

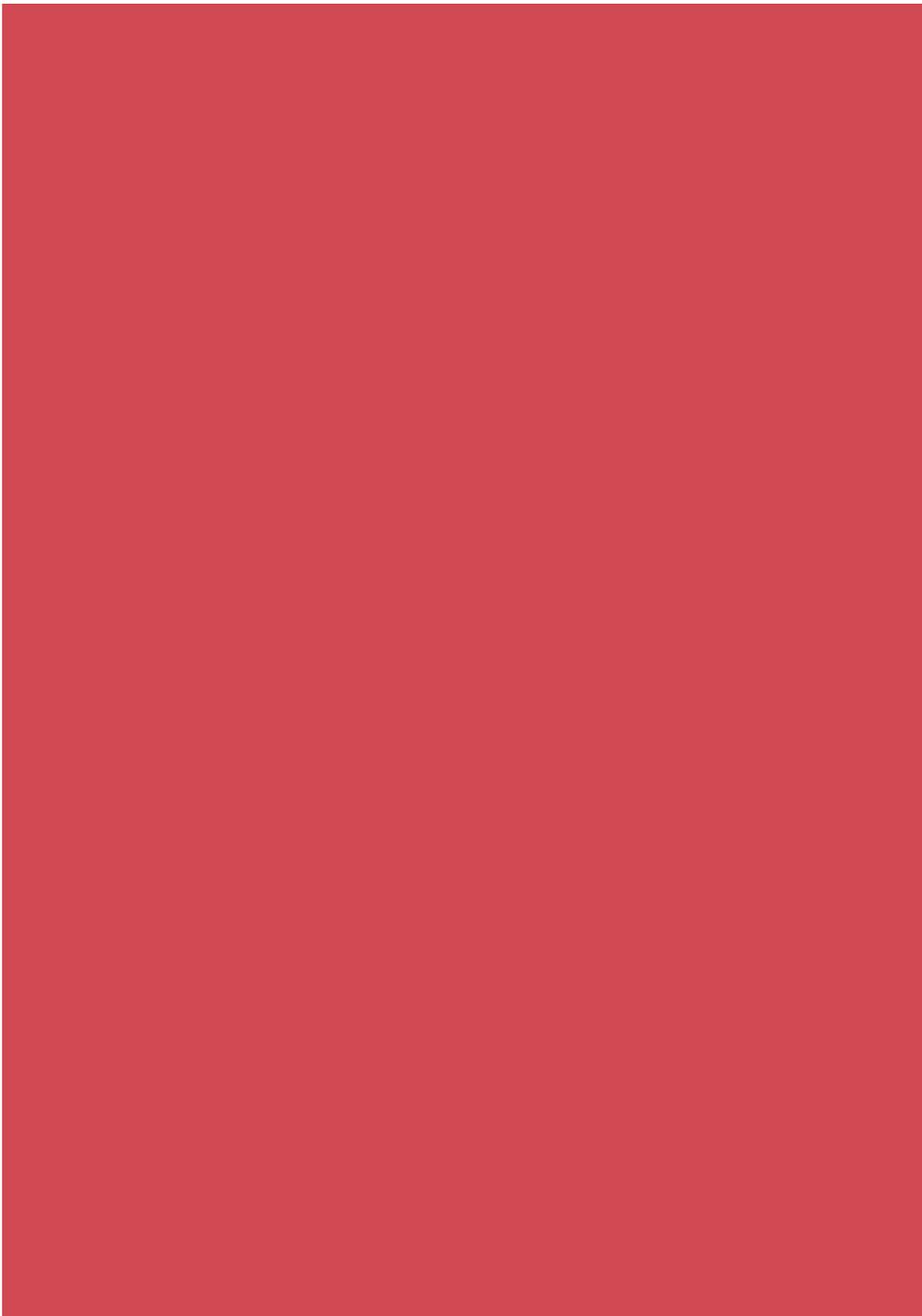
**BASELINE STUDY**

Mir Mubashir & Luxshi Vimalarajah



**Tradition- & Faith-Oriented Insider Mediators (TFIMs)  
as Crucial Actors in Conflict Transformation**

Potential, Constraints, & Opportunities for Collaborative Support



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## About the authors

*Mir Mubashir* is a researcher and project manager in the Dialogue, Mediation & Peace Support Structures programme at the Berghof Foundation. His research interests in the field of peace and conflict lie particularly in systemic conflict transformation, cultural & religious dimensions of conflict and creative forms of dialogue (e.g. interactive theatre).

*Luxshi Vimalarajah* is the programme director of the Dialogue, Mediation & Peace Support Structures programme at the Berghof Foundation. She has many years' experience in designing and facilitating dialogue processes and in providing training and mediation support to third-party mediators.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following people for their gracious support in making this study possible: Antti Pentikäinen, Matthias Wevelsiep, Marc Zuiderveen, Stephan Kraus, Véronique Dudouet, Jularat Damrongviteetham (LukOm), Katrin Planta, Malika Bouziane, Hans-Joachim Giessmann, Simon Mason, Owen Frazer, Nathalie Al-Zyoud, Ossi Gustafsson, Edla Puoskari, Anna Tervahartiala, Paula Tarvainen and Tom Strömman. Thanks also to all our interviewees and interlocutors in the case studies and the participants at the June 2015 Berlin workshop of the study.

**Visualisation:** Krystal Renschler

**Proofreading:** Richard Lambert

**Layout:** Hiekka Graphics

## Citation

Mir, Mubashir, and Luxshi Vimalarajah. 2016. Tradition- & Faith-Oriented Insider Mediators (TFIMs) as Crucial Actors in Conflict Transformation: Potential, Constraints, & Opportunities for Collaborative Support. Baseline Study.

## Availability

This study, a synopsis and six case studies (Myanmar/ Burma, Southern Thailand, Lebanon, Colombia, Kenya and Mali) are available at [www.peacemakersnetwork.org/tfim](http://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/tfim).

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Peacemakers



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## Key Insights

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Tradition- & faith-oriented insider mediators (TFIMs) are not only traditional and religious leaders/authorities, but also include a diverse array of actors who, one way or another, incorporate traditional and religious elements in their conflict transformation efforts.

A TFIM may draw tools and inspiration from multiple faiths, cultures and traditions, as well as from non-religious (secular) and non-traditional concepts/values.

In many contexts, the fact that religious institutions are deeply embedded within communities makes them more legitimate mediators than traditional or political actors, an example being the Catholic Church in Colombia.

‘Moderate’ TFIMs sometimes manage to constructively challenge and transform traditional and religious establishments. One example of this is the monastic education system in Myanmar, which is becoming more ‘socially engaged’.

The approach to mediation adopted by religious peacemakers is not necessarily ‘religious’, i.e. it is often indistinguishable from the ‘secular’ approaches used by other kinds of peacemakers. Examples include the ‘coffee club’ dialogue forums run by a pastor in Nairobi, Kenya, and the interfaith diapraxis approaches used by a group of monks in Mandalay, Myanmar.

Young TFIMs in traditional and religious establishments are increasingly facing a ‘generational conflict’ with their older colleagues with respect to leadership styles, motivation, creativity and approach.

TFIMs may serve as ‘indirect connectors’, facilitating the involvement of neutral outsider mediators in cases where they themselves lack sufficient trust and credibility among the conflicting parties, as was the case with some imams in Southern Thailand.

Civil society actors working in conjunction with religious leaders can have subtle but far-reaching influence on policy. Examples include the ratification of a national policy on healing and compensation for victims in Southern Thailand and the adoption of policies in Lebanon, which embeds the concepts of inclusive citizenship and religious diversity into the national curriculum.

Serendipitous encounters often create the atmosphere that constructively challenges human perceptions. In Myanmar, for example, cooperative humanitarian work undertaken in the wake of cyclone Nargis brought about a paradigm shift among some prejudiced monks. Such encounters can also be strategically ‘created’, as some TFIMs in Myanmar demonstrate.

TFIMs can also help to engender new TFIMs, for example in Myanmar, where some TFIMs are facilitating dialogue among, and the empowerment of, (intolerant) religious leaders, who then gradually emerge as TFIMs.

Most of the challenges that TFIMs face are not unique to TFIMs but are shared with other peacemakers. One such challenge is a lack of coordination between different kinds of peacemakers. The support needs of TFIMs thus largely revolve around a need to explore complementary and collaborative conflict transformation practices.

# Recommendations

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## General recommendation for all actors

Create inclusive spaces for dialogue between all of the relevant actors: middlemen, so-called ‘extremists’, armed groups, hardliners, state actors, etc. Deliberate on how to engage and collaborate with unfamiliar or ‘difficult’ actors, instead of pondering whether to engage. Paradigm shifts take place when we are exposed to encounters and situations that are unfamiliar to us not only by accident, but also through strategically planned intervention. Play an active part in evolving and maintaining collaborative support frameworks in the conflict context you are part of.

Identify, in collaboration with the relevant actors, the parameters of the traditional (patriarchal) or religious context (if any) that prohibits or limits mediator roles for women and young people. Then establish and communicate, via a conflict-sensitive approach, the possible advantages of women and young mediators, using inspiring stories from similar contexts. If a congenial atmosphere can be generated, encourage the training of future TFIMs, especially women and youth TFIMs.

Work intensively on intra-group mediation in order to sensitise groups for inter-group mediation (e.g. intra-faith mediation as a basis for inter-faith mediation).

Allow space for creative thinking. While mediation is an established tool, it can always accommodate and benefit from creative approaches, which may involve some trial and error, and which constitute learning exercises in their own right. Experiment with the arts (e.g. storytelling, theatre, photography) and technology (e.g. social media) to extend the available spaces for dialogue.

Nuance the prevalent discourses of ‘countering/preventing violent extremism’ to be able to reflect on potentially conflict-insensitive formulations/language and policies that make engagement with certain actors more difficult (e.g. proscribing and listing of ‘extremists’ and ‘terrorists’). Strive for transformational approaches that unpack the complexity of ‘violent extremism’ and address its root causes, thereby promoting a culture of tolerance.

## TFIMs and civil society actors

Proactively engage with and create opportunities for collaborative peace mediation with other TFIMs, other state and non-state (peacebuilding) actors.

Use your moral influence to address the so-called ‘violent extremism’, but also help others gain a sense of the root causes of extremism and ensure that mechanisms are in place to address these root causes. Utilise mass media to achieve greater impact in sensitising the communities concerned.

Stay grounded: your context needs you most (there have been cases in which the crucial work of TFIMs, in the course of gaining much-deserved international attention, gradually got detached from the national context).

## State actors

Recognise the unofficial peace mediation efforts of TFIMs and support them with the logistical and human resources that they require. Establish/strengthen the legal foundations that underpin and secure the mediation efforts of TFIMs, e.g. by enforcing the rule of law and making security arrangements that ensure safe and secure conditions for mediation processes.

Avoid imposing top-down structures and processes, which are rarely sustainable, even if they seem to be worthwhile solutions. Be aware of the pitfalls of formalisation and institutionalisation; informal structures and networking processes are often more effective and better complement the state’s peacebuilding efforts.

## **International, supranational and intergovernmental actors, INGOs, donors, and development agencies**

Systematically include tradition and faith as cross-cutting elements in programme/project planning (just as gender issues or do-no harm approaches are usually mainstreamed in development work). Support the revival and transformation of indigenous/traditional mediation mechanisms.

Avoid undermining the existing efforts of TFIMs. Understand their cultural specificities and capacities for addressing conflict, and draw on their knowledge and experience in order to engage constructively and in a manner that is conflict-sensitive. Build on their current activities in a collaborative manner rather than prescribing solutions. Suggest and offer technical support if the context requires it. Tailor support according to the context and the actors involved. Avoid 'projectisation' and 'NGOisation', which by and large tend to render local efforts unsustainable.

Depending on what is most useful in the local context, support networks/platforms as well as individual initiatives, since both can be very worthwhile.

## **The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (and other platforms and networks)**

Establish partnerships with academia, think tanks and policy centres to conduct research that can inform practical engagements and vice versa, e.g. on specific faith-oriented approaches to mediation, interfaith entry points for mediation (e.g. Christian-Muslim, Buddhist-Muslim etc.), comparative analyses of different approaches to mediation and extensive research on mediation approaches in indigenous communities.

Build a global knowledge-base to gather information on TFIM efforts scattered throughout the literature and in worldwide mediation praxis. Create spaces and mechanism for regional exchange, peer-to-peer and collaborative learning, coaching and training mechanisms. Make effective use of technology and media in this regard. Create regional TFIM pools and TFIM support channels to foster cross-national mediation exercises.

Help to establish links between high-level policy makers and TFIMs at the national and regional levels.

# 1 Introduction

Conflict transformation and peacebuilding processes are a mélange of the efforts of a diversity of local, regional<sup>1</sup> and international actors with their own (unique) attributes, resources, capacities, strengths, scopes and influences. For these processes to be sustainable, it is necessary that all actors recognise this diversity and see it as an opportunity for strategic networking, collaboration and mutual support. This creates the conditions for better coordination, complementarity, and convergence of the efforts. Localised and low-profile peacebuilding efforts of certain types of *local/insider* actors often escape the radar of the larger peacebuilding machinery of international and state actors. This can be seen as a missed opportunity, since the unique strengths and potential of the former – if identified, recognised, made use of, and reinforced—may actually prove to be beneficial to the latter and to peacebuilding processes. In fact, as research in the last decade have shown, it is imperative for sustainability of processes that they evolve from the inside out – beginning at the local level and then iteratively connecting the national, regional and global/international levels – so as to render a *collaborative peace support structure* that is organic and communicative.

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (hereafter: the Network) can be seen as an attempt towards such a collaborative peace support structure.<sup>2</sup> It grew out of the recently growing interest in international peacemaking on the relevance of local/insider actors commonly referred to as traditional or religious/faith-based actors. This study stems from an observation made by the Network that in certain conflict contexts, religious and traditional peacemakers exhibit remarkable potential as mediators, and that they may have specific mediation support needs that, if met, could further strengthen their potential and thereby the likelihood of successful mediation.<sup>3</sup> In order to verify this observation, theoretical and empirical enquiries were carried out. It is on the basis of these that the following (1) explores the premises and methodology of this study; (2) proposes a framework for conceptualising and contextualising **tradition- & faith-oriented insider mediators (TFIMs)** as a specific subset of insider mediators and of religious and traditional peacemakers; (3) highlights their mediation roles and approaches, their uniqueness and the added value they bring; (4) underscores the challenges they face and their own limitations; (5) considers the forms of support that, in their view, would let them over-

come these challenges, and reflects on the broader forms of support that might also contribute to addressing these challenges and limitations.

This study is by no means comprehensive, but is rather intended to advance the discourse on peace mediation through the informed inclusion of TFIMs. Knowledge from further cases studies would help to provide new insights into conceptual and methodological developments, to confirm or challenge the general and specific assessments presented in this study, and to contribute to the elaboration of further ideas for TFIM support structures.

## 1.1 Premises and propositions

The following sections consider the terminology of peace and conflict research/practice insofar as it pertains to the premises of this study and the manner in which they interconnect with one another to encapsulate the notion of a TFIM.

### 1.1.1 Conflict transformation

The concept of conflict transformation will be used in this study instead of peacebuilding or conflict resolution/management/prevention. Conflict is understood here as a complex social phenomenon that, as a driver of social change, can be shaped both non-violently and violently (Berghof Foundation 2012, 10–11). Conflict transformation is thought of as a process of “constructively changing relationships, attitudes, behaviours, interests and discourses in violence-prone conflict settings”, so as to address the “underlying structures, cultures and institutions that encourage and condition violent political and social conflict” (ibid., 23).

### 1.1.2 Tradition and faith

The terms tradition, culture and indigeneity are often used interchangeably and in conjunction with one another, as in the expressions ‘cultural tradition’ and ‘indigenous culture’. The same goes for the terms faith, religion, belief and spirituality in expressions such as ‘religious faith’, ‘spiritual belief’, etc. Furthermore, these two sets of terms often intermingle, as in expressions such as ‘religious tradition’, ‘Hindu tradition’, ‘indigenous religion’, and ‘Islamic culture’. Complex worldviews, ideologies, and systems of meaning, value and belief are generated through the amalgamation of tradition, culture, indigeneity, religion,

1. ‘In this study, ‘regional’ refers to a set of neighbouring countries that exhibit cultural and contextual similarities, e.g. the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Some countries use ‘region’ to denote an administrative area, e.g. the Mandalay region in Myanmar, but this is not the connotation of ‘region’ in the present study.

2. The Network was established in 2013 as a joint initiative of Finn Church Aid (FCA), the UN Mediation Support Unit (MSU) in the Department of Political Affairs, UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and Religions for Peace (RfP). FCA is the secretariat responsible for implementing all of the activities of the Network since 2013. See [www.peacemakersnetwork.org](http://www.peacemakersnetwork.org).

3. The study (timeline: Jan-Dec 2015) was commissioned by Finn Church Aid, as the current secretariat of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, with primary funding from Finland’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

faith, and spirituality. In many societies, the complex evolution of tradition, culture and indigeneity is rooted in religion, faith and spirituality, and these dimensions reciprocally shape one another. Broader regional classifications like 'Middle-Eastern culture' are not necessarily associated with one particular religion, but a historical mixture of different religions, along with cultural and socio-political elements. In societies where religion as such is absent, e.g. in many traditional societies, traditional and cultural history, mythology, and social evolution make a significant contribution in its stead.<sup>4</sup> It is nevertheless beyond the scope of this study to discuss the subtleties of these terms. For simplicity's sake, the terms tradition and faith will be used as overarching terms to denote, respectively, the two sets of terms noted above.<sup>5</sup>

On the basis of the above outline, tradition and faith (among other things) can be seen to play a part in creating and shaping human identity and perceptions, and this may become evident in human behaviour in times of socio-political conflict.<sup>6</sup> Cases in which such behaviour assumes a violent form tend to be described as cultural or religious conflicts, which however overclouds the complex nature of the conflicts. As an alternative, one might rather regard tradition and faith as 'dimensions' of conflict (Morton 2008; Fox 2007) that are 'manifested' in various ways. Tradition and faith can also be dimensions of structural violence, as in cases where defining a 'state religion' has hostile consequences for minority religious groups.

The prominent discourse on the role of religion indicates a certain ambivalence, namely that religion may be both a source of violence and of nonviolence, peace, and reconciliation (See for example: Gopin 1997; Seul 1999; Appleby 2000; Alger 2002; Gopin 2003; Fox 2003; Sampson 2004; Little 2006; Little 2007; Little and Appleby 2009).<sup>7</sup> In recent years in particular, actors who manifest religious elements have been seen either as promoting 'terrorism/violent extremism' or as promoting peace – or even as being themselves either terrorists or peacemakers. This highly simplistic dichotomy obscures the complexity of conflict and the dynamism of the human and structural assimilation and manifestation of its religious dimensions, and is thus neither helpful nor transformative. While a nuanced discussion of this question is beyond the scope of this study,<sup>8</sup> it is suggested that the role of tradition and faith

should not be regarded in such binary terms, but rather along a broad spectrum, and that conflict contexts should be analysed in all their complexity, by treating tradition and religion as two conflict dimensions among many, and examining how different actors relate to these dimensions in different ways – without either demonising or romanticising them.

In contemporary conflict resolution and peacebuilding discourses, traditional/cultural and religious/faith-based approaches have demanded greater attention. These approaches are often adopted even in conflict contexts where traditional and religious dimensions are absent.<sup>9</sup> This study considers actors whose approaches may be seen as peace mediation, for example:

- Traditional actors: indigenous leaders, clan elders, village chiefs, tribal judges, individuals representing traditional institutions/authorities in traditional societies/communities, shamans, troubadours.
- Faith-based/religious actors: spiritual leaders, individuals representing religious institutions, e.g. priests, imams, lamas, monks, rabbis, and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs).<sup>10</sup>

This list is nevertheless not exhaustive, since peace mediation can be undertaken by other kinds of traditional or faith-based actors. This point is expanded on in the following.

### 1.1.3 Tradition- and faith-'oriented'

Using the qualifiers 'traditional', 'faith-based' or 'religious' to refer to or describe an actor implies something about their identity and background, which is of course significant (at least with regard to faith-based/religious actors) since a vast majority of the world's population consider themselves to be religious.<sup>11</sup> However, such qualifiers would also exclude cases where the actor:

- draws from non-religious (secular) or non-traditional elements as well;
- draws from religious and traditional aspects of other religions, faiths, cultures and traditions;
- does not wish to be identified with these qualifiers, but certainly draws from tradition and/or faith

4. In sociology, a traditional society is one that is characterised by an orientation toward the past rather than the future, and in which custom and habit, derived from indigenous and ancient cultural practices, play a prominent role in social interactions and relationships (Langlois 2001).

5. Faith can exist without being rooted in religion and faith-based actors need not necessarily draw on (one particular) religion (Ghulam 2012). The term 'faith-based' refers to actors who play a significant spiritual role, and for whom faith constitutes a substantial part of their motivation (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009, 186).

6. In this regard, Frazer and Friedli suggest that religion might be thought about in five ways: "as community, as a set of teachings, as spirituality, as practice and as discourse" (2015, 10–15).

7. The argument is that religion may be:

(i) a source of (structural, physical, psychological) violence of mobilising and instigating fear, mistrust and a sense of 'otherness', thus damaging social relationships and/or human life, or  
(ii) a source of nonviolence by constructively transforming conflict through dialogue and healing, and by reconciling relationships and offering reasons in support of peaceful coexistence.

8. See Silvestri and Mayall (2015) for one of the first works to offer an alternative to this binary discourse.

9. Where tradition and culture are concerned, traditional justice mechanisms, customary laws, and indigenous healing rituals have long been in place to deal with conflict in traditional societies/communities. Mechanisms like Shura and Jirga in some Muslim societies or the judicial system under the Panchayat in the Indian subcontinent have their roots in religion (while also exhibiting local specificities).

10. The UNDP (2014, 5) conceives "faith actors" as faith-based organisations (FBOs) and religious leaders (RLs), including "traditional indigenous spiritual guides such as shamans and sukias" in the latter category.

11. 84% of the 2010 world population identified with one religion or another (Pew Research Center 2012).

One way of avoiding this restriction is to speak instead of the actor's traditional or faith-based **orientation**, i.e. the way in which their approach is directed, designed, aligned, tailored or adapted – to whatever extent – on the basis of a conscious decision to use elements from tradition and/or faith. For similar reasons, the terms religious/interreligious/interfaith peacebuilding can also be seen as semantically and analytically problematic, since such peacebuilding may not be exclusively 'religious' in nature.

#### 1.1.4 Insider, local, indigenous

The kind of actor focussed on in this study is the insider (alternatively 'local' or 'indigenous') – as opposed to the external or international – who is 'intrinsic' to the conflict context in question, whose life is directly affected by the conflict and who has a stake in the conflict. In doing so, the emerging discourse on local peacebuilding is followed (also termed insider or indigenous peacebuilding), which is part of a 'local/insider turn' in the fields of peacebuilding and development cooperation in the last decade. This turn situates the local at the centre of peacebuilding efforts and has served to challenge the nature, efficacy and legitimacy of the prevalent 'liberal' model of peacebuilding and development. The argument is that this model has been largely ineffective, refused by its target beneficiaries, and rarely sustainable. Such a form of manufactured peacebuilding has in some cases even proved to be harmful due to its insensitivity to the local context, culture and capacities (Mac Ginty 2011; Donais 2009).

There is now a greater appreciation of local, indigenous and insider approaches and methods for dealing with conflict – methods that are owned and driven by actors 'intrinsic' to the conflict system and embedded within the conflict context, who are able to "connect with cultural memory banks" and who exhibit a "conformity to popularly held and accepted norms and expectations" (Mac Ginty 2008; Mac Ginty 2010; Boege 2011). Insider peacebuilding thus emphasises indigenous capacities and resources for addressing conflict and the associated initiatives that are locally rooted, led, and driven. These initiatives incorporate the rationales, motivations and modalities of dealing with conflict on the basis of traditional and religious symbols and rituals that might have been transmitted orally over many generations within a community, and to which community members are socialised and consider highly legitimate. Essentially, insider peacebuilding focusses on building and repairing social relations and is thus more promising towards sustainable conflict transformation. The term 'insider peacebuilder' has only recently started to appear in the literature, to refer to actors involved in local/indigenous/insider peacebuilding.<sup>12</sup>

In using the term 'insider,' the following considerations are important to bear in mind:

- An actor's 'localness' or 'insiderness' is subjective: they can be an insider to some people and an outsider to others; they themselves may feel more like an insider in some contexts than in others.
- Their 'insiderness' can be dynamic and may vary in space and time, depending on the phase of the relevant conflict and other factors that affect it and the stakeholders involved in it.<sup>13</sup>

Insider peacebuilders are not to be overly romanticised, but to be regarded through a critical yet constructive lens.

#### 1.1.5 Mediator/mediation

Mediation has been conducted since ancient times by wise men, elders and religious leaders to 'settle disputes', and continues to be practiced in traditional societies. Present day mediation is effectively a professionalised evolution of this ancient practice of mediation, and is widely used in conflict contexts, particularly socially protracted ones. While tradition- and faith-oriented peacebuilders work in various capacities, a great majority continue to be accepted as legitimate mediators. In fact, faith-oriented actors like the Community of Sant' Egidio or the Quakers enjoy high levels of legitimacy as international mediators. In terms of local peacebuilding, the most prominent global mediator, the UN, only recently acknowledged that these actors are unique mediators and that they are to be recognised as such. Furthermore, the UN has officially stated that enhanced dialogue and coordination with religious leaders is essential in supporting the development of its own mediation capacity (UN 2012a; UN 2012b). The EU has also followed suit by recognising religious actors as essential for track 2 diplomacy (EPLD 2013). A recent report by the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations proposes that the UN find ways to draw on the knowledge and resources of those outside the UN system, e.g. within civil society, and specifically refers to religious actors as potential partners in conflict prevention and mediation (UN 2015).

Scholarly research and practice have highlighted the approaches, strengths, (assumed) support needs of, and challenges faced by, tradition- and faith-oriented mediators.<sup>14</sup> The first extensive research on faith-based mediation involving dialogue-based diplomatic initiatives by religious organisations to settle armed conflicts was only recently conducted by Johnstone and Svensson (2013). This was the first global cross-country dataset that included descriptive analysis to map the empirical landscape of faith-based mediation in armed conflicts around the world between 1989 and 2008.

12. A preliminary definition is offered by Ropers (2012). See also [www.berghof-foundation.org/programmes/dialogue-mediation-peace-support-structures/governance-and-insider-peacebuilders](http://www.berghof-foundation.org/programmes/dialogue-mediation-peace-support-structures/governance-and-insider-peacebuilders).

13. As was clearly captured by Interpeace (2010): "In practice there are no pure insiders or outsiders, but rather degrees of insiderness and outsidership. Often the relationship can only be defined in relative terms—one is more or less of an insider/outsider than someone else."

14. Abu-Nimer, Berkovitch, Bouta and Kadayifci-Orellana have done crucial work in this regard (See for example: Bouta, Kadayifci-Orellana, and Abu-Nimer 2005; Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2008; Berkovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). The Culture and Religion in Mediation (CARIM) programme at the Center for Security Studies (CSS) in Zürich reflects extensively on the role of religion and culture in conflict and mediation. The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers aims to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of mediation efforts by strengthening local ownership and supporting the positive role of religious and traditional leaders in mediation processes.

### 1.1.6 Insider mediator/mediation

Until around two decades ago, outsider and neutral/impartial third-party actors were seen as the most effective mediators. The concept of local or insider mediation, and thus the concept of the insider mediator, has received increased attention within peace research in recent years.<sup>15</sup> The fact has been acknowledged that insiders perform mediation with their very own resources, and out of their own innate need to inspire peaceful relationships in their societies. In the discourse of insider peacebuilding, insider mediators are understood as a sub-group within a wider group of insider peacebuilders and are seen to play a very special role insofar as they mediate directly and informally between actors involved in conflict. They are able to fulfil this role on account of their in-depth knowledge of the conflict context, their close relationships with stakeholders, their long-term commitment, willingness to take risks, and their inherent motivation to end violence and promote peaceful coexistence. Besides guiding the mediation process, insider mediators play a strategic role in ensuring continuity between short-term peacemaking responses to periods of crisis and long-term peacebuilding processes.<sup>16</sup> Insider mediators do not necessarily work in isolation; they may also complement other (insider and outsider) peacebuilding actors – a phenomenon that has attracted the attention and interest of international mediators such as the UN and the EU (EPLO 2013; Tamminen 2012; UNDP 2015).

One of the many resources that insider mediators draw on is the conglomeration of religion, faith, spirituality, culture and tradition – values and practices that may serve as a source of inspiration (Mason 2009; Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). Faith-based actors (religious and spiritual leaders, and religious institutions) and traditional actors (elders, indigenous leaders, paramount chiefs and traditional institutions) are “highly respected and their opinions are generally held in high regard within their communities”; they are therefore “often like [...] insider mediators with the moral and spiritual legitimacy to influence the opinions of people [...], [to] mobilize them, to re-humanize the ‘enemy’ by using religious values such as justice for all, forgiveness, harmony, human dignity, and

ultimately to motivate them to work towards peace” (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009, 187).

### 1.2 The current state of research and praxis

The last two decades, and particularly the post-9/11 era, have given rise to rigorous scholarly research on the role of tradition and faith – and thus of traditional and faith-based actors – in conflict and its transformation.<sup>17</sup> This has included contextual analysis and the mapping of faith-based/religious actors’ peacebuilding efforts (See for example: Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009; Hegertun 2010; Candland 2001; Herrington 2011; Haynes 2009; Abu-Nimer 2004; Clark 2010; Goldberg and Blancke 2011; Norenzayan 2013; Banchoff 2008; AOAV 2013; Little and Appleby 2009; HPCR International 2007). Similar studies have considered traditional and indigenous actors (See for example: Mutisi 2011; Logan 2008; USAID 2013; Myers and Shinn 2010; Eberbach et al. 2008; ACCORD 2012; Zartman 2002; Canavera 2006; Rafoss 2005). This has also informed and mobilised peacebuilding praxis: the otherwise dominant liberal (and secular) peacebuilding field has gradually come to acknowledge tradition and faith as intangible but valuable resources that are indispensable in contemporary policies and diplomatic efforts (Bouta, Kadayifci-Orellana, and Abu-Nimer 2005). International and regional initiatives, platforms and networks have emerged to support the peacebuilding efforts of traditional and religious actors.<sup>18</sup> Religious, interreligious, and interfaith peacebuilding have become established approaches in the peacebuilding field.<sup>19</sup> Just to note, the term ‘traditional peacebuilding’ does not describe the field treated by this study, since it refers rather to the tradition of the peacebuilding field itself.

Despite the wealth of knowledge that has been acquired, the Network has observed that support for and coordination with such actors is mostly ad-hoc, non-systematic, and in some contexts non-existent. Knowledge of these actors’ activities is dispersed, limited to specific cases, specific conflict phases and types, and specific countries, and often remains to some extent at the level of anecdotal evidence. The lessons learned and best practices adopted have yet to be framed in more general terms.

15. Wehr and Lederach (1991) were the first to argue and illustrate (in the Nicaraguan context) that, depending on the context, insider-partial actors may be equally or more legitimate mediators than typical outsider-neutral mediators. This has been seminal in propagating an important body of work on insider mediators (see Mason 2009; EU 2012; Elgström, Bercovitch, and Skau 2003; UNDP 2015; EPLO 2013; Gourlay and Ropers 2012; Ropers 2014; Ropers 2012; Hilaire, Smith, and Wachira 2011).

16. Data on the effect of mediation in unarmed insurrections from 1970–2006 suggests that insider mediators significantly increase the likelihood of negotiated agreements being reached (Svensson and Lindgren 2013; Svensson 2013).

17. The works of Scott R. Appleby, Douglas Johnston, Cynthia Sampson, Marc Gopin, Mohammed Abu-Nimer and David Little are particularly prominent here. The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs has conducted an impressive array of analyses, case reports and interviews.

18. These include state actors such as Switzerland, Sweden and Finland; institutes and INGOs such as USIP, Conciliation Resources, ICRD and the Carter Center; and development cooperation entities such as FCA, USAID and UNDP, which have established support initiatives ranging from grassroots projects to international diplomacy, including:

- Platforms for grassroots and regional inter- and intra-faith dialogue: the ‘Interreligious Councils’ set up by Religion for Peace (RfP) and the ‘Cooperation Circles’ of the United Religions Initiative (URI)
- International faith-based diplomacy: International Committee for the Peace Council, World Council of Religious Leaders, Community of Sant’ Egidio, International Interfaith Peace Corps, and National Interreligious Initiative for Peace in the Middle East
- The overarching umbrella platform, The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, aims to nurture knowledge-sharing, cooperation, coordination and synergies by engaging religious and traditional leaders and organisations to support their peacemaking efforts. The Network’s approach to gender includes establishing channels to support female religious and traditional leaders.

19. These approaches offer a valuable institutional framework for peacebuilding within and between faith communities (Umaru 2013). Little and Appleby (2009, 5) define religious peacebuilding as: “the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence” (2009, 5).

It can be argued that these knowledge and support gaps are largely attributable to the fact that the majority of the existing research lacks a clear conceptual approach with respect to which actors are relevant for the discussion of the role of tradition and faith/religion (as discussed in section 1.1.2) and how they are situated and connected in relation to other (peacebuilding) actors. Further clarity at the conceptual level is thus indispensable in order to accurately assess these actors' support needs within their conflict contexts and with regard to other actors in these contexts.

### 1.3 Objectives

This study on tradition- and faith- oriented insider mediators (TFIMs) has been produced using both existing knowledge on insider mediators and tradition- and faith-oriented local peacebuilding, and original data acquired through field studies. Its overarching objectives are to:

- propose a conceptual framework to characterise TFIMs.
- identify the roles played by TFIMs in peace mediation and their approaches.
- reflect on general lessons learnt and best practices of TFIMs in peace mediation.
- stimulate a process of gathering further evidence per-

taining to the above for cross-case knowledge exchange, learning, collaboration and support.

- map existing TFIM support structures and detect support gaps by enquiring into the challenges faced by TFIMs and reflecting on their own limitations (if any).
- propose strategic support structures at the local, national, regional and global levels, which can utilise the opportunities and potential of TFIMs and address the limitations and challenges they face in order to further bolster their peace mediation efforts.

The above will provide the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers with a basic frame of reference and will inform its evolving structure, resourcing decisions and programmatic focus. The Network can also use the qualitative baseline data to develop pilot activities for addressing TFIMs' support needs in selected contexts.

### 1.4 Methodology and data

This study consists of a qualitative analysis of (i) the existing information and knowledge on the subject matter (a desk study which reviews the relevant literature and case studies), and (ii) original data and knowledge acquired through field studies.

## TFIM Baseline Study: Methodology & Data

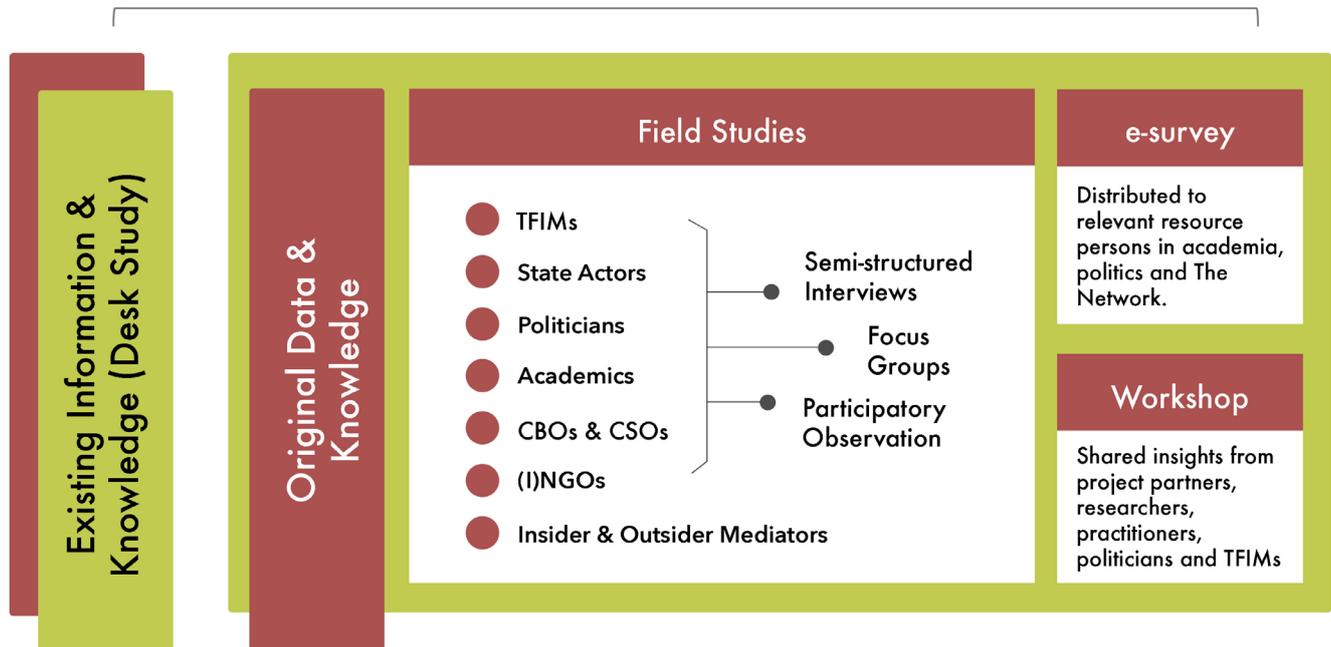


Figure 1: Methodology at a glance

## Field studies

Field studies were carried out in the following six contexts, each for around seven days during March - May 2015.<sup>20</sup>

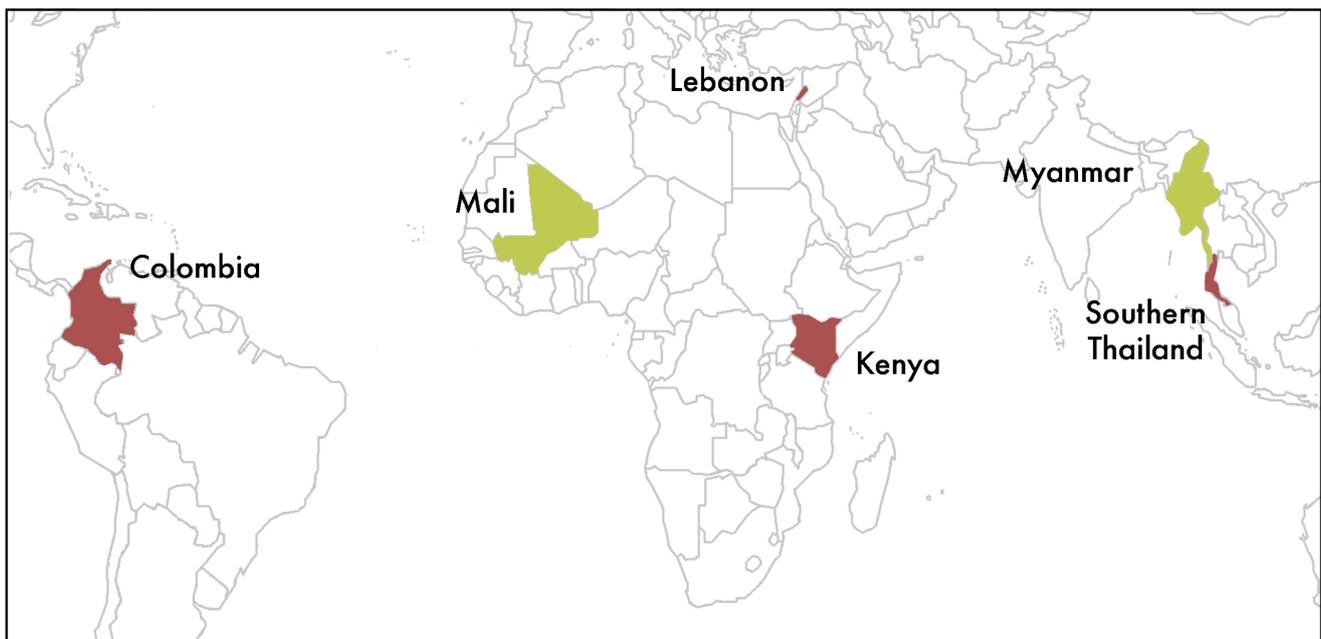


Figure 2: Field case studies

### Case selection

These contexts were selected on the basis of a mapping process using the following criteria. Each case does not of course fulfil *all* the criteria; the idea was rather to have a pragmatic but sufficiently optimal mix and balance of elements within the criteria.

- Relevance for learning and policy-making. Conflict contexts were selected where the Network, the FCA and Berghof are currently engaged in. The rationale was to gain new insights by looking at these contexts with the TFIM concept, which may be useful in informing policies for further engagement.
- Diversity of cultural contexts and conflict premises/types. Conflict contexts from different continents/regions (Southeast Asia, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, South America, and the Middle East) were selected to observe how the roles and functions of TFIMs vary across different types (and phases) of conflict contexts, and how TFIM activities compare in two or more cases with very different cultural contexts but similar conflict premises.

One general consideration was to ensure that there was sufficient access to relevant and dependable interlocutors to make field study in the country feasible; contexts were therefore chosen in which FCA and Berghof had direct contacts in the field.

### Target group

TFIMs were the target group of this study and the central source of information for its baseline data. Nevertheless,

in order to gain a broader (more nuanced and potentially critical) perspective from a number of different angles, other conflict actors and actors were approached for their views on the role and support needs of TFIMs. These were mainly representatives of primary conflict parties, state actors, politicians, academics, local CBOs and CSOs, (I)NGOs, and other insider and outsider mediators.

### Target group selection

TFIMs were selected in these contexts on the basis of the scope of their work, encompassing tracks 1-3 and to some extent influencing policymaking. The assets of leadership, respect and influence were therefore especially important. The following sources were used to identify TFIMs and other relevant actors:

- Tradition- and faith-based actor mapping.
- Insider mediator/peacebuilder mapping to identify those with an orientation on tradition and faith.
- Recommendations from members and partners of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.
- Partners and collaborators of FCA and Berghof, including those located in the field study locations.
- Referrals and connections that arose through conversations with actors on the ground.

### Methods

The field studies, which were carried out by five researchers from Berghof, were comprised of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with the above-mentioned actors, and (where possible) participatory observation of mediation processes.

20. The six case studies are available as individual publications online at [www.peacemakersnetwork.org/tfim](http://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/tfim)

### **Workshop: reflections on the initial findings of the field studies**

On 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2015, a workshop was held at the Berghof Foundation in Berlin to reflect on the insights from the desk and the narratives that emerged from the six field studies. The participants comprised members of the Berghof Foundation and the Network/FCA, researchers and practitioners, politicians, and TFIMs. The interesting mixture of insights and reflections from this workshop has been incorporated into this study.

### **Feedback and e-survey**

In order to further enrich the baseline data, feedback was sought from relevant individuals in academia and senior political positions and from the Network (especially its very insightful advisory group meetings). A structured questionnaire gradually took shape while the field studies were being conducted. This was used to create a web-based form to be filled out by partners and contacts in different conflict contexts around the globe (including those who could not be reached during the six field studies).

## **1.5 Scope and limitations**

The overall scope of the baseline study and its methodology depended on the available budget and resources, and on what was feasible within the timeframe of one year. Furthermore, this is a baseline study with limited resources and scope, and not a comprehensive scientific research project. The baseline data was therefore drawn from a very small number of actors within vast conflict contexts, whose opinions and thoughts reflect their own biases. Some crucial actors, particularly traditional actors in remote areas, were also unreachable due to access and time issues. Though in Southern Thailand, Lebanon, Colombia and Mali, the research was conducted in the local languages, in Kenya and Burma/ Myanmar the language used was English, with a few interpretations required for Myanmar.

## 2 Who are TFIMs?

Unless otherwise indicated, the examples and opinions contained in the following have been drawn from the field notes for this study. Sources have generally not been cited in order to respect requests for confidentiality. In some cases, names have been replaced with *ITALICISED INITIALS*.

In the most basic sense, tradition- & faith-oriented insider mediators (TFIMs) are a specific sub-set of insider mediators who take an assortment of concepts, values and practices from tradition and faith (among other sources) as inspiration, motivation, guidance and as methodological support for their peace mediation efforts. In the following sections, the defining characteristics of TFIMs are elaborated.

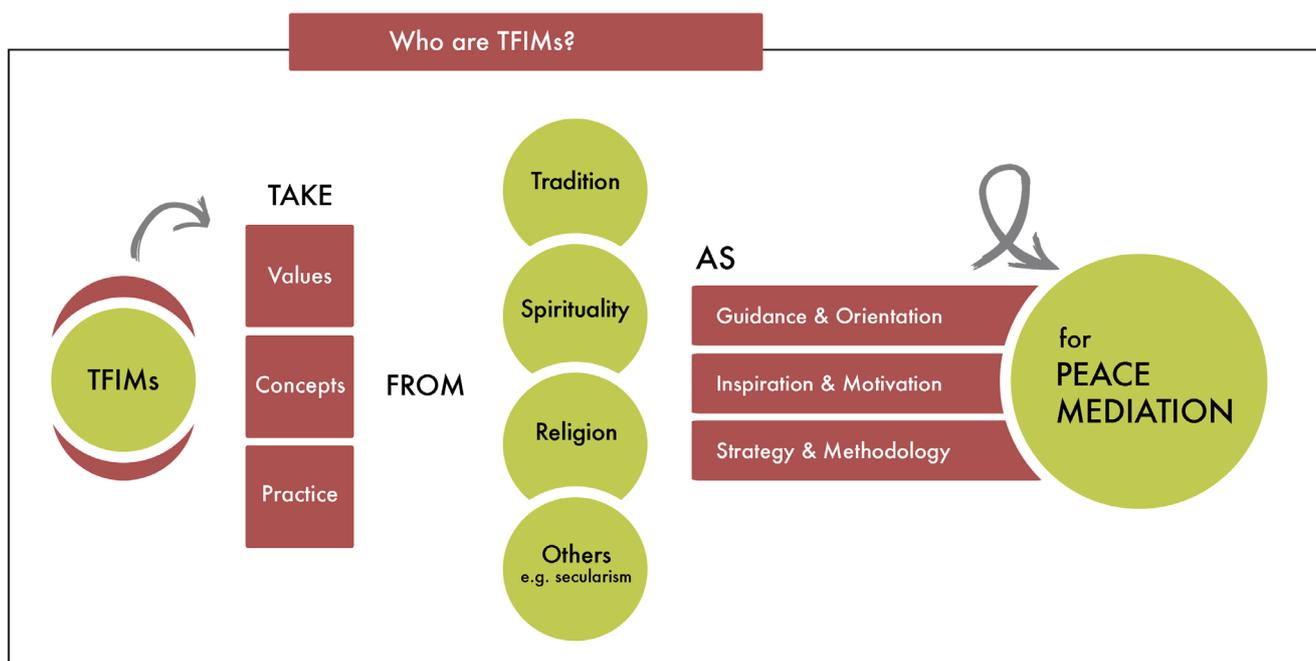


Figure 3: Who are TFIMs?

### 2.1 Evolution and identification

Since religion and tradition are far older than the concepts of nations, states and governments, religious and traditional institutions often enjoy much closer relations with the population. In many societies, religious institutions (e.g. the Catholic Church in Colombia or the monasteries in Myanmar) may even substitute for the state by providing basic services like health and education, and constitute the main (and often the only) 'service point' in rural communities. In rural contexts, informal mediation capacities provided by religious or traditional institutions are perceived to be more effective than the legal court system, since they are usually not bureaucratic or politicised. Urban contexts usually have fewer examples as such. Agreements in intra- or inter-community conflicts are reached faster and are more likely to be accepted by all of the conflict parties. Traditional authorities or elders in various parts of Africa continue to

constitute reference points for (rural) communities on social issues. In Buddhist societies, members of the monastic clergy are relied on in various aspects of life. These actors are usually multifaceted and perform, adopt and adapt to multiple roles within their communities depending on the latter's needs, including the role of TFIMs.<sup>21</sup>

In light of the broader role of tradition and faith as dimensions within conflict, however, it is imperative that a wider set of actors is considered. According to our basic conceptual framework, TFIMs:

- Can be identified as those whose social position and function (i.e. who they are) is explicitly defined by tradition and religion and/or whose inspiration, motivation, strategies and methodologies (i.e. their reasons for doing what they do and how they do it) are implicitly shaped by tradition and religion.

21. See section 3.1 for a discussion of the diverse roles performed by TFIMs.

- ‘Constructively’ manifest elements of tradition and faith in their peace mediation efforts.
- Are ‘insiders’ insofar as they belong to the communities concerned, but are also respected and trusted by other communities since they are seen as ‘fair’ mediators who do not privilege one conflict actor over another. Their ‘insiderness’ may vary in space and time.
- Facilitate dialogical processes that create and nurture space for conflict transformation.
- Enjoy the moral legitimacy and respect required to influence the opinions and perceptions of conflict stakeholders, whether or not tradition and religion play a part in the conflict itself.
- May either be ‘authoritative mediators’ at top-levels or ‘social network mediators’ at the intermediate and grassroots levels.<sup>22</sup>

The role of authoritative TFIMs tends to be prescriptive and doctrinaire. These mediators usually have close relations with state-level and international actors, and often have a political stake in the conflict. In some cases, they have the potential to exert a significant influence on policy, while in others their mediation efforts fail to trickle down to the grassroots level and may exclude certain societal groups. Such authoritative TFIMs include:

- **Religious authorities and elites:** individuals who represent religious institutions (bishops, sheikhs, muftis, abbots, monks, rabbis), or spiritual leaders with visibility and ‘followers’ at a national level.
- **Traditional authorities and elites:** individuals who represent traditional, indigenous or customary systems of authority or authoritative institutions, or who preside over village-level or tribal associations and indigenous civil society networks (village chiefs, tribal judges, senior headmen). In certain cases (particularly in cultures where traditions are primarily rooted in religion), a single person (or entity) may be both a traditional and a religious authority (e.g. sheikhs and monks).<sup>23</sup> In many societies, elders unofficially assume such roles.<sup>24</sup>

Social network mediators focus on people and relationships and tend to take a dialogical approach. They are often more flexible and active than the authoritative mediators described above; they have access to a wider network, their work is broader in scope, and they can influence and mobilise followers more easily than elites. They engage in multi-track diplomacy and are often able to influence policymaking at the macro-political level by initiating and facilitating track 1.5 processes. Such mediators include:

- **Mid-level religious actors:** abbots and monks attached to Buddhist monasteries, bishops, priests and

pastors from the Christian Church, imams, monks, and nuns. Their influence at the community level is generally very high and they are therefore able to mobilise large numbers of people with ease.<sup>25</sup>

- **Faith-based organisations (FBOs):** NGOs, CSOs and CBOs with implicit or explicit associations with a single faith or with multiple faiths (e.g. interfaith organisations). They may be local and independent organisations, or local bodies within international FBOs/networks, and may or may not be connected to religious institutions.
- **Tradition- and faith-oriented community and civil society actors:** a wide range of individuals and organisations (NGOs, CSOs and CBOs), including community leaders, women’s groups, artists, educators, politicians, and entrepreneurs, who are not ‘expressly’ tradition- or faith-based, but who engage with elements of tradition and religion and collaborate with, support or empower all of the above actors.

#### **Tradition- and faith-oriented community and civil society actors**

are seldom featured in the prevalent discourse on traditional and faith-based actors. The case studies have however shown that TFIMs in this category contribute a great deal to insider mediation, often with remarkable transformational effect. One explanation for this is that they are usually ‘moderate’ and in a more advantageous position than the others, in not being necessarily subject to doctrinal pressure of religious institutions. They engage either ‘on principle’ or ‘strategically’ with elements of tradition and religion in their peace mediation work, and often in tandem with TFIMs in the other categories. There are cases where they constructively challenge and address blind spots of predominant religious and traditional norms and practices and succeed in evoking paradigm shifts in people’s attitude and behaviour.

The best example to illustrate such TFIMs is the late Kenyan, Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, whose peace mediation efforts uniquely and skilfully combined traditional, religious and secular approaches. A self-proclaimed woman of faith, coming from a conservative and patriarchal Somali society, she demonstrated how women can gain respect as leaders in their patriarchal societies, and how such societies can be transformed with dedication and persistence. She mediated across religious and ethnic divides using elements from the same religions and traditions that were part of the dimensions of the conflicts. (See for example: Abdi 2008; CPCS 2014; Jenner and Abdi 2000; Maletta 2002).

22. Derived from Moore (2004) who describes three general mediator roles: social network mediators, authoritative mediators, and independent mediators, where the latter category pertains to outsider-partial mediators.

23. This issue was raised a number of times in discussions on this study, i.e. whether such actors should be conceived as religious or traditional. This dichotomy is however not useful, since what matters most and is most interesting is how such actors utilise elements of tradition and faith in their peace mediation efforts.

24. As Keulder (2000, 154) writes: “traditional leaders are individuals that are appointed by members of a specific, ethnically-defined community by means of the accepted customs of the day, to preside over that community.”

25. Lederach’s (1997) three-level pyramid of ‘actors and approaches to peacebuilding’ puts great emphasis on mid-level religious leaders.

## 2.2 Position and engagement

The concept of a TFIM is not to be seen as static, since the dynamic nature of conflict means that TFIMs' roles, forms of engagement, and relationships with conflict stakeholders are in constant flux. They therefore need to continually monitor their influence and legitimacy. Committed TFIMs are usually able to remain dynamic by positioning themselves within a collective that maintains informal networks involving a variety of actors (often at the regional level). A unique characteristic of TFIMs, especially social network mediators, is the fluid manner in which they are able to situate themselves and operate along different tracks within a peace process, bridging track 2 and 3 efforts and track 1 diplomacy. Gourlay and Ropers modify Lederach's (1997) classic pyramid model to include insider mediators (see Figure 4) who "have horizontal links to the conflicting parties, particularly at the middle leadership level, and at the same time can also reach out vertically to tracks 1 and 3" (Gourlay and Ropers 2012, 95). There are two types of insider mediators: (i) those who explicitly work as interlocutors and bridge-builders between the different parties involved in (violent) conflict, and (ii) those who only work

with one party, concentrating mending on internal differences.<sup>26</sup> This was indeed observed of TFIMs in some of the case studies. In Myanmar, bishops and pastors from the Karen Baptist Church take one or the other role: some mediate with the different Karen armed factions, while others work with other high level mediators to attempt to bring the various factions into dialogue with the state and the military.

Gourlay and Ropers (*ibid.*, 95) suggest not to "expand the category of insider mediators to subsume all kinds of peace engagement, e.g. peace advocacy, the monitoring of conflict and peace, protection, peace education, trauma work, etc. It makes most sense to interpret the insider mediators as a sub-group within the wider group of insider peacebuilders. The unique feature of insider mediators in this context is that they engage directly in communications with representatives from the disputing parties". This however should not mean that the scope of insider mediators' work is limited to 'engaging directly in communications with representatives from the disputing parties'. They can, in fact, be seen in other peace engagements as well. One clichéd way of putting this is: 'all insider mediators are

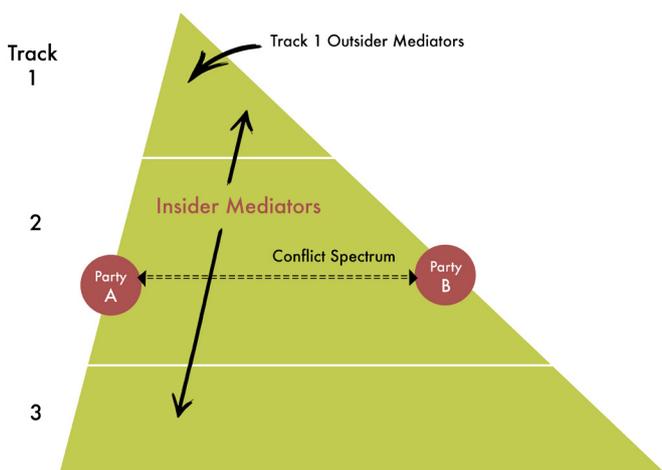


Figure 4: Locating insider mediators  
Adapted from [www.deepsouthwatch.org/dsj/3520](http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/dsj/3520)

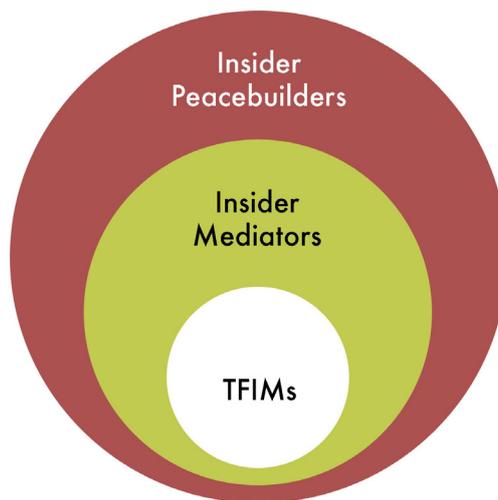


Figure 5: Locating TFIMs

insider peacebuilders, but not all insider peacebuilders are insider mediators'. This also applies to TFIMs – a 'sub-set' of insider mediators (see Figure 5), with unique resources of tradition and faith (and others). As the field studies have revealed, within a cyclical peacebuilding process, as necessitated by the phase and level of the conflict, a TFIM may take on multiple roles. These roles can indeed be within various peace engagements and may or may not exhibit exploitation of tradition and faith (see more in chapter 3).

High-level authoritative TFIMs in certain contexts have major influence in politics. In Asia, for example, there is a long tradition of state officials (who often do not have the time to think strategically about certain issues) consulting

tradition- and faith-based non-state actors about significant decisions (CHD 2010, 6). This is indeed commonplace in many collectivist societies. While in many conflict contexts, there are TFIMs operating at the track 1 level, significant and sustainable processes are usually initiated and facilitated by mid-level leaders, who are more flexible and more numerous than top-level leaders, and who can take advantage of their access to both the grassroots level and to higher levels of leadership (Lederach 1995; Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). In some of the field studies, meaningful peace mediation by top-level TFIMs was observed, yet grassroots TFIM initiatives were reported to be more abundant and in some ways more successful.

26. This insight is drawn from the experience and observation of Norbert Ropers, a peacebuilder based in Southeast Asia.

Tracks can also be conceived in terms of multi-track diplomacy, which turns the (otherwise hierarchal) ordering of tracks 1-3 into an interconnected circle, in which no one track is independent from the others; each track is associated with its own resources, values, and approaches, but since they are all linked, they can operate more powerfully when they are coordinated (Diamond and McDonald 1996). In Figure 6, 'Track 7 – Religion' represents the beliefs and peace-oriented actions of spiritual and religious communities (ibid.).

### 2.3. Networking and collaboration

There is an argument that 'mediation systems', as opposed to ad-hoc efforts, need to be in place in order to deal with conflicts systemically. To this end, insider mediators often form 'network of networks' around themselves to ensure that they remain in close touch with the relevant conflict

dynamics (Mason 2009, 13–14). Leaders, for that matter, do not work alone, but often take on co-leadership roles. Often there are networks of organisations (CSOs, NGOs, INGOs) that support their efforts. These organisations may or may not have religious and/or traditional affiliations, but they recognise the potential of TFIMs and share a common vision of peace. There are also faith-based organisations, such as the Quakers, who support the work of TFIMs regardless of the latter's tradition or faith orientation. An analysis of TFIMs that did not consider these networks and the way in which they operate and interact would therefore be incomplete. Certain TFIM efforts fail to achieve sustainability just because they are not sufficiently aligned with other initiatives, such as civil society efforts. The network of networks works best when it involves an exchange of ideas and a sharing of responsibilities, particularly across the local, national, regional and international spheres (ibid.).

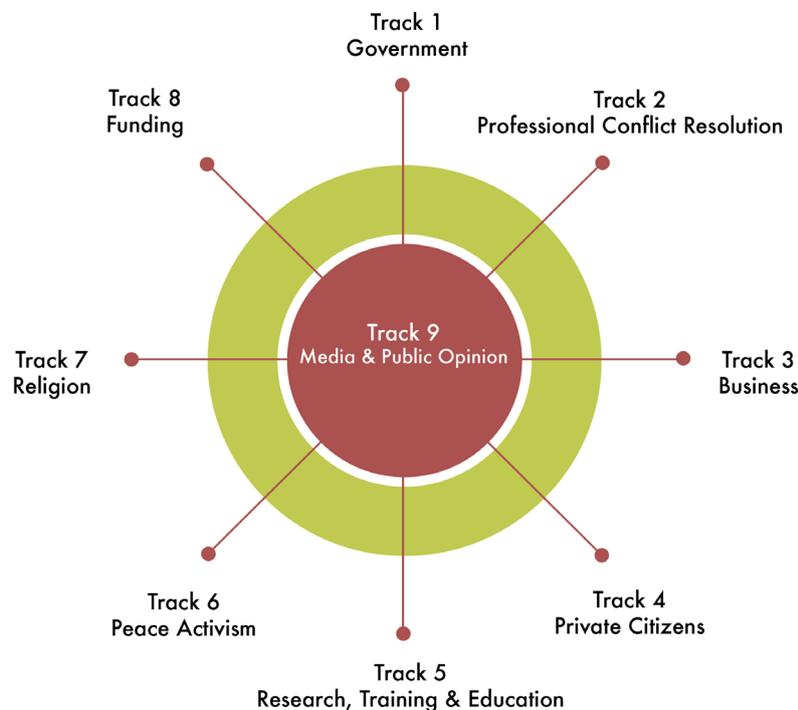


Figure 6: Multi-Track Diplomacy

Adapted from [www.imtd.org/index.php/about/84-about/131-what-is-multi-track-diplomacy](http://www.imtd.org/index.php/about/84-about/131-what-is-multi-track-diplomacy)

In Myanmar, inspiring initiatives have been established in which certain TFIMs (individuals and organisations) make it possible for religious leaders from different denominations to come together under one roof and get to know one another, explore common ground and collaboratively shape pathways to serve the common good of the community. These initiatives are then further connected to hotspots in other parts of the country. Regional and international actors are also involved in these processes. Examples of similar collaborative structures for interfaith dialogue and action were also observed in Lebanon.

### 2.3 Insiderness and outsidership

Whether an actor is an insider or an outsider is really a matter of perspective. This depends to a great extent on the social status, function, and personal qualities of the TFIM, and how she establishes relationships with the members of the community, but it also depends on the collective mindset of the community, i.e. on whether they accept her as a mediator. In Myanmar, for example, monks and church representatives are generally highly respected across religions. In the predominantly Muslim Garissa County in Kenya, by contrast, pastors would not be allowed to participate in mediating an intra-faith (Muslim) conflict.

Depending on the conflict context, a TFIM may have to walk a fine insider/outsider line, so that she is enough of an insider to be subjectively interested in the process (to empathise with the interests and emotions surrounding the conflict), and enough of an outsider to remain objective (to consider the needs of the conflict system in a holistic manner).

Examples can also be found of 'regional insiders' – those who, on account of their religious or ethnic identity, may become legitimate mediators in a context other than their own (e.g. elders across African contexts or certain monks in South/Southeast Asia). The work of many TFIMs is indeed carried out at the regional level. It often has to do with commonalities in conflict dynamics among neigh-

bouring nations and regional dynamics that affect the local conflict context. In Southeast Asia, for example, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) brings together monks from various countries and trains them to act as mediators across borders. Africa has its own set of regional support structures for the cross-border mobilisation of TFIMs, including the African Insider Mediators Platform (AIMP), the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Catholic Church representatives are well connected across Latin America through cross-border mediation retreats and an important role is played in the Middle East by the Arab Group for Christian Muslim Dialogue.

### 3 What do TFIMs do, and how do they do it?

Depending on the different phases and levels of the conflicts they engage in, TFIMs take on various proactive and reactive peace mediation roles, which can best be described as dialogical processes that create and nurture space and possibilities for conflict transformation. The essential characteristics of TFIMs in contrast with other peacebuilders are (a) that they have a specific set of (traditional, religious and other) resources that may give them the upper hand in certain contexts, and (b) that TFIMs are usually involved at multiple stages in the spectrum or cycle of peace mediation activities. As a TFIM interviewee stated, “mediation is not something you choose to do, but a response to the situation and the need [for] dialogue.”

This ensures the continuity and sustainability of their peace mediation efforts. In the following sections, TFIMs’ roles, assets and approaches are explicated.

#### 3.1 Peace mediation roles

The data gathered from the six case studies indicates the diversity and high context-specificity of TFIMs’ peace mediation roles. Nevertheless, TFIM activities can be categorised according to four overall roles that can be seen as interconnected via a cyclical process of social change and conflict transformation (Figure 7).



Figure 7: TFIMs’ peace mediation roles

#### 3.1.1 Engender peaceful coexistence

TFIMs serve as interlocutors in communities by creating spaces in which perceptions and prejudices about ‘the other’ are challenged through constructive dialogue. Some TFIMs “look to spiritual principles and traditions as a basis for establishing common ground” for bridge-building, which “assumes a pluralistic vision for a community and provides the framework for forging unity out of diversity” (Johnston 2003, 19). By sensitising multi-ethnic/multi-religious communities about the ‘need for peace’, some TFIMs are able to engender peaceful coexistence more

than any other kind of peacebuilding actors. Traditional and religious healing and reconciliation rituals can have profound effects during post-war periods or after violent acts have been committed in the community, i.e. in periods when trauma and wounds need to be healed so that broken relationships can be rebuilt and people can come to terms with coexisting again. These may include intra- and inter-faith dialogue, which is widely practiced all over the world. In some cases, dialogue is expanded to include action through diapraxis.<sup>27</sup>

27. Diapraxis = dialogue+praxis or ‘dialogue in action’. It is an interfaith practice that aims to develop mutual appreciation among people of different faiths by working together on common projects, usually humanitarian community development initiatives of various kinds (See for example: Mason and Kartas 2010; Mason and Stein 2011; Mason and Sguaitamatti 2011).

Lebanon	<p>The interfaith organisation Adyan creates space for interfaith encounters that encourage a culture of mutual understanding between people from different religious groups, by stressing the value of religious diversity and promoting the coexistence of communities in relationships of mutual respect.</p> <p>The Islamic-Christian National Committee for Dialogue, comprising representatives of all eighteen officially recognised communities, addresses inter-confessional violence.</p>
Kenya	<p>The ‘coffee club’—a creative dialogue forum established by a pastor in Nairobi – encourages young people from different ethnic backgrounds to come together, get to know one another, discuss issues pertaining to their communities, and become more politically aware and active.</p>
Southern Thailand	<p>Group counselling is used by some Buddhist monks with local Buddhists and other monks who feel a great deal of fear and hatred toward Muslims.</p> <p>Recommendations made by TFIMs to incorporate healing measures and compensation schemes for victims at the national policy level were acted upon.</p> <p>TFIMs facilitate workshops where imams, village headmen, district heads, or natural leaders – who are often the main conflict parties in local communities – are invited to discuss issues concerning community development, but the main focus is to strengthen and build bridges between the parties, since establishing good relationships can serve to reduce tension in the community and protect young people from recruitment by insurgent movements.</p>
Myanmar	<p>In the Mandalay region, an interfaith group led by Buddhist, Muslim, Bahaii, Christian and Hindu religious leaders, and incorporating young volunteers from all religions, engages in diapraxis, bringing together community members of different faiths to actively solve local environmental or economic problems.</p> <p>Group counselling is used by Buddhist monks with local Buddhists and monks who feel a great deal of fear and hatred toward Muslims.</p>

### 3.1.2 Respond to violence with short-term and long-term schemes

Due to the respect they command, TFIMs are often entrusted with spontaneous, ad-hoc and needs-based mediation in attempts to de-escalate violent conflicts. TFIMs are often the first responders to incidents of violence, managing the tense aftermath by providing a safety net, shelter and psychological support, along with cool-headed and persistent dialogue between the conflicting parties to ensure that retaliation is avoided and that dialogue continues. Since they have a great deal of understanding and empathy for the root causes of such violence, TFIMs help vulnerable communities to develop long-term alternatives to violence.

Addressing the political and economic roots of so-called ‘violent extremism’ and their relation to structural forms of violence such as marginalisation is largely the state’s responsibility. Nevertheless, some argue that faith-oriented actors are best suited to being at the forefront of P/CVE<sup>28</sup>, since the sources of and the solution to extremist violence share a common root: religion (Nozell 2014). Indeed, in the relevant field studies, TFIMs were guiding processes that strive to address some of the factors that elicit radical narratives. They provide psycho-social support to actors who are vulnerable to recruitment, offer corrective interpretations of religious dogma through education and their preaching, and deliver intra-faith counter-narratives in an attempt to prevent recruitment by such groups.

Mali	<p>Sporadic intra-religious conflicts are mainly mediated by religious leaders (such as imams, cadis or marabouts), via consultations between conflicting religious groups, or by imams from other communities.</p> <p>Resource conflicts are often dealt with through village councils, and traditional chiefs have had much success in facilitating mediation initiatives, particularly between various northern communities, including the community pacts signed during the 1990s.</p>
Kenya	<p>Traditional and religious leaders and local peace committees are unofficially the primary mediators in sporadic clan-based and pastoral conflicts. They are well placed to engage with the situation as soon as security forces have succeeded in establishing some measure of calm, and to employ traditional mechanisms to ensure swift justice and establish order.</p> <p>In the suburbs of Nairobi, where levels of violence are high due to the ethnic divide, poverty, drug abuse, internal displacement, and the political manipulation of young people, a small number of very small CBOs, e.g. the Pumwani Interfaith Organisation (PIO), work via interfaith platforms to support youth empowerment, with the long-term goal of tackling Al Shabaab recruitment.</p>
Southern Thailand	<p>The Inter-Religious Council for Peace is well placed to curb conflict escalation in the aftermath of violent incidents, since the victim group is often quick to assume that the act was committed by a person of a different faith.</p> <p>In light of the recent rise in incidents of violence against Muslims, socially engaged monastic schools are also taking steps to adapt their curriculum so as to sensitise monks to the perils of extremism.</p>
Myanmar	<p>During the Mandalay riots in 2012, TFIMs played a very active role in reducing violence and providing shelter to victims in churches and monasteries.</p>

28. ‘Extremist’ violence is a contentious term in peacebuilding jargon. The related expressions, ‘countering/preventing violent extremism (CVE/PVE)’ are problematic and often conflict-insensitive, since they usually connote counter-terrorism, post 9/11, and a ‘self-evident’ sole focus on religion (Islam in particular). The field of P/CVE is relatively new, and much reflective learning and trial-and-error remains to be done—a nuanced discussion of this is nevertheless beyond the scope of this study. What would be helpful here is a sound and conflict-sensitive conceptual framework for understanding and engaging with actors who adhere to political philosophies, ideologies and agendas that are expressed by them and/or perceived by others as being ‘primarily’ based on religion, and which come to be manifested in violent acts (whether physical, psychological, structural, etc.).

### 3.1.3 Facilitate peace processes in protracted armed conflict by involving armed actors (state and non-state) and communities

Not only in our six case studies, but also in many other conflict contexts, TFIMs play an unparalleled role in facilitating intra- and inter-group dialogue to encourage state and non-state (e.g. resistance and liberation movement (RLM)) armed actors to reach ceasefire agreements and find political solutions to conflict. Interestingly, empirical research shows that faith-based mediation primarily occurs in situations where religion is not itself a dimension

of the conflict.<sup>29</sup> As part of communities suffering from the ills of violence and war, TFIMs represent their communities' interests with armed actors, e.g. by negotiating access to food and other basic livelihood needs and security requirements, and intervening to prevent the recruitment of minors. Furthermore, they are often asked to be observers in peace processes or to act as ceasefire monitors. TFIMs have also proved to be adept at liberating non-state prisoners from state captivity and freeing hostages (civilian, state actors, internationals) from non-state organisations.

Myanmar	The Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) has brokered many ceasefire agreements between Myanmar's various ethnic insurgent groups and the military junta. The Nyein (Shalom) Foundation continues this trend, though focusses more on back-room mediation and negotiation preparation. Church leaders in Karen, Chin and Kayah have also played very significant roles in the past; their engagement is gradually morphing into collaborative action involving civil society actors.
Mali	In Kidal (the centre of power of the MNLA), the Haut Conseil Islamique du Mali (HCIM) reportedly played a central role in mediating the liberation of 160 Malian military personnel from the hands of the Tuareg rebels in 2012. The cultural association Gina Dogon helped to successfully mediate a prisoner release deal in the region of Goundam Circle in May 2015, using local traditional communication methods such as <i>Sinagouya/Sanankuya</i> ('cousinage à plaisanterie'). <sup>30</sup>
Colombia	The Catholic Church has used "dialogues pastorales" (pastoral dialogues) to mediate between communities and armed groups in order to negotiate access to food, improve security conditions, and prevent the recruitment of minors. The President of the Episcopal Conference was part of the government's negotiation team, mediating on issues including imprisoned ELN members and the liberation of hostages. Representatives of the Catholic Church guided a mediation process on de-mining between the ELN and the Mi-coahumado community. Since the negotiations were undertaken under the 'auspices' of the Catholic Church, this helped the community maintain its efforts within a form of legal framework.
Southern Thailand	In the Bugeta community, the Waeng district, and the Narathiwat province, intensive TFIM groundwork using religious principles to strengthen community relations has resulted in a significant decline in recruitment by militant groups. Some TFIMs work as 'indirect connectors', facilitating the involvement of outsider-neutral mediators in contexts where they themselves lack sufficient trust and credibility among the conflicting parties.

### 3.1.4 Mobilise nonviolent action for social change

Some TFIMs are adept at promoting and initiating constructive, nonviolent action for social change. This constitutes a broader empowerment framework involving dialogical learning, which TFIMs stimulate in various forms, and which has diverse implications. This may, for example, take the form of awareness-raising about democracy, human rights, justice, development and peace, i.e. giving

communities the political capacities to demand their (marginalised) rights. It might also involve experiential learning forums that challenge perceptions and worldviews in order to alter behaviour, attitudes, negative stereotypes, and mindsets, and to re-humanise the 'other'. This helps to develop social and human capacities for sustainable change, and approaches

29. Refer to Johnstone and Svensson (2013) for a detailed study on faith-based mediation involving diplomatic initiatives by religious organisations to settle armed conflicts through dialogue processes. This was the first global cross-country dataset using descriptive analysis to map the empirical landscape of faith-based mediation in armed conflicts around the world between 1989 and 2008.

30. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanankuya>; [http://base.afrique-gouvernance.net/fr/corpus\\_dph/fiche-dph-314.html](http://base.afrique-gouvernance.net/fr/corpus_dph/fiche-dph-314.html)

Myanmar	KKL is a passionate TFIM who is highly adept at training new TFIMs and who does not shy away from discussing how her religious and cultural upbringing shapes her work. She also notes that her exposure to other cultures and conceptions of conflict transformation has informed her work. Her creative and human-centred approach is based on a very simple idea, namely that bigotry is rooted in a fear of the 'unknown', so that if a safe space can be created, an otherwise unlikely encounter can be staged which will allow the unknown to become known, and the rest will simply follow from basic human instincts. An experiential learning process serves to challenge perceptions and worldviews, helps alter attitudes and negative stereotypes and provides a way of re-humanising the 'other'.
Lebanon	The teaching and practice of 'engaged Buddhism' addresses the various socio-political issues that contribute to different conflict contexts. Connected to regional networks like the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), TFIMs run socially engaged monastic schools where monks are trained to be leaders in peacebuilding.
Kenya	Adyan brings together pairs of religious leaders and members of their communities to carry out joint community projects that empower them to better address conflict. In 2013 Adyan collaborated with various religious authorities such as Dar al-Fatwa, the Higher Shi'a Council, and the Council of the Druze Community to successfully lobby for the adoption of a National Charter for Education on Living Together, which introduced the concepts of inclusive citizenship and religious diversity into the national curricula.
Southern Thailand	Pastors and sheikhs in Nairobi and Garissa engage in regular dialogue with their communities about how to gain critical mass in demanding their rights from the county/central government. TFIMs provide training for officials on how to apply nonviolent tactics with demonstrators, peaceful third-party intervention, and the relations between conflict and religion. Aspects of the nonviolent intervention training run by faith-based CSOs have been taken up by the Border Police and incorporated into the police training curriculum.

### 3.2 Assets and approaches

Myanmar's Reverend Saboi Jum articulated the preconditions for the success of dialogue as follows: "For keeping genuine peace, it is not durable by only taking a business or political approach but go with a heart-to-heart approach. What I mean is moral integrity, including loving kindness, sympathy and honesty" (Thein 2012). This heart-to-heart approach forms the basis of TFIM mediation, as many of the interviewees in the field studies affirmed. TFIMs are better equipped to engage with the value and meaning systems that religion and tradition bring to human worldviews. Making direct references to religion and tradition, they can 'improvise' with the relevant range of values in the manner of piano keys that can be combined in chords and progressions in infinite patterns to stimulate new perceptions, as is required in constructive approaches to dealing with conflict.<sup>31</sup> TFIM efforts constitute what Johnston terms 'faith-based track 2 diplomacy', which supplements official track 1 diplomacy. "Its motivating vision of politics, its assumptions about human nature and the political order, and the norms that govern its conduct all arise from an understanding of the nature and activity of the divine – understood in some traditions as a personal God and in other traditions as the source of meaning and existence" (Cox and Philpott 2001, 1).

While faith provides their orienting compass, many TFIMs also draw upon secular expertise when it comes to conflict resolution and analysis, political science and philosophy, community development, and so on. With regard to the Somalian conflict, for example, Herrington (2011) reflected on how faith-based diplomacy might promote moderate religious nationalism by unifying disparate groups and cooperating with moderate Muslims who can

help protect minority Christians and Sufi Muslims by reminding radical thinkers of the Quranic injunctions that prohibit harming the people of the Abrahamic tradition. Moderate TFIMs encourage communities to study their own religions in order to become better followers, and to study other religions in order to discover common threads.

#### Religion, faith, spirituality

The approach taken by TFIMs and the resources they draw upon may have a religious or traditional character, a mixture of both religious and traditional elements, or may not (visibly) include such elements at all. In many cases, the social respect enjoyed by TFIMs and their status as moral authorities may be more relevant than the particular approach they take. In conflict contexts with a religious dimension, faith-based TFIMs may not necessarily invoke religious elements in their mediation work (though they may have been intrinsically guided by them). This was the case, for example, in Kenya and Myanmar. By contrast, in conflict contexts with no intrinsic religious dimension, TFIMs may still be able to use religious and traditional elements to guide people away from violence. This was the case in Colombia, Mali and Kenya. According to TFIMs, their strategy largely depends on what appeals most to the conflict stakeholders and on what is really at stake in the conflict.

In Kenya's Turkana County, Bishop Korir and the county-appointed peace ambassador, Emmanuel Ichor Imana, have made a significant difference to the pastoral conflict dynamics in the North Rift Valley by fusing religious, traditional and other conflict resolution tools.<sup>32</sup> The approach can also range from high-powered (directive) to low-powered (facilitative) modes of mediation. Often TFIMs use

31. Thanks for this analogy to Ambassador Aref Ali Nayed, who participated in a workshop of the study.

32. As stated in case study interviews. See also Korir (2009).

their authority to ensure that belligerents engage in dialogue and promise to stick to agreements. Where other more sensitive issues are concerned, they facilitate the process as a perceived neutral actor.

Spirituality transcends the usual strictures of organised religion. The more entrenched and emotional foundations of conflict actors' behavioural patterns may be accessed through this spiritual dimension, which may then motivate them to reflect on their own attitudes and actions (Johnston and Sampson 1994). Reconciliation, for example, lends itself to a spiritual approach because it touches the very heart and soul of the individual. TFIMs who are traditional spiritual leaders may not belong to an organised religion but still play a spiritual role, often one that is localised within a specific community.

In conflicts that do not themselves have a religious dimension, certain TFIMs may still draw positively on religious elements, e.g. in Colombia, Mali and Kenya, where TFIMs have used their position of respect and their authoritative status to guide people away from violence. In promoting reconciliation and peaceful coexistence and facilitating nonviolent processes to address inequality, marginalisation and oppression, TFIMs endeavour to positively invoke religious and traditional dimensions through symbolism and rituals.

In intra-group conflicts involving Muslims, the Shura (consultative) principle is often adhered to, which, like the democratic principle, states that all persons in society are equal and that the view of the majority should be the main method for deciding on public issues.<sup>33</sup> Interfaith mediation processes that aim to restore social order and/or prevent violence focus on the concept of 'unity in plurality', emphasising what unites the conflicting parties. TFIMs invoke elements from religious texts, narratives, myths and stories shared by both faiths to encourage forgiveness and mutual understanding and to emphasise the importance of justice, reconciliation, and peace. In Lebanon, faith-based groups and religious leaders such as Shuyukh, imams, and judges from the Sunni Shari'a courts use religious and spiritual resources to encourage conflicting parties to aspire to a common agreement.

### **Tradition, indigeneity, culture**

The traditional and indigenous elements of local peacebuilding efforts are based on "long-established practice and local custom" (Mac Ginty 2008, 145–146), often in the form of customary and indigenous rules, laws, and procedures, but also in the form of an assortment of symbols and rituals that focus on the psycho-social dimension of conflict and its transformation in a process-oriented manner (Boege 2011). Using such traditional approaches in their purest forms theoretically enables local actors to exercise their agency and become partners in the peacebuilding process, rather than simply remaining its beneficiaries. Insider mediators are particularly prominent in more traditional societies that rely heavily on interpersonal trust and personal relationships (Wehr and Lederach 1991).

Tradition is therefore an indispensable resource employed by TFIMs in mediation processes. In many African contexts, traditional authorities are important societal actors who fulfil a range of different functions, mediation being one of them. Africa is a prime example of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms being embedded within a diverse range of cultures, which place the interests of the group above those of the individual, and therefore place great emphasis on reconciliation, healing and reintegration on the basis of long-standing relationships and values. In Mali, Ghana and Kenya, for example, such traditions are very strong, while in Nigeria they are not. Informally organised mediation processes based on certain Arabic traditions use shaming, public embarrassment and guilt as strategic elements. At the same time, these processes also involve Islamic values and principles such as justice for all, forgiveness and human dignity. Like Shura (the consultative principle) in Islam, most of the different mediation processes in Africa are consensus-based. The *mechu* (friendship) mechanism in Western Ethiopia was developed to resolve ethnic conflicts by creating an environment of tolerance and mutual coexistence; Somalia's *guurti* (councils of elders) help to achieve consensus among warring clans (Myers and Shinn 2010). In Sudan, *judiyya* (customary mediation) is used to mediate resource conflicts between and within pastoral and agricultural groups (ACCORD 2012). Nevertheless, it is again important to take a non-romanticised view of traditional and religious peacebuilding practices – a traditional mechanism, for example, may in fact give rise to the marginalisation of, or apathy towards, elements of society such as women.

### **Hybridisation**

In an increasingly globalised world, indigeneity and tradition evolve through varying degrees of hybridisation. Most of the TFIMs in the field studies have a hybridised repertoire, which consists of a wide range of concepts and resources acquired through their openness, personal interests, and exposure to different cultures. In certain contexts, traditional and religious attributes are intertwined and evolve together in patterns that are unique to those contexts. One TFIM, for example, identified herself as Christian, but asserted that her approach and orientation is inspired not only by the Bible, but also by the Quran and other, non-religious cultural and traditional attributes of the community/region in which she was born. Another TFIM who was not affiliated with a Christian institution was strongly influenced by the Bible and used Biblical readings in her mediation efforts. While in some contexts conflict transformation may require a purist traditional or religious approach, other contexts may respond better to hybridised approaches that mix religion, secularism, tradition and modernity. The success or failure of a TFIM's mediation efforts thus depends very much on how innovatively they adapt their approach to the context in question. In Kenya, local peace committees have been exemplary in adopting both traditional and modern conflict intervention mechanisms.

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33. In practice, however, Shura is largely patriarchal and does not involve the consultation of women.

### Personal/organisational characteristics

The diagram below contains a set of interconnected and interdependent characteristics that provide a positive characterisation of TFIMs. Not all of these attributes will

of course be present or magnified in one person; TFIMs are human beings (or human beings within organisational structures) with human flaws and shortcomings.

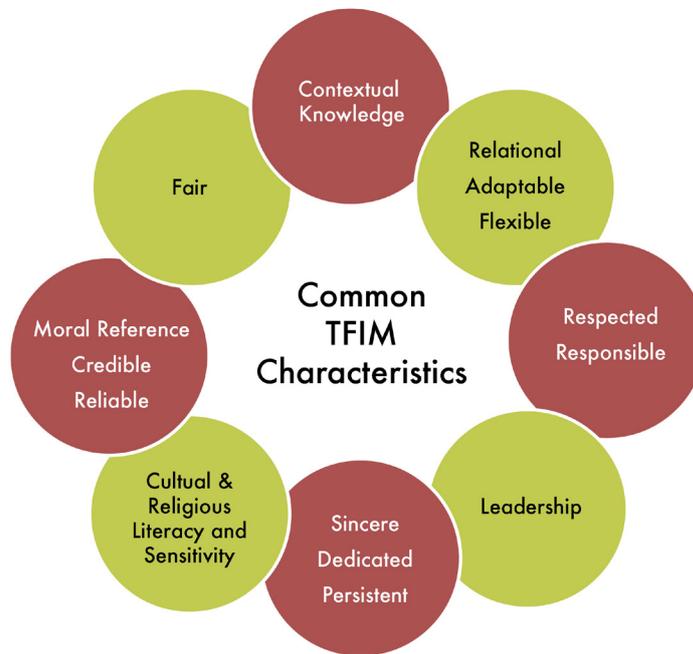


Figure 8: Common TFIM characteristics

- Many TFIMs spend years in the same place and therefore come to know the territory and the people very well, building up trusted relationships. This allows them to adapt well and to be flexible about which ‘piano keys’ to play, or at least to experiment with different chord progressions to learn what works and what does not.
- TFIMs who engage with armed groups often do so at great personal risk, e.g. going straight to the bushes alone to have a talk with warriors and warlords. This indicates not only their legitimacy across divides but also their innate motivation to build bridges across divides.
- The leadership qualities of TFIMs and their often charismatic nature earns them deep respect from the community. Since their work is not based on personal interest but rather on the principle of responsibility, in deeply religious and traditional communities TFIMs are considered the first port of call when conflict erupts. Devout Christians, for example, might not obey their superiors at work or their family at home, but they would listen to their priest. Depending on how constructive an influence this priest exerts, he may be able to transform violent mindsets. Leadership involves different types of authority that are complex and mixed with one another. Furthermore, the importance and efficacy of leadership depends on the relevant context and continually changes.
- The identity of a mediator is closely related to the question of the credibility of mediation efforts. If someone is perceived as having the moral authority to serve as a mediator, she is given leeway to intervene in the conflict and to resolve it in a manner that is acceptable to the communities concerned. Some religious and traditional leaders also conceded that their mediation efforts involve ‘speaking from the heart, and not necessarily or solely from religious texts’; this earns them the trust of their followers and can make all the difference. 82 percent of Malians, for example, place a great deal of trust in traditional actors such as cadis or griots, who take on the hereditary role of conciliators—a role that they take very seriously. These actors have access to all communities and to the whole country, including regions such as Kidal where no other Malians can go.

- International agencies and NGO staff are often forced to leave countries in times of insecurity. TFIMs usually remain in place during such periods because they belong there, have a stake in the conflict and are committed to addressing the issues it involves in order to keep the community together. Conflict dynamics often disrupt long-standing relationships, and there may be a need to continually monitor the parameters of these. Even though TFIMs are insiders, they recognise that effective mediation must involve rebuilding confidence and trust, which may take time and requires a great deal of persistence, patience, and sincerity.
- Mediating across cultures and faith groups, and particularly doing interfaith work, requires a great deal of sensitivity from a TFIM. Conflicts can often (and sometimes intentionally) be highly charged with religious symbolism that may test and challenge a TFIM's integrity. Nevertheless, the best TFIMs have sufficient sensitivity and perseverance to take a delicate approach to working on the differences that separate groups.
- While neutrality and impartiality are usually expected

from outsider mediators, it is unrealistic or even unnecessary to demand these qualities in TFIMs. They are insiders, they are part of the community in conflict, and so are bound to have affiliations with one or the other conflicting party. This should not necessarily mean that they cannot mediate. All of the above-mentioned attributes actually lend themselves to TFIMs being 'fair' in the mediation process, without giving an advantage to one party at the expense of another. This emphasises the importance of transparency of the goals and interests of TFIMs over considerations of neutrality and impartiality (Gourlay and Ropers 2012).

## 4 What constraints are TFIMs subject to?

Despite all the promising assets and resources that TFIMs bring to their mediation work, there are certain challenges that constrain their efforts, whether these are the forces of realpolitik, the actions of spoilers, or support gaps. As indicated earlier, it is important to take an objective, non-romantic and critical view of TFIMs and to understand their shortcomings and limitations. These can be discussed in terms of two broad categories: challenges in current support structures and limitations in TFIMs' approaches. These categories nonetheless have to be seen as interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Many of the challenges were remarked on by TFIMs themselves and the limitations were primarily noted by other actors (who were either critical or supportive of TFIMs) interviewed during the field studies. Additionally, the researchers' observations and assumptions served to link the observations of both groups. It should be noted that TFIMs did not always find it easy to articulate challenges during the field studies, and in many cases they tended to emphasise the broader challenges within the conflict context, focussing particularly on the state's peacebuilding failings.

### 4.1 Challenges in current support structures

#### **Lack of (effective) collaboration and coordination**

Interdependency and collaboration between the local, national, regional and international levels is key to creating a mutual support structure for TFIMs and other actors. This is largely a question of establishing a balance of engagement and power between different actors, which is not always easy to achieve in practice. In some of the case studies, a certain level of collaboration was observed between actors at different levels, but on the whole there were acute coordination problems. A lack of coordination in approaches and initiatives is in any case a general challenge within the peacebuilding field (de Coning 2009). The disconnect between international, regional, national and local level processes undermines the systemic effectiveness of efforts at all levels. The source of this disconnect sometimes lies in 'projectisation' by INGOs/donors. In most of the case studies, TFIMs expressed deep concern about the sheer number of actors in the field and their uncoordinated, conflict insensitive approach, which hampers TFIMs' local peacebuilding work. Additionally, civil society actors and non-faith-based organisations at the local, regional and international levels often become tied to a critical perspective on TFIMs rather than constructively engaging with them.

At the other extreme, there may be a risk of weakened national process ownership and local traction and cohesion at certain collaboration levels. In Uganda and the Central African Republic, for example, interfaith platforms have become more active internationally and are slowly becoming detached from national networks and developments.

#### **Conflict-insensitive interventions by international actors**

International development organisations, donors, and other international actors are sometimes seen as having an Orientalist view of TFIMs and their approaches, perceiving the latter as backward and in need of reformation. Their consequent analyses of conflicts, actors, support needs and strategies thus run along these lines, which can be conflict-insensitive and ultimately do more harm than good. Some TFIMs are often subjected to a plethora of conferences, seminars and workshops, which they find largely confusing and ineffective. Another concern is contractual clauses that place certain conditions on projects and often impose (western) concepts and ideologies that are not congruent with (or are even harmful to) the relevant cultural context.

When the Kenyan local peace committees (LPCs) were operating at their height, the gold rush of international donors, NGOs and religious institutions and the resultant competition and inability to deal with large grants largely debilitated an otherwise admirable process (Odendaal 2010). Except in the areas where they originated, namely Wajir and neighbouring counties in the North, the LPCs are now largely ineffective and corrupt mechanisms. In Myanmar, there is great concern that the country's recent and ongoing gold rush will also seriously undermine the local peacebuilding processes.

#### **Lack of financial and organisational means**

Financial (and thus organisational) challenges are the most pronounced obstacles to the work of TFIMs. Religious and traditional leaders perform their mediation activity as a service to their communities on a voluntary basis, alongside their official functions, and are therefore not remunerated for it. For many, this is not of great importance, yet for TFIM organisations, low salaries and funding shortfalls often mean that it is difficult to attract and retain professional full-time staff. Furthermore, episodic financial support from donors who only fund short-term projects results in a lack of continuity and comprehensiveness in mediation processes.

On the other hand, however, direct funding is sometimes interpreted as external intervention, which leads to mistrust. Furthermore, if TFIMs are not transparent about their organisational infrastructure, finances, and approaches, they also risk losing credibility. Additionally, there are certain cases in which the misappropriation of funds has further exacerbated conflict dynamics. In some contexts, it was suggested that funding should be given to networks or platforms rather than individual initiatives.

A different problem was observed with regard to certain (primarily Muslim) TFIM organisations that, on account of religious principles, cannot accept money derived from 'sin taxes' (money that can somehow be traced back to the sale of alcohol or tobacco). For such organisations, the source of the funding must be transparent and must have

a clear purpose. At the same time, many Islam-oriented TFIMs find it difficult to gain funding from western donors, since many donors hesitate (or sometimes are not allowed) to engage with/fund actors who 'may have links to extremist terrorism'. The Union des femmes Musulmanes du Mali (UNAFEM), for example, thus faces a double obstacle in securing funding for its activities: since it is an 'Islamic' network, its members have limited access to Western donors, and since its members are women, this puts off Muslim donors. Christian churches face similar problems insofar as they are not generally considered suitable partners for international cooperation.

Gearing funding for peacebuilding initiatives is still a significant challenge for donors and INGOs who are interested for examples in peacebuilding in Myanmar and Southern Thailand. Most of Myanmar's aid is channelled into business and infrastructural development, some of which touches on peacebuilding efforts, though largely in an inefficient and impractical manner.

### Limited space for action

Though there have been many positive effects of urbanisation, globalisation and improvements to education, they have also led to a reduction of the spaces and opportunities for traditional mediation systems. The natural mediation potential of actors in these systems remains unapplied. Structural limitations on direct and official TFIM engagement in track 1 mediation were noted in all of the field studies. This is also a question of mandates, which, for one reason or another, governments are little inclined to give TFIMs. In many cases, the law actually prohibits interaction with armed non-state actors, which poses a challenge for TFIMs who attempt to reach out to violent hardliners.

In Myanmar, some 'constructive' monks have been able to exert significant influence at high levels on account of their religious stature, but they are not allowed by the government to formally mediate in conflicts. TFIMs are largely absent from official peace processes. Kenya is somewhat different: the county governments that received increased powers as a result of the recent devolution have the freedom (and find it advantageous) to appoint TFIMs in high level mediation processes, though on a very unofficial basis. There was no direct role for TFIMs in the Algiers peace negotiations on the Mali conflict, and very few TFIMs were invited to the second phase of the talks as part of the civil society delegations. This may change in the very near future, since the Conference d'Entente Nationale called for by the Algiers agreement provides for the formalisation of the role of traditional and religious authorities in the peacebuilding and reform process.

Resistance to the work of TFIMs often comes in the form of state-directed threats, persecution, prosecution or even assassination. TFIMs who work closely with RLMS, for example, are in danger of being perceived by the state as supporting the rebels, particularly in Myanmar and Southern Thailand. In Myanmar, much community sensitisation work, youth leadership training, and socially-engaged monastic education needs to be conducted in an inconspicuous manner, in order not to attract the attention of

the government. The situation is somewhat different in Colombia, where church leaders are highly respected by the state, and in Mali, which has both Muslim and Christian traditional and religious leaders.

Less conservative TFIMs often have to face resistance from religious/traditional authorities/institutions, while women TFIMs often face resistance from the community. In Myanmar, another form of resistance comes from those who are influenced by hate speech, who can be difficult to steer toward counter narratives. Resistance often takes the form of threats, persecution, prosecution or assassination by armed groups. In some cases, such violence has forced many TFIMs to flee, while others have been killed, leaving no one to take on their roles.

## 4.2 Limitations of TFIMs' approaches

### Lack of (effective) collaboration and coordination among different types of TFIMs

Lack of collaboration is not only a matter of other actors disregarding TFIMs. In some cases, TFIMs themselves are dismissive of other actors, such as civil society actors. Multiple FBOs often work on the same issue or with the same community, yet with limited or almost no knowledge of one another's work. There are also cases where TFIMs decline to engage and collaborate with TFIMs from other religious denominations or traditions. All of these factors only cause further division within communities. Fractionalisation and conflict between religious institutions over who has the legal authority to represent the religion is also commonplace (examples include the Christian Church in Colombia, Kenya and Myanmar; the Muslim community in Myanmar, Mali and Lebanon; Monks and other socially engaged Buddhist networks in Myanmar and Thailand). Some faith-based organisations are also divided in this manner. Religious institutions and faith-based organisations may also be beset by a generational divide between very motivated, open-minded, dynamic young TFIMs and (often) less creative and proactive elderly TFIMs.

The lack of collaboration is also often attributable to the fact that religious/traditional leadership may additionally serve to maintain the status-quo and the dominant power structures. While this is not necessarily a negative aspect, it is important to ensure that these mechanisms and actors do not end up (intentionally or unintentionally) fuelling conflict dynamics. Community leadership, by contrast, is more organic and passion-driven, though is also not immune to politicisation. In Mali, traditional conflict management customs such as *cousinage à plaisanterie* are depicted by some as instruments to maintain the status quo rather than to promote social justice. In fact, in Mali the state often uses traditional leaders to sensitise the population to its vision of peace (top-down relay); the reverse (bottom-top relay) almost never takes place.

In Kenya, the proposal to formalise local peace committees was based on a perceived need to enhance their authority in mediation, but this soon turned into a competition to control key positions. In order to maintain power, some TFIMs lent their support to local political parties,

which hampered their legitimacy and their overall mediation efforts. Furthermore, traditional mechanisms too often become dominated or manipulated by family or clan interests.

### **Lack of inclusion of women and young people**

Certain traditional and religious approaches have been criticised as conservative, hierarchical and patriarchal, and as devoid of inclusivity, accessibility and the participation of women and young people. Certain traditional norms, practices and rituals are seen as oppressive and brutal by universal standards, including the lower status of women, female genital mutilation, honour killings, and so on. Young people are often regarded as having too little experience to deal with the 'perilous' task of mediation. In many (patriarchal) contexts, women are not (sufficiently) regarded as potential peace mediation agents, though there are striking examples of their mediation capacities and their catalytic role in helping men break out of a vicious circle of violence, e.g. in the Wajir story mentioned above.

Efforts to transform such constraints have seldom produced significant results, largely due to deeply entrenched social systems. In Kenya, for example, at the insistence of donors some NGOs required that women and young people be included in the local peace committees. This, however, weakened the committees' ability to resolve conflicts, since it created confusion over traditional roles (Odendaal 2010). Mediation thus predominantly remains a male function, particularly in rural contexts. A Muslim leader in Garissa County, Kenya, explained this in his own firm logic: "women have their distinct role in preserving the family sphere; we cannot endanger them, nor have they the capability and experience to go to the centre of violence and mediate between angry violent men" [reformulation by author]. Responding to what he thinks of women TFIMs like the late Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, he shrugged, dismissing them as merely networkers rather than real mediators.

### **Non-transformative approaches**

While indigenous/traditional rituals are considered highly legitimate processes for healing, rehabilitating and reintegrating offenders in certain cultures, one might question how transformative and sustainable they really are, particularly if the person in question recurrently commits the same crime. The same might be said of settlement mechanisms in traditional arbitration methods, in which offenders are materially punished in proportion to the number of their victims. This has had some success in cutting down the frequency of violent incidents in some cases, but has not eliminated it.

Typical religious reconciliatory injunctions to 'forgive and forget' may be admirable, but are not necessarily transformative. They are often invoked by TFIMs, but may not have the intended effect. Reconciliation may indeed be more meaningful if it involves a commitment to 'remember and change', and so to address questions of social justice, the recognition of wrong-doing, and reparation (Lederach 2005).

### **Being reactive and not taking on enough responsibility**

In protracted ethno-political conflicts or in the sporadic interfaith tensions in the various field cases, some TFIMs play a strictly reactive, ad hoc mediation role only when violent incidents occur. In Kenya, for example, the county governments urge influential religious leaders to travel to the scene of violent outbreaks. TFIMs rush to the scene, talk with both sides, ensure that things calm down, and then leave. This unfortunately reflects a narrow understanding of peace as the absence of violence, and this approach does not involve follow-up activities to address the root causes of the conflict. This, however, should not necessarily be attributed to the unwillingness of TFIMs to engage systemically with these root causes, but rather to a structural constraint that does not allow for sustainable processes and results in the recurrence of violence.

A religious leader in Kenya was asked about his reactive role in mediating recurrent pastoral conflict, insofar as he travels to different conflict hotspots only when violence erupts. His response was that pastoral conflicts have existed for centuries and will continue to exist; they are a natural phenomenon and there is little one can do beyond playing a placatory role when deaths occur. He did later acknowledge that conflicts are not merely a natural phenomenon, that much in them is politicised, and that the vested interests of certain actors are also in play. Nevertheless, he still made it clear that it is his job as a religious leader to mediate whenever there is a need to mediate, rather than to design a proactive, transformative approach to the conflict.

Shifting conflict dynamics serve to influence the premises of TFIM mediation work. The unpredictable turbulence of these conflict dynamics may well lead to TFIMs becoming disorientated. In Kenya, for example, the country's otherwise very committed and active TFIMs have at times surprised the nation. The unprecedented violence surrounding the 2008 elections caught even religious institutions off guard. The fact that some religious leaders took sides, pitting one community against another, significantly damaged their legitimacy. As a result, even those TFIMs who had been playing constructive roles in these times were also regarded with scepticism and suspicion: insiders become outsiders.

Since persistence and commitment are the defining characteristics of TFIMs, these are naturally expected (despite the scepticism noted above) to lead the community out of violence. Not doing enough is sometimes a limitation that can raise questions concerning their legitimacy. During the 2008 election violence in Kenya, many religious leaders were also blamed for remaining silent and passive, and not playing a stronger role. In more recent times, Kenya has experienced both Al Shabaab violence and massive ongoing recruitment for the group. Kenya has yet to see its (Muslim) religious leaders play a defining role in CVE (See also: Muraya 2015).

Non-action may also include religious leaders limiting their activities to speeches. In Myanmar, for example, many interfaith events involving top-level religious leaders are

limited to statement-giving and signing, without the necessary follow-up action. As a result, however valuable they may be in sending a message, they lead to little change in terms of policy implementation.

### **Knowledge gaps**

Sound theological knowledge has not been observed to be a necessary criterion in choosing religious leaders. Religious leaders and other TFIMs who attempt to do intra- or inter-faith work thus often lack a sound theological basis. In some cases, this was said to have led to mediation processes being inefficient or even harmful. There have been pleas for religious leaders to 'upgrade' their knowledge.

Language is often a barrier to engagement, particularly in societies containing a wide range of ethnic groups, each of which has its own language. A lack of Malay language skills is an obstacle for Thai-Buddhist activists when they need to communicate with Malay people or local people who cannot speak Thai. In Kenya, many potential TFIMs cannot reach out to other communities because of the variety of different languages used in different regions. A related problem is that Islamic religious texts have not been translated into all of these languages. A lack of English can also prevent some TFIMs from accessing literature from other contexts that might help to broaden their horizons.

### **Being exclusively apolitical**

Interfaith dialogue often fails to acknowledge and incorporate the political dimensions of conflict. This was observed in Myanmar, where it is largely the state and the military's prevailing angst that prevents religious actors from engaging with political questions. In order to adequately address conflicts involving religious issues, however, it must be acknowledged that the religious and the political can shape one another (Mason and Stein 2011). It is also essential that complementary and potentially contradictory elements be valued and included in the mediation process – for example, that human rights be considered.

## 5 How can the constraints on TFIMs be addressed?

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The descriptions given by TFIMs of the limitations in current support structures, as detailed in the previous section, were understandably accompanied by deliberations on the kinds of support that could help them overcome these challenges. The limitations within TFIMs' own approaches, as noted by other actors, also help to contribute ideas for improving support structures, i.e. the overall conditions that might help address these limitations by further empowering TFIMs and enhancing their mediation efforts.

### 5.1 Concrete support needs

#### Inclusion

Promoting the activities of women and young TFIMs in conservative patriarchal societies is vital. Yet this also needs to be done in a conflict-sensitive manner. Structural reform and the transformation of long-standing mechanisms needs to be approached in a strategic manner, in order to ensure that it takes place from the inside out and not in the form of a prescription from the outside. This takes time, but if the relevant society can be encouraged to push through such reforms, these will then develop organically. One constructive approach to dealing with the inclusion issue is to emphasise the opportunities that lie in exploring the 'untapped' potential of women in peace mediation, by presenting national and regional evidence from areas that are similar to the context in question.

Significant inspiration can be drawn from the initial stages of the formation of LPCs in Wajir County, Kenya, in the 1990s. This process provides an example of how deeply motivated women may emerge as very strong and efficient TFIMs, actively mediating (despite strong initial resistance) between men (elders, warlords, and imams) to put an end to violence. The constructive, persistent approach taken by these women leaders gradually changed perceptions of them among many conservative authorities, leading the latter to respect and celebrate the role of women in keeping society together, and succeeded in transforming the patriarchal model so that women could be seen as leaders (or co-leaders) in mediation processes (CPCS 2014; Jenner and Abdi 2000; Abdi and Jenner 1998; Menkhaus 2008). There are many other such inspiring examples from other contexts, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liberia, Indonesia and Syria, where women of faith have found innovative ways to establish their place in the mediation field (Patterson 2013; Rojas 2004; Lahtaw and Raw 2012; Šiljak 2014; Lundquist 2011; van Lierde 2013). Significant examples of more tradition-based women TFIMs can be found in several African societies, e.g. in the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Burundi, Somalia and Namibia (Mengesha, Yesuf, and Gebre 2015; Nwoye 2009; Kingsley N. 2013).

#### Learning opportunity

Some of the limitations in the approaches and characteristics of TFIMs discussed in the previous section raise the question of 'who mediates the mediator?' These limitations are somewhat difficult to address directly by means of concrete support suggestions. What could directly ameliorate fractionalisation within groups of religious actors or resolve their power struggles, for example? Here one can only stress that spaces and mechanism need to be created in which joint (peer-to-peer and collaborative)<sup>34</sup> learning and action can lead to the transformation of perceptions and attitudes. Some of the other limitations can be more directly addressed by means of joint learning. The majority of the TFIMs interviewed considered peer learning through local, regional and international exchange/consultation to be essential. Effective use technology and media can prove beneficial in this regard. Experiential learning during TFIMs' own mediation processes was also considered valuable.

Many TFIMs regarded professional training as imperative if they were to improve the effectiveness of their mediation efforts; one difficulty noted by some TFIMs, for instance, was "what to do when negotiations get stuck?" Some specific training needs that were raised across the cases are:

- Training on peace pedagogy (theory and practice), conflict analysis, nonviolence, mediation, technical facilitation skills, organisational management, communication, law, psychology, process design and documentation, theological knowledge, value systems, language.
- Training on fundraising (writing proposals, staying informed about calls for applications, making contacts in the international community, finding out which donors may be right for the project in question).
- Training of trainers, multipliers. Some TFIMs also expressed a desire for coaching, i.e. for a more individualised exploratory learning/skill development process.

Some actors, however, referred to mediation as a natural skill, and warned against the 'professionalisation' of the TFIM role, since this would create a division between those TFIMs who have/want professional training and those who do not. In any case, from a more holistic perspective, support for mediation skills should go beyond simply offering training and should rather extend to "embedding a mediative approach into all forms of engagement in society, and nurturing a culture of dialogue and collaborative problem solving".<sup>35</sup> This is where TFIMs working at different levels can support one another by offering learning sessions. Regional and international peacebuilder networks can further support such sessions through a peer learning approach.

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34. Collaborative learning is learning with each other and peer-to-peer learning is learning from each other; see [www.itworx.education/collaborative-learning-vs-peer-to-peer-learning](http://www.itworx.education/collaborative-learning-vs-peer-to-peer-learning).

35. See African Insider Mediators Platform (AIMP) [www.asc.org.za/african-insider-mediators-platform-aimp](http://www.asc.org.za/african-insider-mediators-platform-aimp).

### Security provision

Given that TFIMs often take significant risks in venturing to mediate in intensely violent conditions, there is a strong need for state security support. In some cases, TFIMs can also benefit from security support provided by international entities.

### Technical support

Technical support from local and international actors is also required—support which may for example take the form of process design, process support, and documentation. Some TFIMs also mentioned a need for support in the form of advisory councils that could act as a sounding board. This primarily meant expert support when dialogue processes stall or falter, or when the actions of spoilers severely undermine/threaten peace processes. Global and regional think tanks were the TFIMs' preferred support providers in this regard.

### Financial and organisational support

Understandably, financial support has a direct impact on sustaining and broadening the scope of TFIMs' work. For those TFIMs who mediate on a voluntary basis, such support could potentially renew their energy and their motivation to engage more systematically. TFIM organisations could also benefit from more robust organisational structures and increased manpower. It is nevertheless important to avoid the NGOisation and projectisation of TFIMs' activities. Given the difficulties surrounding international donor support, which cannot be simply eradicated, suggestions were made by some interviewees that instead of directly supporting TFIM projects, donors should fund regional and national networks that can channel funds into initiatives in which TFIMs are involved. The potential success of such an approach, however, is highly context-dependent, since in some contexts the moral integrity of an international actor may be perceived as greater than that of a network or platform, which may be regarded with suspicion on account of its own vested interests.

### Recognition, mandate and visibility

Many TFIMs expressed a need to be recognised for their mediation work, particularly by the state. In some cases, recognition was also sought from regional and international actors. Some contexts may benefit from the (conflict sensitive) utilisation of media, e.g. the large-scale broadcast of interfaith events and talks. This would also go some way to addressing the frequent lack of visibility and recognition of the work of TFIMs. The international community is often seen to give greater recognition to TFIM initiatives than national actors. Such recognition (whether in the form of funding, encouragement or symbolic rewards) can have a tremendously motivating effect and can also boost organisations at the national level.

Nevertheless, certain mediation processes are more successful when they are able to keep a low profile. This may seem contradictory, given that transparency is also an important aspect of mediation. Yet here there are certain context-specific exceptions. In Myanmar, many TFIM ini-

tiatives are slowly but surely taking shape and are making a difference only because they have not been the focus of media attention. Some TFIMs in fact stated that it would be better not to receive any form of support. While one might jump to the conclusion that this is due to a fear of state persecution, this is not the whole of the story, since there is also a need for a slow, undisturbed, organic process.

## 5.2 Reflections on opportunities and needs for (collaborative) support

The support needs mentioned above are in fact not exclusive to TFIMs, since most other peacebuilding actors would likely report similar support needs. Where the lack of (effective) collaboration and coordination among TFIMs and between TFIMs and other peacebuilding actors is concerned, 'systemic thinking' tells us that this is bound to undermine the efforts of everyone. This line of thought has been emphasised in peace research in recent years, primarily in the context of three interconnected approaches:

**a) Networks of effective action (NEA).** A set of practices for collaboration and communication that facilitate integrated approaches to peacebuilding by bringing together international and local actors within a conflict context and finding creative ways to develop a 'common theory of action'. The key here is to have a 'chaordic' arrangement: neither random nor centrally coordinated, and not a formalised network with an explicit division of responsibilities, but a self-organising and flexible form of collaboration, which is as inclusive as possible and provides spaces for 'joint learning'. (Ricigliano 2003; Ropers 2012; Ropers and Anuvatudom 2013).

**b) Systemic conflict transformation (SCT).** As well as enjoining valuable systemic conflict analysis, SCT also involves the creation of collaborative frameworks to help establish and promote communication and cooperation between local and international and state and non-state actors. Such frameworks promote the cooperative identification of common objectives in order to produce synergies between different mediation tracks, and enable actors working on different levels to implement joint concrete activities. (Schirch 2013; Wils et al. 2006; Burns 2007; Midgley 2000; Ropers 2008; Körppen, Ropers, and Giessmann 2011; Korppen, Schmelzle, and Wils 2008).

**c) Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) or Peace Infrastructures.** Essentially a strategic approach to collaboration, I4P involves establishing dynamic networks of interdependent local, regional and global structures, and promoting the associated mechanisms, resources, values, and skills. This aim here is to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue and consultation that will (further) develop contextually appropriate institutional mechanisms, structures and capacities for addressing locally driven conflicts. Examples of I4P can be found in Nepal, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa in the form of national, district and local peace councils or committees. (van Tongeren 2013a; Unger et al. 2013; van Tongeren 2013b; Ryan 2012).

These approaches provide some useful elements that might be included in a **collaborative support framework**, which:

- incorporates actors into an informal, self-organising and flexible network that makes it possible to identify and address support gaps;
- allows all actors to contribute according to their own resources and capabilities;
- is based on reciprocity and complementarity, and thus avoids the duplication of efforts; and
- is sufficiently communicative and transparent.

If it were structured sensitively so as not to undermine or downplay existing structures, mechanisms, processes and 'network of networks', such a framework would allow the structures currently inhabited by tradition- and faith-based actors to continue to exist without being destabilised. Indeed, given the variety of actors involved, it would encourage collaborative engagement to address the issues of the conflict context. This framework would assimilate the basic attributes of the three approaches mentioned above. I4P is a relatively new and evolving approach and there is ongoing conceptual debate regarding which levels of institutionalisation and formalisation are most productive (cf. van Tongeren 2013b; Verzat 2014; Suurmond and Sharma 2013; Pfeiffer 2014). In most of the field studies, it was apparent that faith-oriented actors were not very enthusiastic about their mediation work being incorporated into formalised structures or institutions, while traditional actors were content with their existing, informal structures.

What they deemed essential, however, were locally owned and led collaborative networks to support joint learning and engagement, with the aim of further enhancing existing mediation processes. Joint learning offers an easier opportunity for some form of engagement with other groups than do 'demands' for collaboration.<sup>36</sup> In order to acquire structural support for such learning, TFIMs seek access to local and national mechanisms and resources that guarantee financial, organisational, logistical and security support.

The lessons learned from the LPCs in Kenya are significant in this regard. The outstanding contributions made by the originally informal LPCs in Wajir County were marred to a certain extent through their formalisation on a national scale, which led to major complications with regard to authority, leadership, legitimacy, membership, politicisation and corruption.<sup>37</sup> There have indeed been other more positive experiences in contexts where local initiatives have been approached and linked through an informed and sensitive approach of Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) (van Tongeren 2013c; Suurmond and Sharma 2013). This is an ongoing learning process for all of the actors involved, and for reflection on peace research more broadly. Learning in this way from various cases can help to inform the proposed framework for collaboration and networking, allowing different actors at the local, national, regional and international layers to offer their insights and support one another. It creates a 'community of support' in which solidarity becomes a necessity (Figure 10).

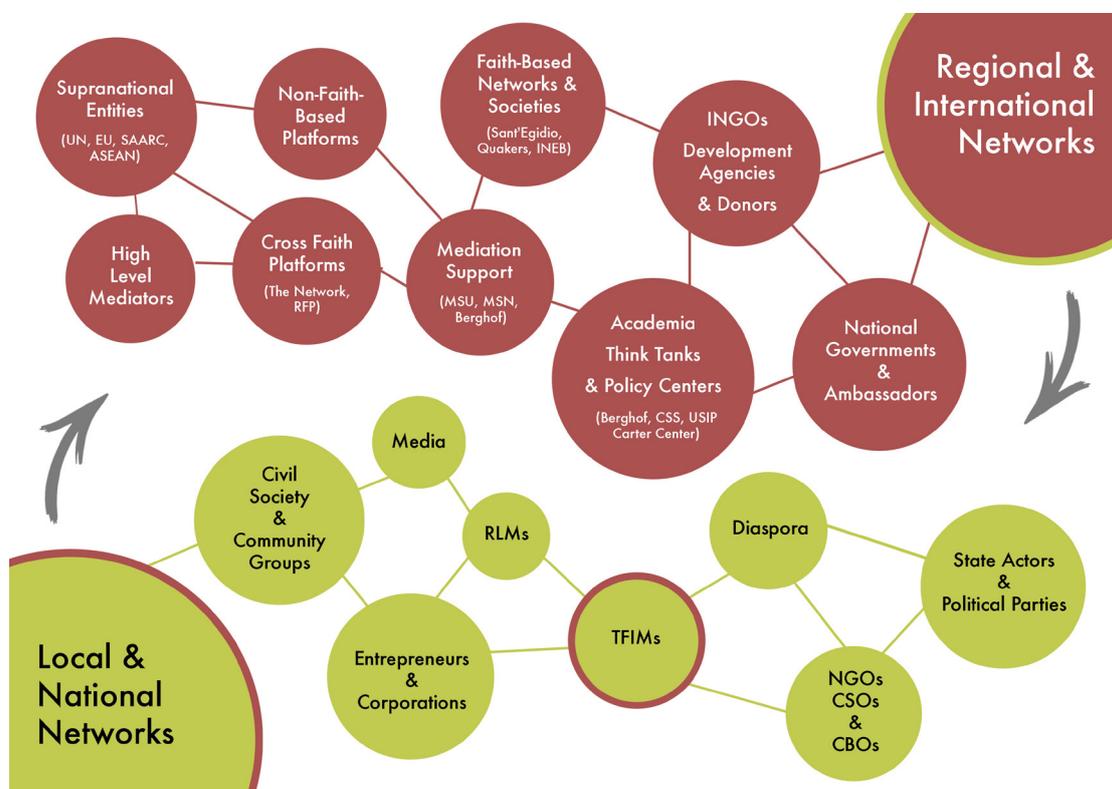


Figure 9: Actors engaging within a collaborative support framework

36. Reflection by Norbert Ropers; see also Ropers and Anuvatudom (2013).

37. See Adan and Pkalya (2006) for a nuanced look at the evolution and difficult metamorphosis of LPCs in Kenya.

The following steps could be taken in order to establish such a framework:

- Identifying and mapping 'actors – expertise – experience'.
- Creating a support pool that can be drawn upon in deciding which actors can most effectively deal with which aspects of a given conflict.
- Creating channels and mechanisms to meet needs-based demands.
- Creating issue-based forums that bring together actors to collaboratively analyse conflict dynamics, identify support gaps, duplications and challenges, and formulate strategies to address these.
- Designing multi-level, multi-stakeholder approaches that link short-term rapid responses to longer-term processes.
- Maintaining the dynamism of collaborative networks through clear communication, and actively following-up and re-strategising as the situation requires.
- Actively seeking out potential agents of peaceful change within the conflict context and bringing them on board in the collaborative process.

Such a framework is not a utopian ideal; indeed, in some contexts it already exists to a certain extent. In Myanmar, for example, a number of initiatives are slowly but surely being connected to one another, against all the odds.

## 6 Concluding remarks

“It is not only necessary to understand how religious and cultural traditions can contribute to peace, but also to work together with and incorporate local peace-building actors, as their legitimacy and knowledge can contribute to the effectiveness of peace-building initiatives”.

(Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2008)

This study has sought to understand tradition- and faith-oriented insider mediators (TFIMs) on the basis of a conceptual framework consisting of the dynamic attributes exhibited by TFIMs. TFIMs’ orientation around tradition and religion makes them legitimate and influential actors within their communities, where tradition and religion are highly valued. This added value they bring in peace mediation can thus complement the efforts of other actors. The purpose of these discussions is not to glorify TFIMs but rather to indicate that they have unique resources that can add useful dimensions to peacebuilding. The empirical evidence shows that they intelligently approach the issues in their conflict contexts using elements of tradition, religion and universal norms and values.

The roles that TFIMs play are not unique to TFIMs. What is unique is how they perform these roles, i.e. using their repertoire of traditional, religious and hybrid elements. It is also noteworthy that they perform multiple roles in both long-term, process-oriented, and short-term, ad-hoc initiatives. Their approach is also unique insofar as they do not see their mediation efforts as a job, but as a responsibility to their community, which means that they remain persistent in attempting to bridge communal divides and helping to reconcile relationships broken by violent conflict.

The challenges and limitations faced by TFIMs are also superficially similar to those of other peacebuilding actors. Yet here too these constraints have to be considered in relation to their traditional and faith-based orientation. Only in this way is it possible to gain useful insights that will help

TFIMs to enhance their contribution to peace mediation in their conflict contexts.

One conclusion shared by all of the field studies is that a lack of coordination between actors operating at different levels is a major impediment to the work of TFIMs. This is why there is a need for a framework for collaborative support, which should be established using informal and flexible networking in order to organically develop and sustain the mediation capacities of TFIMs. This framework would allow for joint learning and action, which would also have a catalytic impact on the efforts of other actors, and thus on the overall conditions of mediation in each conflict context. The framework is, however, not a panacea for the diverse and highly complex issues besetting the conflict contexts in which TFIMs operate. It cannot address realpolitik or the unforeseeable future. Nevertheless, it does have the potential to transform the way in which different actors communicate, learn from one another, and share the responsibility of transforming conflicts.

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The Network for  
Religious and  
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