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Summary

Cofounder of and Senior Partner at Meridian Institute, with over 30 years of experience facilitating national and international policy dialogues, negotiations, and internal and multi-organizational strategy development processes. A recognized leader in the field of facilitation and consensus building, with expertise and experience in environmental quality, natural resource management, global stability, international development, science and technology policy, agriculture, disaster resilience, energy, and climate change. Author of a variety of publications on conflict management and collaborative problem solving. Holds a M.S. and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in Natural Resource Policy and Environmental Dispute Resolution.

Meridian Experience

Meridian Institute

1997–Present

Meridian Institute designs and facilitates collaborative processes that help diverse parties identify critical issues, build relationships and trust, construct innovative solutions, and implement durable decisions. These collaborative processes address challenges at the local, state, national, and international levels, and involve leaders from government agencies, industry, nongovernmental organizations, research institutes, and international institutions. Meridian also assists organizations in conducting strategy development and planning.

Senior Partner

Cofounded Meridian in 1997 with four partners. Serves as program director of the organization, involved in program and project development and workload distribution. Also involved in all aspects of strategic planning, human resources, finance, IT, and marketing. Designs, manages, and leads policy dialogues, negotiations, and strategy development projects involving teams of facilitators. For these projects, conducts convening assessments, designs processes, secures financial support, plans and facilitates meetings, helps participants develop consensus documents, and conducts implementation activities such as press releases and briefings. Selected highlights are summarized below:

- Project Director for a set of projects focused on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), including the conservation and sustainable management of forests and the enhancement of carbon stocks (REDD+). REDD+ activities revolving around reduced emissions, climate change and agriculture, sustainable landscapes and green growth. Also supporting the

Norwegian Ministry of Environment's International Climate and Forest Initiative in similar activities.

- Project Director and co-lead facilitator assisting the 15 Centers of the Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) to conduct an internal assessment process. Conducted interviews with Director Generals, Board Chairs, and Research Program Directors to collect feedback on options for designing the CGIAR research portfolio; convened and facilitated a working group to further explore and refine portfolio design options; and provides ongoing process design and facilitation support to CGIAR.
- Co-directed a Meridian team that facilitated an engagement process to bring together a diverse coalition of key forest stakeholders to deliver interrelated and mutually supportive commitments to announce at the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Leaders Summit in September 2014. In cooperation with a team from the United Nations Development Programme, Meridian facilitated a systematic contact group of the leaders of critical networks to discuss what their networks would pledge, as part of their commitments to the New York Declaration on Forests (Declaration) and what each network would request from other networks of forest stakeholders. Meridian also orchestrated an outreach strategy to ensure that a critical mass of signatories endorsed the Declaration, including: national and subnational governments, leading companies from across key commodity supply chains, the finance community, civil society, and indigenous and local peoples' groups.
- Served as the project director for a two-phased portfolio of work for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in partnership with former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the Kofi Annan Foundation and Chairwoman Zuma of the African Union Commission. Meridian conducted interviews with African and global policy makers, CSOs and NGOs, researchers, businesses, farmers and farmers organizations, and entrepreneurs, to assess the effectiveness of existing innovation platforms and the means to encourage, develop, and/or deliver innovations to smallholders. The final report assessed critical gaps, including innovation areas such as: science and technology, policies, market access, information needs, finance, and institutional and organizational interventions, and shed light on new public private partnerships, investments, policies, and practical solutions for real farmer-centric, efficient access to social, economic, and technological innovation. The project identified critical needs and opportunities for action in three interrelated reports for which Meridian was the primary author: : [*Innovation Gaps and Smallholder Farmers: Opportunities for Action; Chair's Summary: Optimism for African Agriculture and Food Systems*](#); and [*Scaling-up Investment in African Agriculture and Food Systems*](#).
- Project Director for a Meridian-led process that convened a team of independent, expert authors to develop the Options Assessment Report, [*REDD+ Safeguards: Practical Considerations for Developing a Summary of Information*](#). The report provided a practical set of elements for countries to consider when developing their summary of information on safeguards for submission to the United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Meridian facilitated in-person and online consultations to solicit feedback for the author team on the report's content and framing with diverse stakeholders including those from indigenous peoples' and non-governmental organizations, researchers, and forest and donor countries. The paper was launched at a Meridian-designed event on 3 December 2014 on the margins of the UNFCCC Conference of Parties in Lima, Peru.

- Meridian project director for a Winrock International-led multi-year task order contract with the U.S. Department of State to produce a series of Options Assessment Reports (OARs) on critical issues around Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), including the conservation and sustainable management of forests and the enhancement of carbon stocks (REDD+) and land use-related topics that were under discussion in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Managed Meridian's contributions to this effort to design and facilitate consultation processes that led to the development of two OARs: *Analysis of Approaches for REDD+ Verification* and *Land Use in a Future Climate Agreement*. The program informed negotiators, practitioners, and policy-makers on REDD+ by producing analytic papers on key REDD+ topics in areas relevant to the UNFCCC as well as the implementation of REDD+.
- Provided leadership to Meridian's Climate Change and Agriculture Team, facilitating a series of multi-stakeholder dialogues and independent objective assessments on the topics of agriculture in the context of climate change and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- Provides leadership and facilitation on the Asia-Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience project. Works with a multi-lateral group of representatives from the public sector, private industry, nongovernmental organizations, donors and philanthropies, and research institutes that are collaborating to develop joint activities to reduce disaster risk and strengthen resilience in the Asia-Pacific region. Facilitate network leadership coordination as well as outreach to partners in the Asia Pacific region.
- Served as Project Director and facilitator for an informal stakeholder workshop on enhancing the effectiveness of the Multilateral System for the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources. Responsibilities included: conducting interviews with 30 workshop participants from private sector, government ministries, research institutions, and civil society; analyzing interview results to inform the workshop agenda and materials, in partnership with colleagues from Bioversity International; facilitating plenary and small group discussions on options for improving benefit sharing and access in the multilateral system; and developing a workshop summary report and PowerPoint slides presented at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group to Enhance the Functioning of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-Sharing on December 8, 2014 in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Please see <http://merid.org/staff/mlesnick> for a full list of projects completed.

Previous Experience

The Keystone Center

Keystone, Colorado 1986–1997

Senior Vice President, Science and Public Policy Program

Senior mediator responsible for overall management of the \$3.7 million, 28-person Science and Public Policy Program, which designed and facilitated national and international policy dialogues on issues associated with the environment, economy, science, and technology. The program convened more than 40 dialogues each year involving more than 700 participants from environmental organizations, companies, labor unions, government, and research organizations.

University of Michigan, School of Natural Resources

Ann Arbor, Michigan 1984–1986
& 1978–1980

*Associate Director,
Environmental Conflict Project*

This interdisciplinary institute was devoted to research, teaching, and the practice of dispute resolution, with special emphasis in research and teaching on the implications of alternative dispute resolution on low-power parties. Taught three graduate seminars, mediated disputes, conducted research evaluating dispute resolution processes, and consulted to government agencies on institutionalizing conflict management.

Member of a research team studying the social and economic impacts of large-scale water development projects for the Institute of Water Resources at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Assisted in teaching graduate-level courses on organization theory, planned social change, environmental conflict management, integrated impact assessment, and the management of interdisciplinary teams.

Resource Consultants International

Ann Arbor, Michigan 1980

Resource and Development Research Associate

Assisted principals in forming an international consulting firm that developed integrated solutions to highly controversial and complex problems. Developed grant proposals and conducted research for a project on devastated global landscapes sponsored by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport

Bridgeport, Connecticut 1975–1978

Director, Temporary Shelter Program

Directed a regional agency for conflict intervention, temporary placement, and referral for abused young people. Intervened in court, police, school, and at-home settings. Placed youth in temporary foster homes and agency-run institutional settings.

Education

University of Michigan

Post-Doctoral Fellow, Environmental Dispute Resolution

1986

Ph.D., Natural Resource Policy and Environmental Dispute Resolution

1985

M.S., Natural Resource Policy

1981

Fairfield University

B.A., Political Science

Minor: Sociology

1974