighting, siding with some of the domestic factions against others. It is clear that the rebels perceived ECOWAS and ECOMOG as yet another enemy (Barclay 1999; Tudor 2000:622). Although the main aim of ECOWAS was to facilitate negotiations between the rebels and the governments, or between different rebel groups, its mediation efforts were often met by mistrust and suspicion by many regime opponents. Despite the insistence of the Nigerian president that '[T]he ECOMOG is a peace force.... It is not an army of conquest or occupation.... The ECOMOG forces are soldiers without enemies or favored faction in the conflict...' (Babangida, quoted by Skau 2000), the rebel leaders obviously thought differently. But not only the rebels were sceptical; even international observers like Jimmy Carter criticised ECOMOG for partiality (Haygood 1996; cf. Adebajo 2002a:17). It is fair to conclude that ECOWAS was seriously handicapped in its mediation efforts by its own lack of process and outcome impartiality.

## **Conclusion: An Advocacy of Insider-impartial Mediation**

ECOWAS was clearly an insider mediator. Its member states had deep interests in the disputes and were directly affected by refugee flows, by the fact that their citizens were trapped in the fighting and by the risk of diffusion of regional insecurity. The states of the region are highly interconnected and interdependent. This created strong incentives, both to put an end to the fighting and to accomplish a lasting peace agreement.

The cases highlight both the advantages and the limitations of insider-partial mediation. The ECOWAS missions distinctly demonstrate some of the benefits that come with being an insider mediator. A high commitment to the peace process was linked to deep knowledge of the conflict area and a dense network of personal contacts. With the support of the international community – and by peace forces in the war-plagued countries themselves – ECOWAS finally succeeded in brokering cease-fire and peace agreements. ECOWAS played the roles of facilitator and manipulator, and could pose a credible threat of non-recognition to the warring factions. It is clear that ECOWAS contributed to a negotiated settlement, however temporary and fragile. The outsider-neutral mediator, the UN, helped lend legitimacy to ECOWAS policy initiatives and played a supportive but minor role in the peace processes (cf. Adebajo 2002a:143).

It is at the same time equally obvious that ECOWAS in some respects was not ideal as a mediator. The lack of internal unity decreased the credibility and consistency of its mediation efforts. Even more problematic was its not very subtle partiality. It was by some actors perceived as one part among others in the conflict, and not as a neutral mediator. An insider is probably always relationally biased, but in this case ECOWAS was also blatantly partial in the process and as regards the outcome.

Linking our findings to recommendations, we suggest that insider mediators should at least exhibit processual impartiality, not openly favouring one or some of the parties to the detriment of others, if they want to achieve durable solutions. It is not necessary, or even possible, for an insider mediator to break up earlier bonds of friendship or personal relationships (relational partiality). Open processual bias is, on the other hand, counterproductive in mediation. Mediator unity is also strongly recommended; effectiveness is heavily curtailed if actors within a mediating organisation pull in different directions.

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In brief, mediation efforts by regional IGOs seem to be both necessary and positive ingredients of any future global peace-building regime. Global actors often hesitate to become involved in conflicts where their economic or security interests are weak. Insider mediation holds many advantages – especially if it is also impartial in its handling of the mediation process.

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