

2017

Koodam Impact Analysis Research Report



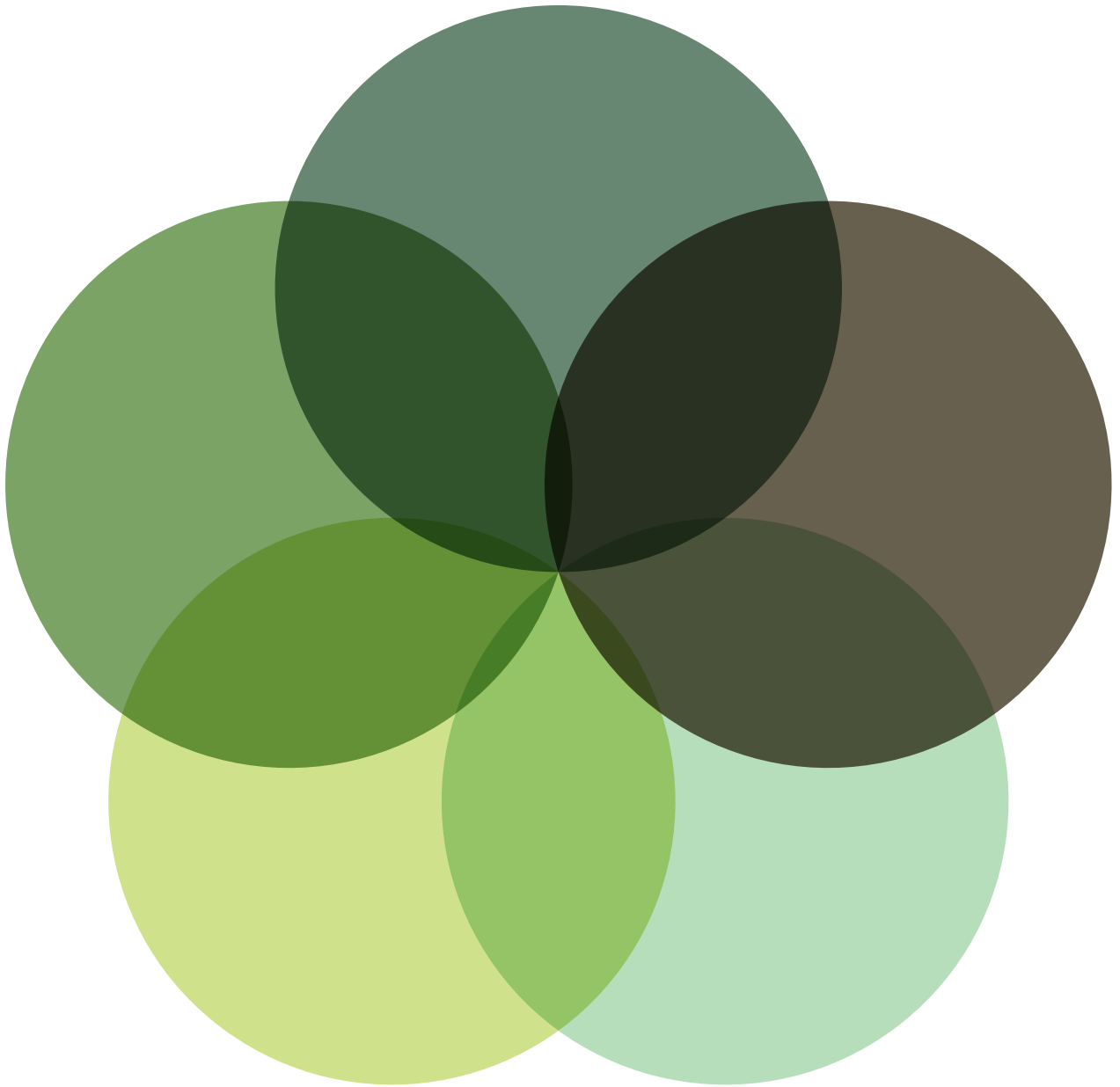



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“All your differences are purely mental, and in spite of the great importance you seem to give to them, they are in fact, of very little importance, and could easily be overcome if each one made a broadening effort and understood that what he or she thinks is only one point of view of the question, and that any attempt for effectivity must admit the other points of view as well and try to make a synthesis of them all.”

~ The Mother, 6 April 1961

Report Summary

Koodam is a conflict resolution referral platform in Auroville offering personal and group conflict transformation services, as well as process support and meeting facilitation. Koodam has been functioning since September 2013 and seeks to transform how Aurovilians engage in conflict both as individuals and as a community.

Early in 2017, Koodam hired an independent research assistant to conduct research and analysis on the impacts of its services since its last assessment in 2015. Sixty-one people participated in an online questionnaire or emailed feedback about their experiences with Koodam. Through this feedback, Koodam was able to see in which ways its services had impacted the community, how the role of Koodam in Auroville has evolved, and how the conflict transformation platform could improve and grow in the future.

Highlights of the Impact of Koodam's Services

Sixty-one people participated in an online questionnaire or emailed feedback about their experiences with Koodam.

- ***There is an increasing desire to involve Koodam earlier in the conflict resolution process. In 2013, 40% of the mediation cases had one party***

who refused to participate, while in 2016, that percentage dropped to 17%.

- ***The number of processes overall has increased, from nine cases in 2013 to 53 in 2016.***

Since its last research report in 2015, Koodam has watched its services evolve. “We’re not doing ‘classic’ mediation any more, but a sort of Aurovilian variety,” explains one of Koodam’s mediators. Instead, services and processes blur together as Koodam practises “the essence” of conflict resolution and adjusts to meet the needs of all the parties involved.

“People don’t wait until a conflict is out of hand any more to involve Koodam,” another Koodam mediator notes. “Those who come early want resolution.” This increase in the desire to resolve conflict is backed up by Koodam’s data; in 2013, 40% of the mediation cases had one party who refused to participate, while in 2016, that percentage dropped to 17%.

Each year, the number of processes overall has increased — from nine cases in 2013 to 53 in 2016 — as have the percentage of people willing to try a conflict resolution process with Koodam. Most individuals who walk through Koodam’s door are self-referred, having heard about Koodam via word of mouth instead of through referral by the Auroville Council (AVC).

More importantly, Koodam has seen a growing willingness and maturity from the community towards conflict transformation. In some cases, two parties in conflict individually came to Koodam without knowing the other had. Cases in which people acknowledge their own issues—“Can you help me shift my thinking, or should we come for mediation?”—show that there is a shift in communal consciousness towards inner work and personal awareness when conflict surfaces.



The History of Koodam

When it comes to conflict resolution in Auroville, the common attitude of “demanding justice” still prevails: conflicting parties often seek an authority to act as a judiciary body. Though often accepted across cultures, this approach presents various challenges.

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- *It tends to create winners and losers instead of win-win solutions based on mutual agreement.*
 - *This “winners–losers” perspective in turn carries the potential for renewed or additional conflict.*
 - *In the absence of an executive power in Auroville, the implementation of decisions that are not “owned” by the affected parties is sometimes very challenging.*
-

As a result, conflicts escalate, and this work primarily became the responsibility of the AVC and various Working Groups. These groups concentrate valuable time and energy on conflict resolution instead of on their actual mandates of sustainable public policy development and innovative project support. In addition, most of the members of these Working Groups are not trained in conflict resolution techniques and processes.

After more than ten years of working closely with various governance Working Groups and as a mediator in Auroville, Elvira Klein proposed the creation of a platform for alternative dispute resolution in Auroville early in 2013. Having received overwhelming support from the community, Koodam opened an office at the Unity Pavilion in September 2013, and in the summer of 2014, Niva Kovshi joined Elvira as the second Koodam coordinator. After more than a year of extensive mediation training, Mukta den Hollander joined Koodam’s core team in 2015.

Though the Unity Pavilion was conceptually a perfect place for conflict resolution, Koodam quickly realized privacy would be an issue during sessions; there was a lack of confidential space for conversations to take place. After two years, Koodam had the opportunity to move to the recently vacated Kailash Health Clinic, and with the agreement of the Kailash residents and coordinators, Koodam moved into its current office space in August 2015.

The Auroville community received Koodam’s move to Kailash very positively. Many Service Recipients feel that the Kailash space is neutral and safe, two important qualities when dealing with sensitive issues. Koodam extends its heartfelt gratitude to the Auroville community, which donated everything Koodam needed for the office space—from art to furniture to office supplies.

“I find that Koodam strikes a very good balance between professionalism and straightforwardness. Their honesty about what they can and can’t do as well as their integrity is an excellent example of what is possible in the Auroville context, given the right intentions and commitment.” ~ Research participant

Origins of the Word “Koodam”

The name “Koodam” is taken from the Tamil word கூடம் (*koo-dahm*), meaning “gathering place”. The root of this Tamil word is கூட (*koo-dah*), meaning “together”, which perfectly embodies the goal of Koodam’s work in Auroville: to resolve conflict in order to bring people together.

Koodam’s Coordinator Profiles

Elvira Klein


Koodam’s founder, Elvira Klein, has been an Aurovilian since 1995. Originally from Germany, Elvira studied international conflict transformation and mediation, and has worked as a mediator, facilitator and consultant in various contexts, including rural Palestine, middle-class India and corporate Germany. With her professional experience in conflict transformation and a fierce love for Auroville, Elvira was drawn to create Koodam to begin to address issues of conflict resolution, interpersonal communication and public policy in the experimental Auroville context.

Niva Kovshi

Niva Kovshi joined the Koodam team in 2014, the same year she became Aurovilian, after a four-year stay in the international township. Having studied law and mediation, Niva practised law for over fourteen years before coming to Auroville. As a native Israeli, Niva grew up watching the social and political fabric of her country unravel, inspiring her quest for peace and conflict resolution. Her wish is to support Auroville in finding effective solutions for its conflicts in ways that bring closure for all the parties involved.

Mukta den Hollander

Mukta began mediation training with Koodam in 2014 and joined as a part-time team member in 2015. Having been born and raised in Auroville, she has a deep understanding of the way Auroville works in terms of personal conflict, Working Group decisions and community ties. Acknowledging the tension between Auroville’s aspirations and its cultural and social diversity, Mukta was drawn to Koodam’s work to explore the way conflict and differences can be used as an opportunity for growth and unity.



Koodam Services and Support

Koodam is structured as a referral service, connecting needs with solutions available in the community. Koodam's services and support seek to facilitate an agreement born from the parties themselves through deep listening, mutual understanding and inner work. Koodam conducts research on conflict resolution, offers process support to various groups in Auroville, and has provided training in conflict transformation techniques.¹ All services and referrals are offered free of charge, allowing individuals and groups to get the support they need without the constraints of payment. Since it opened in late 2013, Koodam has had a total of 113 conflict cases.

¹ All mediation and conflict resolution training is currently on hold until Koodam restructures the programme to better fit the needs of the community and Koodam itself.

FIGURE #1: Koodam's Conflict Cases (meeting facilitation excluded)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Mediations	5	4	20	18	47
Request for mediation, one party refused	2	4	2	3	11
Negotiations	-	2	1	3	6
Venting/Advice	2	-	2	16	20
Meeting facilitation in conflict	-	-	1	5	6
Arbitration	-	2	1	3	6
Process support in conflict	-	5	7	3	15
RC	-	-	-	2	2*
TOTAL CASES KOODAM SUPPORTED PER YEAR	9	17	34	53	113

* These are only the RCs that Koodam referred to

Listening and Venting

Listening and venting support is for people who wish to have somebody listen to their personal feelings, thoughts and experiences in a safe and confidential environment. Advice on how to navigate life within Auroville is given if requested.

Mediation

Mediation is a structured process for solving disputes, accompanied by one or more mediators who act as a neutral third party. The mediators support the disputing parties by creating a safe space in which to have a constructive conversation and reach an agreement that is acceptable to both parties. Mediation as a process aims at restoring relationships by defining the conflict as a challenge the parties share and enabling them to cooperate on a shared solution. Mediation is voluntary, and at any moment, either side can decide to stop the process.

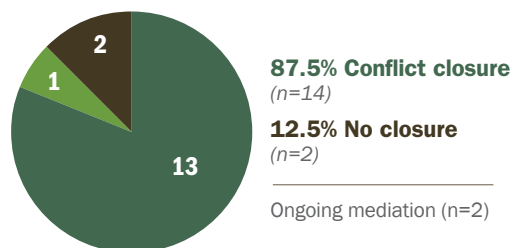
Negotiation

Negotiation is a tool used between two or more parties to reach an agreement when their interests or goals seem mutually exclusive. Koodam facilitates both direct and indirect negotiation. While the parties in disagreement interact with each other directly in a direct negotiation, indirect negotiation occurs when the parties nominate a representative to come to the table on their behalf; this is advantageous in situations where emotions are high and people prefer not to engage directly at that given point in time, and where finding a mutually acceptable and workable agreement is more important than restoring a relationship.

Restorative Circles (Restorative Auroville Team: L'aura, Janet, Shanti, Helene and Kati)

Restorative Circles (RCs) are offered through Restorative Auroville. An RC is a process that holds space for conflict and dialogue within the context of community, and it consists of a series of meetings amongst those involved in a conflict, either directly or indirectly. Through dialogue and reflective listening, the process allows those involved to understand each other at a deeper level, to start to take responsibility for their choices, and to look at how, together, they might contribute to forward movement and constructive change, both on the personal and collective levels.

FIGURE #2: Mediation Success Rate



- Mediations agreements**
The parties reached a formal agreement.
- Closure after mediation**
No formal agreement reached, but the conflict de-escalated or stopped after the mediation.
- No agreement**
The mediation was stopped without any agreement.

This information is for 2016

Koodam is not directly involved in this process but can refer people to Restorative Auroville when they feel that an RC would be the most suitable process for the conflict at hand. However, RCs remains voluntary, and an individual (anyone, whether they're directly involved or not) must come forward to call for a Circle.

It is important to mention that RCs are already rather well known by the Auroville community, and apart from two cases where Koodam referred a party to an RC, in all the other cases people contacted Restorative Auroville directly. In the last one and a half years (since January 2016), Restorative Auroville has facilitated 17 live Circles. Although each Circle has contributed to healing and forward movement, the team still feels that the community hasn't yet reached the full potential of what RCs can offer, as many community members still choose not to engage when they are invited to join the process. However, the team is hopeful that with time, the process will grow and become more trusted as a constructive response to conflict and misunderstanding.

Meeting Design and Facilitation

Koodam offers meeting facilitation to Working Groups and others who wish to have this support. Meetings are an essential part of Auroville's governance. Though still largely infamous in the community as being an unproductive waste of time and energy, we are happy to observe that more and more Working Groups and teams understand that meetings led by a trained facilitator can become

purposeful, engaging, face-to-face conversations that produce stable decisions owned by the collective, which are therefore easy to implement. This facilitation service can range from creating an agenda with an objective that a facilitator helps the meeting follow, to designing and facilitating a road map of meetings and workshops for strategic and organizational change processes.

Process Support

An effective, process-centred approach to communication is relatively new in Auroville. For meeting facilitation, decision-making or the setting up of an arbitration body, Koodam supports the AVC and other Working Groups in learning how to create and follow specific steps to reach a clear goal.

One such support mechanism is arbitration. If parties cannot solve their conflict through mediation, negotiation or RCs, then one or both parties can ask the AVC for an arbitration process. In arbitration, one or more third-party arbiters are entrusted with the responsibility to make a binding decision that brings closure to the conflict situation. When an arbitration process starts, the parties in conflict surrender their responsibility to the collective—represented by the arbiters, who remain neutral—in order to find a solution, accepting that the arbiters’ decision will be final and binding. Given that the AVC is charged with facilitating the actual arbitration process, Koodam’s role in an arbitration is to provide the AVC and arbiters with the support needed to carry out a successful arbitration; this includes setting up meetings and ensuring that proper procedures are followed. Koodam is never involved in arbitration decision-making.

Policy and Research Development

In 2015, Koodam drafted a step-by-step conflict resolution policy to guide Aurovilians through conflict situations and establish a commonly agreed upon process to be followed. The draft went through a participatory revision process and was ratified in May 2015. The aim of this policy is to shift the collective attitude away from the concept of a truth-versus-lies judiciary system and towards the ideas of multiple truths, conflict as an opportunity for positive change, and taking personal responsibility to engage with and transform our own challenges.


In addition to policy development, Koodam helps to facilitate various research initiatives. Koodam supported the AVC to draft the “Auroville Appeal Process”, which

intends to support fair, open and transparent decision-making processes and encourage accountability from our Working Groups. It provides a framework to meaningfully address individuals’ serious dissatisfaction with decisions of Working Groups, and thus helps to harmonize and improve the relationship between Working Groups and the community.

Non-Conflict-Related Meeting Design & Facilitation/Process Support

These services have been part of Koodam’s offer to the community from the beginning, but they have constituted a relatively small part of our workload so far. However, throughout 2016, the demand for this kind of support has grown exponentially.

In 2016, we facilitated a total of 68 meetings that were not related to any actual conflicts. We worked with the Working Committee (WC), Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC), Entry Service, Entry Task Group, the interim Town Development Council (iTDC), the Core Group for the Town Development Council (TDC) restructuring process, Land Board, the Pool of Arbiters, Adult Learning Activities, Auroville Art Services and The Learning Community. For us at Koodam, this is a positive and exciting development, and we hope to be able to support the community more with these platforms for cooperation.



“Koodam is highly professional and at the same time, it is down to earth. Not much trying to apply general theory and philosophy of conflict resolution. Reality is much more complex and our community is very peculiar. Koodam is starting from that, and that’s why real progress is made in any situation where there’s an opening for progress by the parts involved.”

~ Research participant

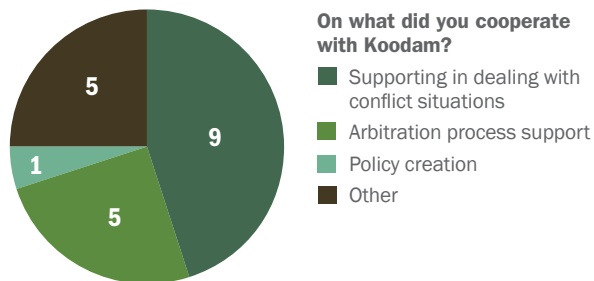
Impact Analysis Research Results

Given its increased involvement in Auroville, Koodam sought to assess its position in the community and measure any impact its services have had in Auroville over the past two years. At the beginning of 2017, Koodam used a third party to conduct research on the impacts of its services since its previous analysis in 2015. In January, online questionnaires were distributed via email to Koodam's Working Partners and Service Recipients², with each questionnaire tailored to the specific audience. A total of 61 people fully participated in Koodam's research; sixty people completed the online questionnaire, and one person sent feedback via personal email.

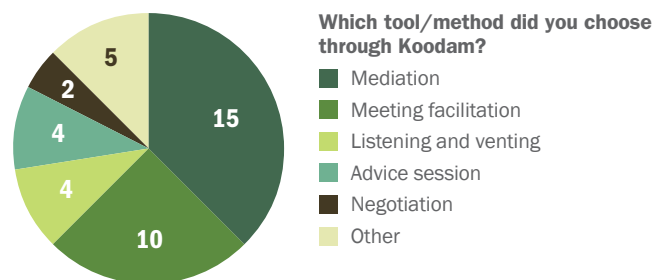
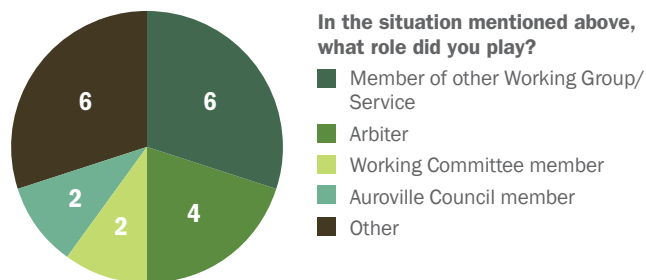
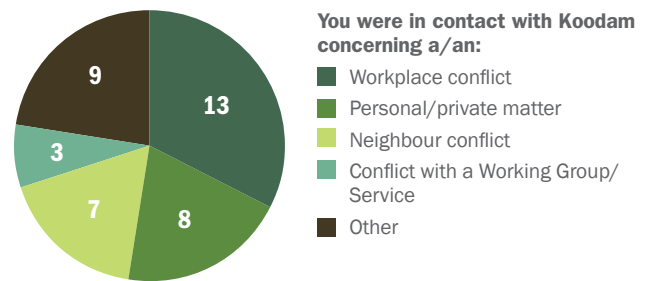
² "Service Recipients" denote individuals who were part of a conflict that was addressed through listening and venting, mediation, negotiation and/or arbitration services. "Working Partners" signify the group of individuals who supports or is supported by Koodam, including the AVC, Working Groups, policy drafters, arbiters and Tamil advisers.

FIGURE #3: Research Participant Demographics

Working Partners (Total: 20)



Service Recipients (Total: 40)



Community Perceptions of Koodam's Role in Auroville

Regardless of overall experience or the relationship with Koodam, every survey response from both Working Partners and Service Recipients conveyed understanding of Koodam's envisioned role in the Auroville community. The most common response (n=31) understood Koodam as a service that sought conflict resolution through mediation and communication support. The second most common response (n=9) was that Koodam existed to facilitate better communication and listening skills in a variety of situations. More nuanced responses included that Koodam provided training in conflict resolution, served as meeting facilitators, and fostered understanding, harmony, healing and reconnection.

Responses to "What is your understanding of Koodam's role in the Auroville community?" included:

- **To be a clearing house and support system for the many conflict resolution processes that have been developed in Auroville; to help people find what they need to help resolve their conflict when they can't themselves.**
- **Healing and reconnecting; supporting resolution of conflicts; building awareness in our interactions and nurturing the connection.**
- **An independent agency to help facilitate differences of opinion/conflicts for parties that seek an amicable solution without having to involve internal Working Groups or outside "legal" institutions.**
- **Koodam provides community members with what I would call an advanced listening service: a facilitating presence that allows disputing parties to recalibrate their listening for each other. This is a deeply important role to serve in a place with so much cross-cultural complexity!**
- **Somewhere to turn to for objective and professional support in conflict.**

Support and Sessions: Interacting with Koodam

The Working Partners and Service Recipients used over 30 different terms to describe Koodam and its services. The two most common terms used were "professional" (n=8) and "listening" (n=8), while "supportive" and "support" (n=7) received the next most mentions. "Understanding" came next with four mentions (n=4), while "positive", "quick/punctual", "impartial/neutral/unbiased" and "goal/solution-oriented" descriptors followed (each n=3). Two participants appreciated Koodam's honesty about what it could and could not achieve as a service, with one survey participant stating, "I love working with people like you who ... understand their own strengths and limitations."

- **84% of Service Recipients felt the process was confidential.**
 - **82.5% of Service Recipients felt Koodam's team was neutral and impartial towards the conflict and all parties involved.**
 - **100% of Working Partners felt their process with Koodam was efficient and helpful.**
- One Service Recipient believed Koodam showed "prejudice from the beginning" and that "throughout the process [there was] unfairness."
- Responses to "What was your experience with Koodam's support and processes?" included:
- **I find that Koodam strikes a very good balance between professionalism and straightforwardness. Their honesty about what they can and can't do as well as their integrity is an excellent example of what is possible in the Auroville context, given the right intentions and commitment.**
 - **The Koodam team was very good at reflecting what was said, coming up with reasonable goals, and listening to and respecting the people present.**

- ***In the processes that I have attended, I found the support of Koodam quite effective in bridging positions that were apparently impossible to reconcile.***

- ***Very professional! Just the right combination of clear communication, professionalism that respects privacy (difficult in a small community like this), empathy and unbiased positioning.***

Progress without Finality: Finding Closure in Unresolved Conflict

Not all conflict can be resolved simply and easily, and Koodam strives for at least individual progress in difficult conflict situations. Half of the Service Recipients (n=28) responded to the question about making personal progress despite ongoing unresolved conflicts. Of those who responded, about two-thirds (n=18) said that they had been able to move on or make progress with the conflict. Respondents stated that progress for them meant gaining more understanding and clarity in one's own position, a release of tension, the ability to distance oneself from the conflict, and understanding what the actual reasons were behind a conflict.

Eight respondents believed no progress had been made due to stalemates in communication and compromise between the parties in conflict (n=3), a general lack of forward movement (n=2), the fact that Koodam's processes had no power in comparison to mandated Working Groups' decisions (n=2), or conflict situations which changed on their own (n=1). One Service Recipient felt the conflict intensified after meeting with Koodam but did not expand further on the response.

Responses to "If the conflict was not resolved, do you feel you made progress with the conflict?" included:

- ***Yes, it helped (me) understand the conflict, helped release tension, and helped (me) come to terms with the situation.***
- ***The conflict was not resolved because the concerned persons were not able to overcome their own attitudes. Nothing to do about that.***
- ***For me (it) was not a conflict as such before; the neighbour asked for Koodam's help. But through the Koodam process, I could explore and express what my conscious awareness is (on) the issue, and this helped to clear and calm the issue. This was good.***
- ***The conflict is not resolved, but we found a way to accept both our needs.***
- ***Well, yes, progress was made, as it became clearer what the actual reasons behind the conflict were. As the demands cannot be met by AV, the conflict is not resolvable in (a) mutually agreeable way.***

Learning from Conflict: Personal Reflections

In addition to resolving issues between conflicting parties, Koodam seeks to educate others on how to productively handle conflict. The most common response by both Working Partners and Service Recipients (n=6) was that they learned "a deeper sense of what listening means". Other top responses were the importance of a neutral, third-party perspective within conflict, the necessity of getting professional help, and how impactful simply feeling listened to by the other parties can be.

Five Service Recipients stated that they learned nothing, while all the Working Partners that responded (n=18) affirmed they had discovered valuable lessons while working with Koodam.

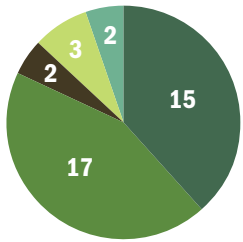
Responses to "Did you learn anything about conflict resolution during your experience with Koodam?" included:

- ***I learned patience; I learned to listen; I learned not to lean towards my personal preferences but rather to consider the welfare of the collective.***

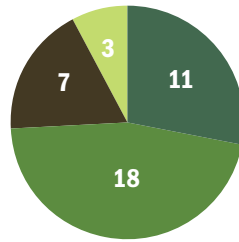
FIGURE #4: Ratings of Experiences with and Opinions of Koodam – Service Recipients (Total: 40)*

* Though only 39 Service Recipients completed the survey in full, partial surveys were kept in the research data in order to save any and all valuable feedback.

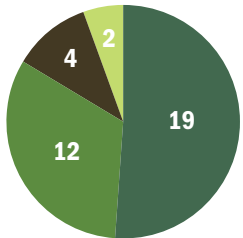
Strongly Agree
 No Opinion
 Disagree
 Agree
 N/A Not Applicable
 Strongly Disagree



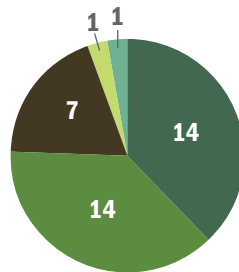
The process was efficient and timely.
N/A = 1



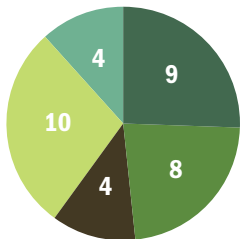
Koodam's support improved our meeting and/or communication.
N/A = 1



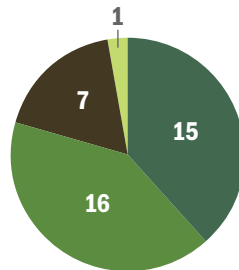
The process was confidential.
N/A = 3



Koodam's services support Auroville on a personal level.
N/A = 3



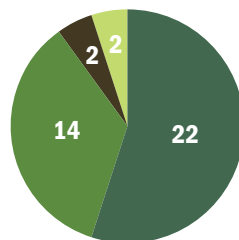
I was able to resolve the conflict through the use of Koodam's services.
N/A = 5



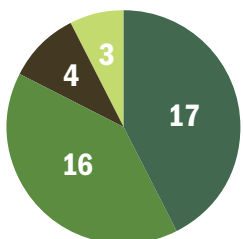
Koodam's services support Auroville on a community level.
N/A = 1



I was able to have personal closure with the conflict.
N/A = 3



I would recommend Koodam's services to a friend if he/she were having a conflict.
N/A = 0



Koodam's team was neutral and impartial towards the conflict and all parties involved.
N/A = 0

- ***A deeper sense of what listening means. And how it helps “victims” to feel better when they feel heard.***
- ***That human beings are complex and as such also situations involving people are very complex. As such, any conflict needs to be addressed at different levels and understanding of the people included needs to reach beyond the matter of the conflict itself. But most of all, I learned that bringing forth positivity is a half-step towards any resolution, doesn’t matter how difficult the issue is.***
- ***I learned that it is very important in moments of conflict to get professional help.***
- ***Yes, that thinking of resolution in terms of growing out of your own position is easier said than done. Resolving a conflict can be very hard inner work!***
- ***I think that I have learned a lot about communication and coping mechanisms as they differ culturally. I am also more conscious of the fact that conflict resolution is a daily commitment that people must make with one another - even when they do not know that there is conflict.***
- ***Yes. That though the outcome may not have been what I “wanted” or felt was needed, it was more than acceptable.***

Koodam and the Community: Perceived Impacts

The majority of all survey participants perceive Koodam’s impact on and importance in the Auroville community at large; 100% of Working Partners and 79% of Service Recipients surveyed agree that Koodam’s services support Auroville on a community level (see Figures #4 and #5). The most common response of both survey groups (n=9) was that a neutral third party is essential in helping to solve conflicts, especially since Auroville is a small community where many have pre-existing opinions of each other. Several Working Partners (n=5) believe Koodam’s services embody and bring forward Auroville’s values, namely human unity. Other responses highlighted that Koodam helps community members understand each other, especially given the cultural differences in Auroville, raises the bar in interpersonal communication, and tries to find a solution that all parties can agree upon instead of imposing a verdict-like decision.

Only two survey participants—both Service Recipients—believed Koodam did not support Auroville on a community level. One stated that as members of the community it serves, Koodam’s team would not be able to be completely impartial in light of conflicts and personal opinions of fellow Aurovilians. The other survey participant felt Koodam accepted false accusations and did not rebuke one side’s negative attitudes during a conflict resolution process (see page 20 for Koodam’s reflections on survey feedback).

Responses to “Why do you or why do you not feel Koodam’s services support Auroville on a community level?” included:

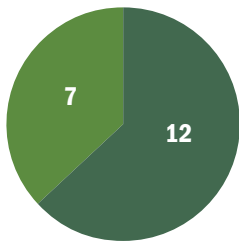
- ***When emotions and agendas are very strong, it is helpful to have a third party to facilitate dialogue. Koodam shows skill and understanding in creating a neutral space.***
- ***Conflict is a natural part of living together especially in a community. (We) need healthy, open and transparent processes and facilitators to work with conflict in order to achieve growth.***
- ***Because it’s highly professional and at the same time it is down to earth. Not much trying to apply general theory and philosophy of conflict resolution. Reality is much more complex and our community is very peculiar; Koodam is starting from that and that’s why real progress is made in any situation where there’s opening for progress by the parts involved.***
- ***All conflict, whether it is personal or between Working Groups, is a reflection of our community. Koodam’s offer to help any of these conflicts highly contributes to a greater harmony and maybe even a bit of growth for the individuals taking part in any of the processes/facilitation.***



FIGURE #5: Ratings of Experiences with and Opinions of Koodam - Working Partners (Total: 20)*

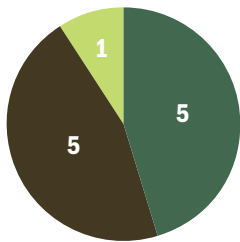
* One Working Partner represented in the numbers below filled in the survey from a Service Recipient perspective, as some people collaborate with Koodam from both working and client-based situations. As the questions are different between the two surveys and cannot be simply transferred, these responses remain in the Working Partner data.

■ Strongly Agree ■ No Opinion ■ Disagree
■ Agree ■ N/A Not Applicable ■ Strongly Disagree



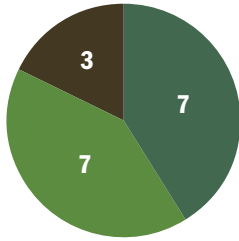
The process was efficient and helpful.

N/A = 1



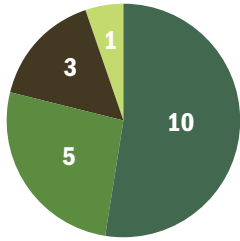
Koodam provided me with adequate support as an arbiter.

N/A = 9



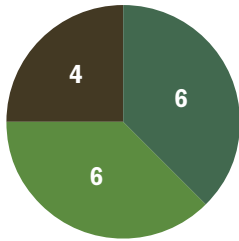
The process was confidential.

N/A = 3



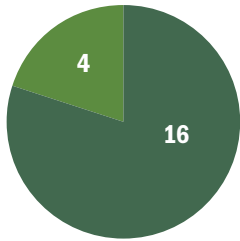
Koodam's services support Auroville on a personal level.

N/A = 1



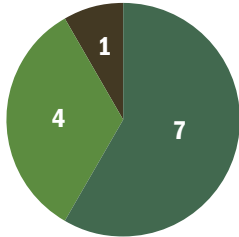
Koodam's team was neutral and impartial towards the conflict and all parties involved.

N/A = 4



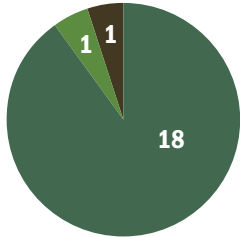
Koodam's services support Auroville on a community level.

N/A = 0



My role as an Auroville Council/Working Group member has been made easier through the support and services of Koodam.

N/A = 8



I would recommend Koodam's services to a friend if he/she were having a conflict.

N/A = 0

Room to Grow: Improving Koodam's Services


Beyond using the questionnaire to assess the past, Koodam uses feedback to learn, grow and move forward. The most mentioned suggestion for Koodam was to expand its human resources and train more people in conflict resolution and facilitation, as many felt Koodam was understaffed and overworked. Many respondents also suggested that Koodam could provide more follow-up after a meeting or process; concrete suggestions included regular follow-up meetings as a preventative measure and providing meeting minutes or post-process reports of the conflict.

Other suggestions included:

- **more integration with AVC and WC;**
- **train all Auroville groups in conflict resolution techniques;**
- **have Tamil interpreters when necessary; and**
- **foster more community acceptance and understanding of Koodam's purpose in Auroville.**


Responses to "What would you improve about your experience with Koodam and its services?" included:

- ***It is a constant work for us all to drop our background conversations about each other and deal with conflict in an impartial space of non-judgement and non-reaction. Anything Koodam can do to further refine this will add more value to the service and role model change in AV.***
- ***I would want more uniform neutrality towards the conflict resolution or Working Group dialogue facilitation. I would want more support/safe feeling to be given to individuals within the process.***
- ***My experience could not improve, but I noticed that their workload was heavy, so an expansion of the service in the future could help to continue to give a quality service.***



“It is a constant work for us all to drop our background conversations about each other and deal with conflict in an impartial space of non-judgement and non-reaction. Anything Koodam can do to further refine this will add more value to the service and [be a] role model [for] change in AV.”

~ Research participant



“Keep up this crucial work... It is one of the reasons for me to not move out of the community. Thank you!”

~ Research participant

A Moment with Koodam: Team Reflections and Survey Commentary

Auroville's philosophy states that Auroville should exist without law, courts, police and other traditional justice systems, but many still come to AVC and Koodam with justice-type issues—neighbourhood and workplace conflicts, ownership, land, fences. Koodam believes conflict resolution should be born from self-responsibility and inner awareness instead of a right-or-wrong or us-versus-them approach. In this way, people come to Koodam to build their own justice, since working through differences to find unity and compromise upholds the ideals and Charter of Auroville.

Koodam acknowledges that Auroville has not yet found a faultless substitute to traditional justice systems, and while Koodam has found a range of alternative methods that work for the majority, there are still occasional issues and situations that require processes that have not yet been perfected. As with many systems in Auroville, conflict resolution continues to be an ever-changing, ever-explored experiment. Koodam is exploring these systems with a shift from solely conflict resolution to conflict transformation—preventing conflict and dealing with foreseeable issues. To adequately address this, Koodam continually seeks the cooperation of other Auroville bodies and Working Groups, especially in maintaining a balance between rigid policy adherence and the human experience.

When there is a feeling of power imbalance or differences in opinion and a solution cannot be reached together, Koodam provides the safe and neutral space to find common ground. Despite years of experience and training in conflict resolution and transformation, challenging cases exist that require more time and energy in order to find an agreement. These cases include:

-
- ***ownership, territory and city planning disputes;***
 - ***long-standing conflicts in which time has intensified personal positions, making change difficult;***
 - ***differences in the interpretation of Auroville's vision and ideals and how those should be realized within the community; and***
 - ***translation challenges and the cultural gap, where specific mediation techniques can get lost in translation or in an individual's cultural understanding.***
-

In the area of process support, Koodam has faced issues with implementation and non-compliance after a decision or agreement is made; parties in conflict fail to follow the agreement provided by arbiters or Working Groups that they promised to respect. Koodam operates from the belief that people should take responsibility for their own actions and follow through on their own promises.

Broad in Scope, Personal in Nature

Over the years, Koodam has realized that the Auroville community does not have a full picture of Koodam's capabilities. "Many people feel you can only come for more 'official' problems and not personal situations, but everything is personal," notes one Koodam mediator. Koodam addresses a variety of conflict situations in the community including:

- **family issues such as divorce and parent/child conflict;**
- **broken relationships between couples or friends;**
- **neighbour matters;**
- **conflicts at the workplace;**

- **supporting Working Groups in order to reach consensus;**
- **conflicts between units/services/Working Groups and clients/individuals; and**
- **school/parent relationships.**

Beyond the various issues it addresses, Koodam also offers shuttle mediation. Shuttle mediation is a convenient way to address conflicts in which the parties simply cannot sit in the same room together, as in the cases of broken relationships and extremely volatile disagreements. Koodam acts as the middleman, dealing with each party in separate sessions and "shuttling" the discussion back and forth.

Survey Feedback Reflections

The purpose of conducting biennial, third-party surveys is to assess Koodam's perceived and actual impact in the Auroville community. Besides appreciating encouraging positive survey responses, the Koodam team also deeply appreciates constructive criticism in order to continually grow and change according to the needs of the community. In addition, feedback helps Koodam see where its services may be misunderstood by the community and can thereby address these misconceptions.

Lack of Process Follow-Up

Koodam acknowledges the need of some parties for conflict follow-up and updates, but the team would like to stress that follow-up is not part of Koodam's services. Koodam acts solely as a mediator or facilitator between parties during conflict and encourages the parties themselves to follow up with their new-found awareness within the situation.

No "Bite" to Koodam's Decisions

In traditional justice systems, decisions are binding. As mentioned, Koodam does not wish to be a part of a justice system as such, and therefore does not enforce process decisions; Koodam actually does not have power or "bite". Instead, Koodam would like to see the community itself evolve to a point where it becomes the accountability

power in decisions. In this way, the Auroville community and collective consciousness would be enough to hold each other to a higher way of living and interacting with each other in conflict situations. "I think the word we need more is trust, not bite," explains one Koodam mediator. When a community is unified by trust and personal accountability, there is no need for law enforcement.

Need More Staff

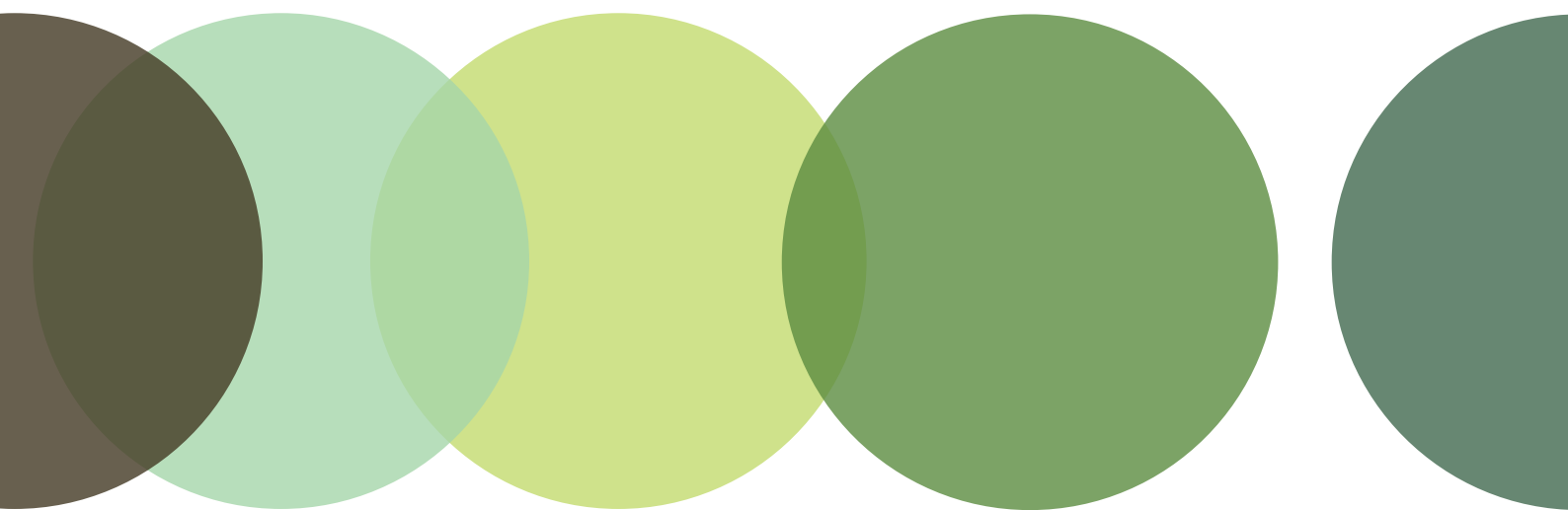
Koodam acknowledges it needs more mediators and support staff but currently cannot expand due to the time constraints of the team. Koodam is not running training sessions for new mediators but hopes that it can start doing so in the near future to help alleviate its workload.

Lack of Neutrality

Koodam's goal in any process is to remain neutral and objective. Despite this, occasionally parties in conflict feel that a member of Koodam's team is taking sides. "Actually, what we do is 'peel the onion'," notes Elvira, explaining how individuals must get to the innermost part of a conflict before progress can be made towards resolution. Sometimes Koodam targets one party with questions to encourage self-reflection or to 'peel' more layers of the onion, but this is never done to take sides or attack an individual.

Multicultural Hurdles

Koodam understands that Auroville is a beautiful yet complex variety of cultural systems and languages. While Koodam strives to address each situation with neutrality and fairness and adapt their tools to each situation, its team members are not familiar with every single cultural and linguistic nuance in Auroville. Koodam seeks to be more aware of personal experiences shared not only within Auroville but also globally.



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