



INFORMATION SHEET

FACILITATION

Facilitation is a process whereby an outsider becomes involved in a problem with the objective of providing assistance to the parties in any way possible but without making any binding decisions for them.

Facilitators assist the parties where necessary in a wide range of matters which might help or contribute to their decisions. These may include gathering of relevant information, fact finding, conducting public meetings, round table conferencing, private consultations or whatever. Facilitated meetings range from informal and flexible gatherings to structured conferences.

Facilitators provide leadership in developing in conjunction with the parties, appropriate processes and structures to deal with the parties' problem/s. They also assist the parties with communication issues, negotiation and creative problem-solving. Whilst facilitation is often more suited to situations where there are multiple issues and many parties, it can readily be adopted to situations where there are only two parties involved. Facilitators normally work with entire groups in discussions rather than representatives so that all people affected by a decision are engaged in finding an effective solution.

Facilitation processes can assist in varied situations such as planning, land-use and environmental matters but can also be used in the likes of employment disputes, in voluntary associations and in other groups which may require organisational cohesion and relationship building.

Facilitators may be disinterested outside parties, they may be experts in the area of the dispute or they may simply be nominated representatives of the participants. Facilitation overlaps considerably with mediation and the two often go hand in hand. Typically, dealing with conflict is not always the primary focus of facilitation (e.g. a facilitation may take place well before any conflict has arisen). There is no clear cut distinction between the two and mediators are often referred to as "negotiators" or "facilitators". Both approaches are entirely process-oriented and can be used for a multitude of purposes and differing situations.

Both mediators and facilitators are expected to:

- ⊘ act impartially at all times;
- ⊘ aid and assist in improving communications between the parties;
- ⊘ enhance and encourage the negotiation process; and
- ⊘ act as "agents of reality", without making final decisions.

The process of facilitation is less structured than some forms of mediation. The main point of difference being that facilitation is more flexible and open-ended than mediation in terms of its procedures and potential uses.

Facilitation can be used to assist one side in a dispute to identify its concerns, prioritise its interests and plan for negotiations with the other side or it could constitute a preliminary step before a mediation. It is also possible that a facilitation could result in certain issues being referred on to one of the forms of mediation.