



**“Building Peace from the Inside Phase II: Supporting Insider Mediation  
for the Sustainable Transformation of Conflict”**

**Policy Briefs**

October, 2024

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# Introduction

## The Concept of Insider Mediation

The concept of "insider mediation" has roots in traditional and indigenous conflict resolution practices, where respected community members act as trusted intermediaries within their own social and cultural contexts. Unlike external or professional mediators, insider mediators are individuals who belong to the communities in conflict and leverage their local knowledge, trust, and social ties to facilitate dialogue and resolve disputes. The role of insider mediators was further formalized as a valuable approach within international peacebuilding frameworks in the early 2000s. According to the UNDP, insider mediators are, **"Individual(s), groups, entities or institutions possessing high levels of legitimacy and trust with the individuals and institutions involved in a specific conflict setting by virtue of their relationships and reputation with the parties and who/which possess a unique ability to directly and indirectly influence the conflict parties' behavior and thinking"** (UNDP, 2014, p.9).

Insider mediators are trusted and respected by their communities, and able to use their influence to play a role – often largely behind the scenes – which can directly or indirectly influence the trajectory of conflict in a constructive manner. They often have access to conflict actors who international and regional mediators cannot reach. As "insiders" they are a part of a community and therefore have greater insight into the deeper root causes of a given conflict, which must be addressed when seeking its resolution. Insider mediators are well-placed to monitor the implementation of agreed-upon measures and include the wider community in the reconciliation processes. It is not always clear who can be considered an **"insider"**. The term "insider" may be connected to the nationality, ethnicity, religion, linguistic group or other distinguishing feature of the person. For "outsiders", having the same nationality may qualify someone to be an "insider", but for the population on the ground other features, such as religion and ethnicity, may be important to qualify a mediator as an "insider". Therefore, all of these features must be considered when wanting to work with insider mediators.

Through their unique, localized approach to resolving conflict, insider mediators have the potential to bring about a **transformative** change within their communities and can have an impact, not just in facilitating solutions for those directly affected by the conflict, but also on the wider community. Often the goal of mediation and dialogue processes is not "just" to resolve the conflict at hand, but to build **relationships** of trust with the goal of creating "bonds of friendship"<sup>1</sup> amongst conflicting parties. As such, insider mediators do not use mediation and dialogue as **tools to simply resolve conflicts, but also aim to heal and transform relationships in society**. Insider mediators draw on their position as members of a community and use these relationships, combined with other methods at their disposal, such as capacity strengthening, sporting events, storytelling, awareness-raising or joint service projects within the communities to achieve such a transformative change. This makes them not only insider *mediators*, but also insider *peacebuilders*.

## The Project

**'Building Peace from the Inside'** is a European Union-funded project that started in 2020 and has been implemented by Search for Common Ground (Search), Berghof Foundation and Interpeace, together with the Conflict Alert and Prevention Center (CENAP) in Burundi, Africa University - Institute for Peace Leadership and Governance (IPLG) in Zimbabwe, and Search's office in Niger. The project aims to both support capacity strengthening of insider mediators in the three countries and to strengthen the collaboration between insider mediators and global policy actors to advance the international understanding, recognition of, and support for

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<sup>1</sup> "It's a source of pride for us, because our work is helping to create bonds of friendship." Direct quote from an insider mediator from Burundi

insider mediation. Insider mediators are a key asset to address local conflicts before they become flashpoints and their engagement in international and national peace processes should become a fundamental norm.

In the current phase of the project, phase II, a total of 321 Insider mediators were selected across Burundi (155), Niger (120), and Zimbabwe (46). Of these 111 were women, 50 were young women, 121 were men, 39 were young men. Overall, 108 mediations or dialogue activities were conducted, involving a total of 197 men (47%), 117 women (27%) and 109 young people (26%).

## The Policy Briefs

The objective of these short policy briefs is to inform national, regional and international institutions on key topics related to insider mediation and to inform the development of more holistic and supportive policies for insider mediators. While **women** still face cultural, logistical and security barriers in their participation in local mediations, they are able to play critical and unique roles in mediating family, land, socio-economic, and environmental conflicts, contributing to a high success rate of mediation agreements. While navigating age-related stereotypes and resource limitations, **young mediators** have gained community trust, proving that wisdom comes from knowledge and not just age. Their ability to adapt, use technology, and mediate effectively in resource-limited environments makes them key to sustaining peace and fostering social cohesion. The value of building and supporting **(informal) networks** of insider mediators is key in environments that do not always welcome the contributions of civil society and where more flexible and nimble networks can act as early warning and response mechanisms, raising the chances to achieve sustainable and transformative peace.

These policy briefs are meant to consolidate the learning from many years of working with insider mediators, including beyond the scope of this project, and to foster policy and programming in support of insider mediators at a national, regional and international level.

## The Methodology

The insights, analysis, and recommendations presented in these policy briefs are grounded in a participatory and qualitative approach, drawing directly from the experiences, perspectives and solutions shared by women and men, as well as young and established mediators involved in the Insider Mediators project across Burundi, Niger, and Zimbabwe.

Three key questions have guided all policy briefs :

1. How can we effectively integrate diverse voices, such as women, youth, and local mediators, into peace processes, connecting their experiences with global policies?
2. What unique roles do these stakeholders play in peacebuilding, and how can we enhance their contributions?
3. What practical recommendations can improve participation during and after peace processes?

The project teams conducted focus group discussions and interviews to provide qualitative data from mediators in Burundi, Niger and Zimbabwe. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns focusing on mediators' challenges, successes, and contributions to peace processes. To ensure credibility, findings were triangulated with various data sources, such as mediation logs and lessons learned shared by mediators throughout the project. Additionally, consortium outcome reflection sessions were organized to validate findings related to contextual dynamics, peace outcomes and the impact on policy.

## ISSUE BRIEF

# Women Mediators: their roles and unique value



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**At a Glance:** This policy brief explores the pivotal role of women mediators in conflict resolution across Burundi, Niger, and Zimbabwe, with a focus on their unique contributions and the challenges they face. The project aimed to integrate at least 40% women in each country's mediation cohort and surpassed this goal. Women played critical roles in mediating family, land, socio-economic, and environmental conflicts, contributing to a high success rate of mediation agreements. Despite these achievements, cultural and structural barriers persist. Women mediators often require spousal approval and face limitations in addressing more complex conflicts, with their contributions frequently confined to 'feminine' issues. The brief highlights the importance of community buy-in and male ally support to enhance women's inclusion in peace processes. Recommendations include gender-sensitive capacity strengthening, supporting grassroots women's groups, and addressing logistical barriers to ensure women's meaningful participation in mediation and broader peace processes.

### Problem statement

Although United Nations Security Council Resolution ([UNSCR](#)) [1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the following 9 women-related resolutions](#) promoted women's meaningful participation in peace processes, in most cases, their participation is marginal and tokenistic, and considered by many a hindrance on the whole process. Research indicates that inclusion of women in peace processes contributes to "longer and lasting peace after conflict" making resulting agreements up to 35% more likely to last at least 15 years (UN Women, 2015). According to the UN, women CSOs are critical to creating and restoring collaboration and relationships between local women groups and for ensuring that provisions of gender inequality are addressed (UN Women, 2015). However, both internationally<sup>2</sup> and at the local level, the inclusion of women as mediators or parties at the table continues to be limited because of bias; patriarchal or cultural perceptions of women as weak; the creation of special, but separate spaces for women; the rejection of women's demands altogether; and the use of women as symbols to shape public opinion.

### Insider Mediator project data on women participation

In phase II, a total of 321 Insider mediators were selected across Burundi (155), Niger (120), and Zimbabwe (46). While the project aimed to have at least 40% of women insider mediators in each country's cohort, it was able to include 55%, 42%, and 56% of women respectively, in each country. From December 2023 to September 2024, women's involvement in conflict resolution displayed notable variations. The actual engagement of women, also including young women, in mediations varied: in Burundi, women mediated in 42% of the mediations (16 out of 38 mediations); in Niger this number dropped to 38% (34 out of 90 mediations); in Zimbabwe the number was 68% (17 out of 25 mediations). These numbers are in part due to various limitations to women's participation. Overall, 108 mediations or dialogue activities were conducted, involving a total of 197 men (47%), 117 women (27%) and 109 young people (26%). The conflicts mediated, in which women mediators were actively involved, include (in order of recurrence): family, land, socio-economic and environmental conflicts. Of the total conflicts mediated by IMs, 31% were violent.

<sup>2</sup> Within the last two decades, women have directly only made up 3% of mediators, 4% of signatories, and 13% of negotiators (CFR, 2022).

Among these, women mediated 18% of the violent conflicts. Most mediations (82%) reached a full agreement, while the rest could reach partial agreements.

In phase II of the Insider Mediators project, the consortium has strived to enhance the inclusion of women in training and mediation, but also as parties. We found that women's meaningful participation is not easy to achieve, but it can be improved and it can deliver remarkable results.

**Finding #1: Women's inclusion relies on local credibility and the coordinated support from family, community and male allies.**

### How to ensure meaningful participation of women in mediation?

Women mediators, who are effectively integrated in local mediation efforts, are typically those who are respected leaders or influential figures within their community. They typically achieve this status through participation in community activities, such as women's groups, community projects, or leadership in religious organizations. Other women might not have a leadership role, but might be highly connected in their community. Regardless, women mediators often navigate overlapping identities—such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and social status—that can either support their role as mediators or present challenges and limit their authority or acceptance in male-dominated negotiations. Thus, socio-cultural norms still play a crucial role in shaping the perceptions and the roles of women within local communities. Women may lack institutional support, resources to ensure their safety and mobility, or access to the type of technical training that they need to mediate. Creating an enabling environment for women mediators requires dedicated strategies to address these challenges and mobilize the community for women's success.

**Insider Mediators Project Trends:** Across Burundi, Niger, and Zimbabwe, a total of 321 insider mediators have been selected, including 111 women and 50 young women (under the age of 34). Adult women constitute 34% of the mediators, and young women 16%. Specifically, Burundi's representation is 44% (or 55% including young women), Niger's is 28% (or 42% including young women), and Zimbabwe's is 22% (or 56% including young women). This level of participation not only reflects a strong gender-inclusive approach, but also exceeds the project's commitment to reach at least 40% women representation in the mediators' cohort.

### The issues:

- **Traditional gender norms:** often confine women to the domestic sphere, making it challenging for them to engage in community decision-making processes. One woman mediator in Zimbabwe remarked, "How is it possible that it is accepted in African societies that women are leading at home and in family-life, but outside of the family are not believed to be able to lead in any way?" (Final Conference, Zimbabwe). Notably, both men and women mediators, reported that there is a need to secure spouse approval for women to take on mediation roles. Women must obtain permission from their husband before participating in public events or taking leadership positions. Men insider mediators reported that "Sometimes men do not take seriously what women say, believing they have no value or importance" (Woman, Burundi - Kayanza).
- **Safety logistics and financial barriers:** For women, it was difficult to travel independently and safely to mediation locations. Conflict parties typically agree on a meeting place, but it is crucial that the location is also safe and suitable for female mediators. "*Sometimes a mediation session lasts several hours and ends late. In such cases, we need to ensure that the location is safe for us and the parties involved*" (Burundi, Women, FGD). Men from Zimbabwe highlighted that "*whenever women are involved in mediation processes, we need to understand how secure the place is and ensure it does not*

expose them (the women) to sexual abuse or harassment" (Zimbabwe, Men, FGD). Financial constraints can further hinder their participation, as they may lack the resources needed to cover deployment expenses and mitigate the risks mentioned.

- **Emotional labor:** Effective mediation also requires managing emotional impact and stress, with mediators often necessitating specific strategies and family support to maintain their well-being and effectiveness. *"At the beginning, I would come home in a gloomy mood. My husband advised me not to dive straight into household chores after returning from mediation missions. Now, I first take some rest to regulate my mood"* (Burundi, Women FGD).
- **Role limitations:** Women are often being relegated to mediations on what are considered 'feminine' issues (family and youth), and their mediation skills are not always formally recognized. In rural and conservative settings, women often face skepticism and exclusion when trying to address issues that are typically dealt with by men. They are seen as interfering with men's role and affairs. However, women with established credibility in their community are seen as valuable and consequential. More complex mediations at a national level require connections, additional training or mentorship, and experience. *"Moving from informal to professional mediation depends on opportunities created to enhance women's credibility in broader mediation contexts"* (Zimbabwe, Men FGD).
- **Selection and Selection criteria:**
  - In different contexts, the idea of what 'expertise' is needed to mediate may vary. While local communities value traditional wisdom, local knowledge, and practical experience over formal education, international actors may expect more formal education and training to interact with insider mediators. However, if insider mediators are to be trusted by the communities, the connection to and the trust they have from them might represent more pivotal expertise than formal education. In addition, given the systemic barriers that limit their access to formal education, women are mostly affected.
  - If the objective is the narrow selection and inclusion of a certain number of women, that might actually undermine meaningful participation. Some women might need additional support, like training in leadership, or public speaking, or need support in building self-confidence to be able to manage mediations. So women's meaningful inclusion also requires the technical preparation needed for their meaningful participation.



## Best Practices

- The project included **consultations with diverse local stakeholders**, including local authorities, community leaders and women leaders to address the challenges faced by women in mediation roles (e.g. gaining spousal approval and addressing patriarchal norms). These meetings were meant to ensure the project identified the right people as mediators, as well as to understand the community perceptions of women leaders' roles in mediation, and to identify allies and influencers.
- The teams elaborated a **strategic inclusion plan for each context** to ensure gender representation. In Niger, mediators highlighted the need to recognize and empower **"resource persons"** —individuals who, even when lacking formal education, possess extensive knowledge of local customs, traditions, and conflict dynamics. Women proved very effective in connecting with marginalized





communities and mediating challenging farmer/herder and land conflicts.

- The project's **training** offered women the needed technical skills in mediation, but also the confidence to lead mediation processes. "Among *the challenges faced were the women's refusal to speak and the tendency of men to want to monopolize the conversation. However, the training helped us overcome these obstacles*" (Burundi, Women FGD). The training also included **specific modules on gender sensitivity** to raise awareness on stereotypes and how they affect women inclusion. Lastly, a staggered training and the planning of mediations in advance allowed female mediators to better manage household expectations and secure the necessary family support. As one mediator shared, "*To avoid any suspicions from my husband, I ensure he is aware of my work. That's why the mediation sessions I lead are communicated to him well in advance.*"
- Participation in the project sanctioned the role of women who were already solving conflicts and gave them **additional credibility**. Younger women, who were not as known, could gain through mentorship, the confidence and the opportunity to meet local stakeholders (local meetings, gatherings and more formal meetings at the national level), which in turn enhanced their credibility.
- **Logistical adjustments** were made to ensure the participation of pregnant women ('gender budgeting'). In Zimbabwe and Burundi, for instance, funds were made available for an additional caregiver to accompany mothers to the workshops. As of March 2024, four mothers participated, one of whom had given birth just three days before the workshop. In Niger, the project allowed many women to travel with family members to provide assistance with children, while they trained and mediated. Without these adaptations, few mothers would have been able to fully participate.
- Male co-mediators, mentors and supporters were **allies to women** mediators. Their presence raised their credibility in the eyes of the communities and of other local and national stakeholders, enhanced women's ability to move in safety in relatively unsafe environments, and advanced their learning through mentoring. "*Women are able mediators who need to be regularly included in mediations for them to showcase their skills and expertise*" (Zimbabwe, Men FGD).
- The project provided all mediators with local **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)** experts that accompanied the cohorts throughout the project, providing help in managing stress, avoiding vicarious trauma, and enhancing work-life balance. Focus was put on women and the stress factors related to the need to balance the demands of mediation (travel, focus, commitment to complex conflicts, etc.) with their family and home responsibilities.

*"We work in synergy, because unity is strength" (Niger, male mediator). "We are trusted not only because of our reputation for fairness but also because we have the skills to mediate effectively" (Burundi, female mediator).*

**Finding #2: Women's conflict sensitive approaches are key to conflict transformation.**

### **Is there a specific added value in having women mediators?**

Women mediators demonstrate culturally informed and emotionally intelligent approaches that significantly enhance the mediation process. Their success is rooted in acquired soft skills, specialized approaches, and best practices. However, while women's role is valued when mediating family disputes, their contributions are often underestimated and overlooked when they address topics on which men typically have decision-making power, like land or economic conflicts ('non-feminine' topics), and that are considered more complex. At best, when women mediators solve a 'non-feminine' conflict, there is an assumption that it may be because it is a simpler case or they were lucky. At worst, they are seen as interfering in men's roles and affairs. Generally, It is difficult to pinpoint the added value of women, but their presence resulted in high agreement rates, despite the limitations imposed by cultural and structural factors. According to women mediators themselves, their distinct representation in a male-dominated field is crucial to the resolution of conflicts and to their success.

**Insider Mediators Project Trends:** Women have taken leading roles in 41% of the 108 mediations that took place and mediated a variety of conflicts, including: family (14), socio-economic (8), land (7), environmental (5), political and identity (5), youth-related (2) and other types of conflict (3). Of these, the vast majority (33) ended with a full agreement. Around 19 of the conflicts mediated were also violent, which highlights the complexity and sensitivity of the issues addressed and the ability and the audacity of the women to solve them.

## The evidence

- When mediating cases of domestic violence, inheritance disputes, and marital disagreements, women's ability to address **personal and sensitive issues** is seen as a natural strength, and is culturally anchored. In Burundi, Niger and Zimbabwe, family issues are traditionally resolved by women in the family (for example, aunts). Women mediators were comfortable addressing other women's sensitive issues, "*Some matters are easier to discuss among women, while difficult to approach in the presence of men.*"
- In land or environmental conflicts in Burundi (land tenure and degradation, agricultural disputes and water access) and Zimbabwe (land redistribution, mining rights, water usage and forest protection), women often took the lead. Also when not involved as mediators, **women have played a key role as participants or as peace-builders**, by advising their family members to reconcile, thus supporting the resolution of the case. For instance, in Tebaram, Niger, a woman mediator leveraged her familial connections to resolve tensions between herders and farmers over water access, helping her peer mediators to establish a formal framework for mediating the conflict, which was ultimately solved by setting a designated path for animals and a committee to ensure compliance.

- In Niger, women mediated an extensive number of **socio-economic and political conflicts**, including issues related to economic opportunities, market access, and resource distribution, constituting 62% of such cases.

In addition, according to the conflict parties:

- Women mediators have **demonstrated unique qualities**, including their attention to detail and tendency to explore the broader consequences of conflicts, including the impact on children. In domestic disputes, women mediators have often focused on children's well-being.

- Women mediators can broach **taboo or sensitive topics** and can aptly use refined language or metaphors to navigate these topics without offending anyone.

- Women mediators and women participating in mediation can initiate **'backchannel' and 'shuttle diplomacy'** among their own or other family members involved in conflict, concurrently to mediations, which allows for more confidential conversations, the identification of shared interests, and the finding of practical solutions.

- The **integrity of women mediators**, known for fairness and peaceful relationships, plays a crucial role in gaining the trust of the parties involved. Most women mediators focus on resolving conflicts without expecting material rewards, further enhancing their effectiveness.



## Best Practices:

- **Diverse and Inclusive Representation:** Despite challenges, efforts have been made to ensure representation of women mediators, including those from marginalized communities, through mentoring and pairing. The diversity of women's backgrounds has been crucial in reaching agreements across various types of conflicts, from family disputes to land and socio-economic conflicts.
- **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support:** Even though not all women are MHPSS experts, most women mediators effectively use listening as a therapeutic tool during mediation. By creating spaces for parties to express their feelings, they facilitate a better understanding of each other's perspectives, which supports the finding of a resolution.
- **Practical application of the Training Modules:** Most women who had led informal mediation before the start of the project, were glad to gain more formal tools through the project's training. For example, some women mentioned the "conflict tree", a method for conflict analysis, to be a notable technique to uncover the root causes of conflicts, providing a deeper understanding that supports effective resolution strategies. Additionally, one woman from Zimbabwe (Final Conference, 2024) reported the value of being trained in phase I and then being able, in phase II, to contribute to the group's knowledge through best practices and success stories.
- **Promoting and Documenting Women's Contributions:** Documenting the contributions of women in different types of mediation, beyond 'feminine' issues, and highlighting them in case studies that demonstrate their impact across a variety of cases can enhance their legitimacy and encourage broader participation.

*As reported by one of the male mediators, "Women are considered the core of the family - women are inevitable in everyday life. Women leaders have an understanding of the roots of the problem. If there is conflict in a municipality, they collect the information at the source" (FDG, Men, Niger).*

## Recommendations

### 1. Support Broad-Spectrum Capacity Strengthening

- a. **Fund training programs** for women mediators to enhance their skills and credibility in conflict resolution, particularly in traditionally male-dominated sectors like land disputes, political conflicts, and resource allocation. Additionally, it would be important to consider transversal skills, such as leadership, public speaking, self-confidence building, etc. so that women that are not used to public roles can strengthen their skills and presence.
- b. **Create mentorship programs and/or networks** by pairing experienced female and male mediators with emerging leaders to build confidence and knowledge through on-the-job learning and networking.
- c. Take into account **intersectionality** and make culturally-sensitive training adjustments that take into account women's safety, ability to move, possible lack of confidence and need for leadership and public-speaking skills that go beyond technical mediation skills.
- d. **Institutionalize gender-sensitive training**, especially for men and youth, highlighting the benefits of women's participation and addressing biases that marginalize women's voices.

### 2. Promote Women's Inclusion in Insider Mediation and Formal Peace Processes

- a. **Support the recognition and participation of women as lead mediators**, especially in community-based conflict resolution, by highlighting their successes in mediation, their techniques, and their unique approaches to complex issues

- b. **Support women's mediation of a variety of cases** by promoting co-mediation with men, meetings with local institutions and with community leaders. Communities, who may not be familiar with the women, will come to trust them and eventually invite them to mediate.
- c. **Set and enforce minimum quotas** for women's participation in peace processes as mediators, signatories, and negotiators.
- d. **Ensure diversity among women** involved in mediation, negotiation, and peace agreements so that they may truly represent the variety of women in a society. Select representatives that may have strong local connections and understanding of context, as much as women with formal training and education.
- e. **Lead a broad local outreach** through dedicated radio campaigns in rural areas and in rural communities so that insider mediators may include those women that would not otherwise be reached or who might not know about these opportunities.
- f. **Support grassroots women's groups** that play critical roles in conflict prevention, by providing them with technical and financial assistance. The engagement of women insider mediators can greatly enhance the understanding of local issues that can become flash points of conflict. Insider mediators in general can support high-level processes in reaching more sustainable solutions.

### 3. Address Structural Barriers to Participation

- a. Implement **family and community engagement strategies** to secure the support of male allies, family members, and community leaders, addressing cultural norms that hinder women's involvement.
- b. Implement **positive masculinity campaigns or training sessions** to ensure that men mediators are exposed to other ways of thinking around women and their inclusion.
- c. Ensure **logistical support** for women mediators, such as safe transportation, childcare, and resources to participate in mediations in remote or conflict-prone areas.

### 4. Document and Promote the Impact of Women in Peacebuilding

- a. **Track and publish data** on gender representation, the results of capacity strengthening activities, the effectiveness of women's involvement in mediation, and feedback from stakeholders and the parties in conflict. This can demonstrate their contributions to conflict resolution, as well as dispelling stereotypes.
- b. Highlight **case studies** and success stories of women mediators, particularly in sectors where their involvement is typically overlooked, such as political, land and socio-economic disputes.

## ISSUE BRIEF

# Building Trust to Overcome the Age-Old Barrier: perspectives and solutions by young mediators



Insider  
Mediators

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**At a Glance:** Focusing on experiences in Burundi, Zimbabwe, and Niger, this brief examines strategies young mediators use to overcome obstacles. Young mediators have successfully built trust within their communities by leveraging their training, empathy, and resilience to challenge societal norms that prioritize age over competence. Young mediators' adaptability and creativity, combined with their embrace of technology, have enabled them to overcome logistical challenges and reach underserved areas. Despite facing unique barriers, such as harassment and harmful stereotypes, young female mediators have demonstrated remarkable leadership, advancing gender equality in traditionally male-dominated spaces. To further support these efforts, this brief recommends establishing platforms for intergenerational co-leadership, supporting young mediators in network building, enhancing mental health support, and strengthening gender-transformative policies. These recommendations aim to foster a holistic approach to integrating youth in peace processes, contributing to sustainable conflict resolution and improved community relationships.

### Problem statement

Young people make unique contributions to peacebuilding, such as engaging their peers, working at the community level, sustaining dialogue when others have lost hope, and bridging divides in polarized contexts. Policymakers have recognized the importance of youth leadership in transforming conflicts in policy frameworks at multiple levels, including through UN Security Council resolutions 2250, 2419 and 2535, the AU Continental Framework for Youth, Peace and Security, and in the Youth Action Plan in the EU's External Action, as well as in multiple national-level policies. However, much remains to be done to fully uphold these policies. Additionally, the international community has only recently begun to recognize the complementarity between insider mediation processes and YPS. Consequently, policymakers and practitioners are still working to fully understand the unique challenges faced by young mediators and how they can best support them.

### Insider Mediator project data on youth participation

This brief draws on the experiences and voices of young mediators who participated in the Insider Mediators project, examining the challenges they faced and the strategies they employed to overcome them. Throughout the project, the consortium strived for meaningful participation of young men and women. Of the 321 insider mediators involved in the current phase of the project 28% were young mediators: 50 were young women and 39 were young men. From December 2023 to September 2024, young mediators were involved in 26% of mediation cases handled by insider mediators. These cases include (in order of recurrence): family, land, socio-economic, environmental and electoral conflicts. These young mediators faced unique challenges stemming from the perception of young mediators in societies that place wisdom in age.

## Earning Respect: How Young Mediators Overcome Age Stereotypes



Young mediators face significant challenges due to societal perceptions that prioritize wisdom based on age rather than competence. By **leveraging their mediation training and demonstrating empathy, resilience, and confidence**, consistently applied over time, young people can build trust and establish themselves as legitimate mediators. This focuses on how young mediators across Burundi, Zimbabwe, and Niger navigated age stereotypes and built trust in their communities through mediation. Insider mediation, with its inherent focus on local leadership and long-term sustainability, creates an ideal environment for cultivating trust across generations.

**1. Self-Confidence as Foundation:** Young mediators have shared experiences of developing confidence through mediation training, which enabled them to overcome internalized age-related stigma. One young mediator stated, “By believing in myself, I also find other people trust me, which I would say is very beneficial” (Burundi, F<sup>3</sup>). This confidence allowed young mediators to take on leadership roles within their communities and initiate mediation independently. Young people participating in this initiative began to realize that wisdom comes through knowledge and skills instead of age, and that leadership skills can be developed at any stage of life through capacity strengthening programs. Successful mediations enhanced the credibility of young people as mediators, leading to community trust and broader involvement in conflict resolution. This self-confidence also translates to ownership, as one young female mediator in Burundi recounted how she approached her neighbors to prevent a conflict from escalating after having some experience in mediating through the project, “... it was the people I lived with in a shared courtyard – I noticed there were conflicts between them, so I approached them and talked to them, explaining how we could find a solution, and [the dialogue] went well”.

*“The mediation process is not something that I do [only at] my work. It’s part of everything that I do with my colleagues, friends, and family. I have been positively influencing [people around me by applying principles of] this mediation process in small conflicts that arise, either with my workmates or with family members.” (Zimbabwe, F).*

**2. Trust-building that is Intentional and Consistent:** Young mediators are cognizant that demonstration of capacity is only one aspect of trust-building, and that personal commitment and values need to be equally demonstrated consistently over time. “When it comes to resolving conflicts, the first thing to do is to become someone reliable. Once people see that you are trustworthy, even young people like teenagers confide in you” (Burundi, F). The nature of insider mediation, which requires personal interactions sustained over a long period of time, provides an environment in which trust can be developed across generations and cultures. Young mediators who reported being visible and involved in their community were all solicited by various members to assist them in resolving their conflicts. Moreover, in a context where more than half of the population are under the age of 25, the positive influence of young mediators on their peers helps them establish their credibility, “We are role models in our communities. Our peers (especially my friends) want to emulate us” (Niger, F).

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this brief, F denotes a female mediator and M denotes male mediator.

*“The community reached out to us to say “we have seen you doing some work in this community and you have been speaking about human rights”. [...] Now the community can trust me, [they] say “we would like you to assist us in solving this conflict, seeing that you are also a stakeholder”. In a way that recognised [me as a trustworthy young person]” (Zimbabwe, F).*

**3. Navigating Intergenerational Dynamics:** Despite a restricting social context, young mediators have been effective in finding their own ways of navigating intergenerational dynamics, balancing respect and assertiveness adeptly. They are aware of the prejudice related to their age, sharing how “people may look down on you [as a young mediator]” (Zimbabwe F), highlighting the need for young people to work twice as hard to prove themselves. They were able to gain the trust of older generations by trying to understand their values and culture, finding out what is important to them and putting forward these similarities. “You find that trying to understand the culture of other people would allow you to navigate clearly when it comes to these generational differences, so it’s about our value system: what do young people value and what do old people value, what are the norms?” (Zimbabwe, M). In addition, young people lack resources, long standing connections and networks, and established positions in their community to be able to manage conflicts by themselves. Thus, young mediators strongly advocated for an **intergenerational co-leadership** approach as an effective way of learning as well as taking opportunities in spaces that have been made available to them by elderly community leaders. By working together and combining the different generational skill sets, they are able to overcome and solve difficult conflicts, as “we cannot do this alone” (Zimbabwe, F).

*“We have begun to use intergenerational co-leadership in how we are doing our work. If the overall chairperson is from the elderly generation, they lead together with a youth in exactly the same role. It’s no longer about youth being encouraged to lead, and more about leading together with the elderly. This is helping with the issue of passing the baton, the leadership gaps, the competence gaps, and the experience gaps because we are actually leading together with them” (Zimbabwe, F).*

## Resourceful Leadership: How Youth Innovate in Mediation

Young mediators often work within resource-limited settings, but their adaptability, creativity, and willingness to embrace technology provide them with unique advantages. This section explores how young mediators used innovative strategies to overcome barriers and highlights their effectiveness in reaching remote areas and resolving intergenerational conflicts.

1. **Relatability:** Participants reported many of their peers sought their advice as they did not always feel comfortable sharing their issues or thoughts with the older generation. Likewise, when mediating intergenerational family conflicts, solutions coming from young mediators were more readily accepted and adhered to by the young generation, thus leading to



more sustainable conflict resolutions. Young people can work on, and have demonstrated, their efficacy in strengthening social cohesion with their own generation. However, their bond needs to be balanced with intergenerational trust-building to avoid reinforcing existing intergenerational gaps.

2. **Adaptability:** Young people are more adaptable, creative and open to new ideas in mediation. With less life experience but trained in the importance of inclusive participation, young mediators consciously incorporate a greater array of perspectives and more creativity in their problem-solving, often less constrained by traditional boundaries than their older counterparts. “It’s easy to adapt to context and people when you’re young. [...] I think young people put fresh perspectives and ideas that can really feed positively in mediation processes” (Zimbabwe, F).
3. **Mobility and Readiness to Adopt Technology:** Young people, unencumbered by many of the obligations of older generations, can respond quickly and travel to remote locations to mediate. Whilst an advantage, the exploitation of their good will should be avoided. Young mediators, who tend to be more adept in using technology, are also more ready to use digital tools to overcome geographical barriers and respond to disputes more effectively. Policy makers can capitalize on their potential to lead in modern mediation settings, all while ensuring equitable access and digital literacy across gender, class and geographical reference to address the persistent digital divide.

## Breaking Gender Barriers: The Role of Young Female Mediators

The work of young female mediators not only helps resolve conflicts but also advances progress towards gender equality in their communities. As young women assert themselves in traditionally male-dominated spaces, they pave the way for future generations of female leaders. However, they continue to encounter gender-specific challenges, including **societal prejudice, harassment, and limited access to leadership roles**. This section will explore the obstacles faced by young female mediators and the strategies they used to earn community respect and advance gender equality in mediation.

1. **Gender Barriers and Harassment:** Young women bear a heavier psychological burden and safety risks in carrying out their role as mediators. Some young female mediators have cited harassment (psychological and verbal) as one of the main reasons they consider the possibility of giving up being mediators. Young female mediators often encounter harmful stereotypes, including being labeled as having “loose morals” or being viewed as sexually available as a result of their greater civic engagement. As one young woman from Niger shared, “People see us as free women, even calling us prostitutes” (Niger, F). Greater interaction with men brings consequences that hinder their ability to reach out to certain actors and facilitate dialogues, “It’s either you are labeled to be involved with someone else or maybe you are related to somebody. So for us young women, it’s very difficult to navigate the terrain” (Zimbabwe, F). This perception makes it difficult for young women to navigate the mediation space and undermines their credibility.

*“There’s a certain view that women who work in this space are prostitutes especially when you are unmarried. I had that experience when men interact with me in a very demeaning way, especially when I’m introduced as a new person. They want sexual favors. They think we are easy because we speak about human rights. And it’s emotional and to share... my very honest opinion, I wouldn’t want to be in the sector for another five years because of some of the things that I’ve experienced” (Zimbabwe, F).*

2. **Gaining Respect and Overcoming Prejudices:** Despite these significant barriers, young female mediators have successfully built community respect through competence and dedication. Young



women reported having a sense of achievement in overcoming such prejudices and being proud to become respected members of their communities. Furthermore, many viewed the work done by young female mediators as a demonstration of progress towards greater gender equality in their communities. Rather than seeing the gender barrier as a disadvantage, young female mediators from Niger saw this as an opportunity “to prove that equality between men and women is possible” (Niger, F). One young woman from Zimbabwe reflected on her journey: “I’ve been able to break barriers that young people, especially women, face [...] I am acknowledged and recognised as a young person who is doing remarkable work” (Zimbabwe, F). These personal victories underscore the importance of providing young women with the tools and opportunities to advance their leadership in their communities.

*“Before I started [participating in mediation training], I thought that resolving conflicts was reserved for authorities or village elders. I never thought that a young woman like me could do that. But today, what I find valuable in my life is that there are people five or three years older than me who trust me, who turn to me, or who help me, and this is evident when I help someone in the public space, and others see it and think there is no one else to ask for advice or help but me” (Burundi, F).*

- 3. Safeguarding and Mental Health Support:** The Insider Mediator project has implemented successful safeguarding practices and provided valuable mental health and psychosocial support, such as ensuring more than two people in a mentorship program where a young female mediator is involved and raising awareness on the need for boundaries and self-care. Many young mediators, particularly young women, expressed the need for enhanced mental health and psychosocial support, agreeing that “Mental health is something that mediators [...] must really value because you need that time to detox and put a boundary” (Zimbabwe, F). Young female mediators recognise that they often carry the emotional weight of the conflicts they mediate, as expressed by one participant, “The barrier [of] mental health, because when you are [a] mediator it becomes part of you, [you] carry that burden on a personal level. It may affect how you react, or you may not respond to [certain things] positively” (Zimbabwe, F). Greater investments are critical to foster societal transformation and protect female mediators, allowing them to continue their work safely, with dignity, and sustainably.

## Recommendations

### **1. Establish platforms for intergenerational co-leadership and dialogue.**

Establish and sustain platforms that bring generations together to leverage their shared values and goals, to increase understanding, to build mutual respect and to strengthen trust. Informal or formal leadership gatherings, workshops, and shared community activities, must be used to foster intergenerational co-leadership. This was a recommendation repeatedly highlighted by young mediators as an effective way to advance youth-led insider mediation processes and conflict prevention and resolution.

### **2. Create conditions for young mediators to advance conflict prevention.**

To increase youth inclusion in mediation and support youth in their efforts to be effective mediators, policy makers and practitioners must support the creation of enabling environments. Sensitization activities such as storytelling, art performances or sport, and public endorsement from authorities are tools that can raise greater awareness on the role of young mediators in conflict prevention and resolution. Allocate dedicated financial and material support for young mediators to be active citizens and gain visibility and trust in their communities.

### **3. Support in establishing, maintaining and widening networks.**

Strong networks are vital in supporting young mediators to advance conflict resolution, especially for complex cases. Co-leadership and mentoring programs, as well as exposure to political actors through dialogues, festivals and conferences, all assist young mediators to establish and maintain their vertical networks. Meanwhile, peer learning and exchange networks promote horizontal collaboration. Policymakers and practitioners must equally continue making legal and technical expertise accessible in their programs and seek avenues to make this expertise available more readily. A booklet comprising best practices, frequently asked questions and a list of resources to seek further help, will alleviate some of the technical challenges raised by young mediators.

### **4. Strengthening gender-responsive programs.**

Young female mediators help demonstrate progress towards gender equality, yet their sustained participation requires equal measures of capacity strengthening and protection. Addressing cultural and structural barriers to women's participation, providing ongoing mental health support tailored to women's needs, and establishing safeguarding protocols that are contextually appropriate, is critical. Examples of such protocols include disseminating and regularly updating information on referral pathways, providing on-going care options (for verbal, psychological or physical violence), implementing a whistleblower protection policy, and maintaining mechanisms for participants who report distress.

### **5. Enhance mental health and practical support.**

Recognizing the psychological impact mediation work can have on mental health, it is essential that mental health and psychosocial support mechanisms are in place. Governments and NGOs must provide targeted training programs focused on mental health resilience and navigating power dynamics. In addition, young mediators specifically highlighted the critical need for training on understanding and interpreting legal documents, security protocols, trauma management, and making available practical resources such as a booklet or a checklist on mediation techniques, in support of their work.

### **6. Recognize and celebrate young mediators.**

Publicly acknowledge the contributions of young mediators through awards, features of success stories, and community recognition events to underscore the growing recognition that wisdom comes from knowledge and not just age. Several young mediators have suggested accreditations as one way of increasing their visibility in the community and making their accredited status identifiable by having a pin or a badge.

## ISSUE BRIEF

# The Value of Working with Networks of Insider Mediators



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**At a Glance:** This policy brief aims to consolidate the learning from many years of working with networks of insider mediators in different contexts, to showcase the benefits of insider mediation networks and inform policy and programming choices in peacebuilding. The value of building and supporting (informal) networks of insider mediators that can act both as early warning and response mechanisms and as a tool for achieving sustainable and transformative peace is often overlooked by international stakeholders. Peacebuilding processes often focus on supporting institutional structures - be it through support to governmental institutions or to NGOs and CSOs as the institutional structure of civil society. Giving more attention to insider mediator networks and providing them with more resources would: (1) have a more far reaching impact on communities on a cultural level, (2) support, and in some cases create, infrastructures for peace, (3) support early warning and early response mechanisms, (4) place the ownership of peace processes in local communities, and (5) ensure greater adaptability and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts in dynamic contexts.

## Why Networks of Insider Mediators?

A **network of insider mediators (IMs)** is a group of individuals who are deeply embedded within their local communities and possess the trust, cultural understanding, and social legitimacy to mediate conflicts. These mediators often represent various sectors of society, such as community leaders, religious figures, or local activists, and they work collaboratively to resolve disputes and transform conflicts through dialogue, negotiation, and non-violent means. **Insider Mediator Networks allow for the flexibility needed for individuals to operate in contexts that do not welcome more formal structures, like NGOs or CSOs. At the same time, they enable individual IMs to pool resources, share knowledge, and provide each other with mutual support, allowing them to respond more effectively and rapidly to emerging conflicts.** Young mediators in particular, have shared the challenge of legitimacy in the face of ageism in their communities. Networks can quickly provide them with increased legitimacy allowing them to work alongside more experienced and respected individuals. By leveraging their insider status and community ties, these mediators play a critical role in fostering sustainable peace, preventing violence, and promoting social cohesion at the grassroots level. External peacebuilders and mediators, in contrast, must first establish legitimacy, build trust, and gain a level of understanding of the community and the conflict, which can prove slow and ineffective. Therefore, insider mediator networks are important pillars of **early warning, early response, and are at the core of more sustainable solutions.**

## Adaptability of Informal Networks in Dynamic Contexts

Informal networks of IMs are **especially adaptable in dynamic and often repressive environments** where formal peace infrastructures may be weak or absent. These networks can operate in areas where formal NGOs and CSOs struggle, particularly in remote or security-compromised regions, and they often have greater access to communities than “external” actors do.

Informal networks offer several key advantages:

- **Flexibility:** The decision of whether to officially register as a CSO/NGO is highly context specific. Informal networks have the advantage of offering more flexibility and less hierarchy. However, one point to consider is the question of **legitimacy**. Formal structures usually have clear mandates and offer a sense of legitimacy, which otherwise must be earned through positive experiences of working with the network or through collaboration with or endorsement by existing (traditional) structures. In Niger, Burundi, and Somalia, village chiefs and traditional leaders have endorsed the work of the networks and have also been part of the networks themselves. In Burundi, the insider mediators have worked closely together with the provincial and local administration, as well as with key national institutions. These relationships have been instrumental in managing political sensitivities surrounding the establishment of the Hill Notables institution (2022)—a government-introduced local conflict resolution mechanism—and fostering collaborative relationships with it. The election of some insider mediators as Hill Notables by their communities further demonstrates how the capacity strengthening of the insider mediators and their activities have strengthened trust in them and their legitimacy at large. In Zimbabwe, local and traditional authorities have been invited to all mediation and dialogue interventions organized by insider mediators, after which they have sometimes requested training in mediation and dialogue themselves. This shows that it is possible to receive recognition and legitimacy as an informal network, but that it does take time and experience. Flexibility, however, brings with it certain challenges as informal networks often struggle to receive sufficient funding because they do not have formal structures that donors recognize. This can be limiting for the network members, as they struggle to finance their activities and transport, for example, unless there is a **system of micro-funding** in place.
- **Rapid Response:** Unburdened by bureaucracy, informal networks can quickly adapt and respond to emerging conflicts, acting as both early warning and early response mechanisms. In contexts where infrastructures for peace are lacking or not functioning, insider mediator networks can provide a helpful informal infrastructure for peace that can support the peace architecture in different ways. IMs in the networks can act as multipliers within their respective organisations, thereby indirectly influencing formal NGO and CSO structures, or they can influence their communities by training more individuals in mediation, dialogue facilitation, and conflict transformation. They can therefore broaden their reach into rural communities that formal structures often do not have access to. In Somalia for example, “local” NGOs can only operate from Mogadishu or larger cities due to security reasons, while the insider mediator network can operate directly within the local/rural communities because its members are residents of these communities. Since they are intimately connected to the communities, the networks may serve as an early warning system and can become engaged in the mediation and de-escalation of conflict before it escalates into violence, thus acting as a preventive measure. IMs have the **freedom** to quickly react to dynamic changes in the context without needing to wait for “directives” or go through bureaucratic authorization processes, which usually hinder creative and innovative approaches.
- **Sustainability:** Experience over the past years has shown the great potential for sustainability and the **long-term impact** that these networks can have. If the core group of network members is chosen with the above-mentioned criteria in mind and a good foundation is formed within which a maximum amount of ownership by the network members is fostered, the network can be well-positioned to take over when the time comes. It is therefore important to place the responsibility of the management and maintenance of the network in the hands of the members from the start. IMs from several contexts reflected that a “spirit of volunteerism” within the network members is important.

## The Strength of Networks: Peer Learning and Innovation

Building networks of insider mediators encourages **peer exchange amongst IMs**, and supports the creation of **spaces for joint learning, collaboration, and innovation**. Networks facilitate the pooling of diverse skills, enabling mediators to address conflicts more creatively and effectively and increasing ownership early in the dialogue process. These collaborative networks provide:



- **Innovation Through Collaboration:** Forming a network of peers, in which group learning and exchange is encouraged, fosters collaboration among IMs and an open and safe space to ask for and provide peer advice. The insider mediators reported that by pooling their diverse knowledge, skills, perspectives, and networks, they can find different entry-points, and take advantage of the diverse talents of each member of the network to find new and innovative methods to resolve conflicts; this increases the effectiveness of the individual mediators in their work.
- **Emotional Support:** Some IMs reported that they saw the network as a space to receive emotional support from their peers, to re-motivate themselves, and to gain a sense of hope, given the often-disheartening realities of the processes or contexts they are engaged in.
- **Appreciation for Diversity:** Since the networks are diverse, the IMs are exposed to different perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. Ideally, networks should comprise different demographics, including women, young people, and representatives of ethnic or linguistic minorities. Plurality, not only in the makeup of the network, but in the skills brought by each member, helps to break down misconceptions about different groups within the network, facilitates broader exchange with others, and fosters a sense of appreciation for diversity. This can break down societal and traditional hierarchies, which enables greater exchange and cooperation. Young IMs reported the benefits of being accompanied by more experienced IMs while they were taking their first steps as new mediators and seeking to gain credibility.
- **Addressing Root Causes more Effectively:** Many IMs reported that working in a network enables them to jointly identify patterns that lie at the root of many conflicts on a larger scale. The network can then use other tools, such as advocacy and awareness-raising in the community, to address these root causes more effectively to prevent certain conflicts from (re-)appearing.

To enhance the value that insider mediators can bring, the networks should include:

- Mediators that represent a cross-section of society and reflect its diversity;
- Highly motivated individuals who are willing to actively volunteer their time and energy to the network, rather than being mere passive recipients of capacity strengthening trainings;
- Individuals who already are or can become role models and community leaders, and are able to earn the trust of the communities, as well as local and traditional institutions. These individuals should be willing to take ownership over the development of the network and its role in the community;
- Individuals with a collaborative spirit to ensure that the network will complement existing structures rather than alienating or contradicting them.

*“Everyone, no matter how intelligent, needs new ideas, new knowledge. The strategy of having a network is therefore beneficial in the sense that the transfer of knowledge is automatically assured. As you know, team members have different skills and talents, so they complement each other. Networking is far more likely to produce positive results than working individually”*  
(Burundi, M).

## Insider Mediators’ Impact on Community Conflict Transformation Capacities



In all contexts, interventions by IMs had a visible impact beyond the institutional level and could be felt in the **community culture** – indications of the significant first steps of transformation toward a culture of peace. This is due to the fact that the IMs did not merely have the goal to resolve the conflict at hand, but to heal and transform relationships in society at large. In particular, the IMs observed an attitudinal change in the way the conflicting parties approached conflict. Before the mediation and dialogue interventions, they were more likely to use violence (be it physical or intimidation) to resolve conflict. In contrast, following the interventions, the affected communities were much more likely to

either engage in dialogue to resolve their conflicts amicably through mutually acceptable agreements, or to seek out a mediator to resolve the conflict *before* it escalated into violence. One mediator from Zimbabwe stated: “This [change in behavior] shows that the communities are taking up more ownership over what they want to be as a community.” These observations show the increasing value the communities see in the work of IMs and in dialogue as a tool for resolving conflict.

The shift in the willingness of communities to employ non-violent means of conflict resolution and seek out third parties to support conflict transformation, increases the need for actors who are available to respond quickly to deescalate and prevent conflicts. IMs presence in the communities not only adds to their legitimacy as mediators of potential and acute conflicts, but also embeds conflict transformative actors within the fabric of society. While young mediators shared that they have to increase their legitimacy over time, a network of IMs, including younger and older individuals, can gain credibility more quickly. External mediators, in contrast, must first establish legitimacy, build trust, and gain a level of understanding of the community and the conflict, which can prove too slow and ineffective. Therefore, insider mediator networks are important pillars in **early warning** and – most importantly – **early response**.

In all contexts, the IMs saw an **increase in the capacities** necessary for conflict transformation within the community as a result of their mediation and dialogue engagements. IMs are able to achieve such transformative results by employing other creative conflict transformative tools, such as sporting tournaments or advocacy, in addition to mediation and dialogue (see Zimbabwean example, below). They observed the following capacity shifts:

- An increased capacity to enter into dialogue and listen on both an individual and community level;
- A greater ability to understand different perspectives and empathize with the “other”;
- Increased willingness to compromise and jointly look for solutions;
- Ownership of preventive measures being taken up as a community;
- Greater consultation before taking decisions that affect others; and
- Capacity to share resources and forgive.

### **Creative tools for transforming conflicts: An example from Zimbabwe**

In November 2023, two Zimbabwean IMs observed a significant increase in electoral violence starting from the youth affiliated to political parties in Gweru. With the permission of the political parties, the mediators engaged the youth in a dialogue process. As a first step, these youth groups jointly removed campaign posters from public places, which also symbolized the end of the elections, and supported the cleaning up of local areas. During the dialogue that followed, the youth decided that they should promote more peaceful means of political engagement. Digital tools, such as WhatsApp groups, were used to keep in touch after the dialogue. To support further trust-building, a football tournament was held. The youth were put into mixed teams across party lines to foster collaboration and humanize the “other”. Since the various party-political leaderships from Gweru were present to support the event, this also created an opportunity for them to engage with each other and with their respective youth members in a more informal setting. The intervention aimed to ease future engagements among the youth, as well as the political parties in Gweru, and build momentum for preventing violence in future electoral periods.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Strengthen cross-border and cross-sectoral collaboration**

To get maximum impact from different peacebuilding and mediation initiatives, it is important to **connect** insider mediators with each other more often, regardless of which track they are on. Using IMs to connect with local communities should be explored more concretely, especially with regard to their ability to act as early warning and early response mechanisms directly on the ground. In addition, collaboration between IMs and other sectors such as health, education, and economic development should be encouraged. Since conflict often arises from socio-economic factors, cross-sectoral partnerships can address the underlying causes of conflict and strengthen community resilience.

### **2. Establish Flexible and Diverse Funding Mechanisms**

Given the difficulty informal networks face in securing funding, international donors should explore more flexible and diversified funding models tailored to the specific needs of IMs. This might include providing access to small-scale, community-driven grants that allow for rapid response or seed funding for innovative peacebuilding initiatives.

### **3. Promote Capacity Strengthening for Mediation in Diverse Contexts**

While IMs have deep local knowledge, they may benefit from additional training that introduces them to conflict mediation strategies used in other regions or contexts. This could include training on digital mediation tools, cross-cultural mediation techniques, or methods for addressing newer forms of conflict, such as those driven by climate change or digital misinformation. In addition, leadership development programs would further encourage local ownership and initiative. Building leadership capacity among a diverse range of network members (including youth, women, and minorities) ensures the long-term sustainability and adaptability of the network and empowers new generations of mediators.

#### **4. Monitoring and Evaluation of Insider Mediation Practices**

Develop tools for systematically monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of insider mediator networks. By tracking both short- and long-term impacts, these tools would allow for continuous learning and adaptation of practices, improving the scalability and replicability of successful models.

#### **5. Adopt a Clear and Nuanced Definition of an “Insider”**

When working with IMs, the international community and NGOs seeking to support them should decide who they consider to be **“insiders” in a more nuanced way**. While international actors may consider nationality as sufficient to be considered as an “insider” by international standards, for local populations other features such as ethnicity, religion, gender, or age may be important factors in being viewed and accepted as an “insider” in different communities. The networks should be set up as diversely as possible and reflect local definitions of insiders to ensure the networks can take on as many conflict types in as many communities as possible.



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