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## **BASELINE STUDY**

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

Case Study: **Lebanon**



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## Background of this case study

In mediation processes, usually an *outsider* and *impartial* third party mediator is sought. In certain contexts, especially in traditional and high-context societies, an insider mediator who is intrinsic (geographically, culturally and normatively) to the conflict context, and thereby *partial*, often gets more legitimacy to mediate than an outsider. Tradition- & faith-oriented insider mediator (TFIMs) are those who take an assortment of concepts, values and practices from culture, tradition and faith (among other sources) as inspiration, motivation, guidance and as methodological support towards mediation. TFIMs may include traditional and religious leaders/ authorities, but also other actors who may, on principle and/ or strategically, draw tools and inspiration from (multiple) faiths, cultures and traditions, as well as from non-religious (secular) and non-traditional concepts/ values. This case study is part of the empirical research that was carried out to understand the mediation roles, potential and constraints of TFIMs.

## About the author

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## Availability

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# 1. Introduction & background

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Mediation processes based on tradition and/or religion (MTR) have existed in almost all Middle Eastern societies. Such forms of mediation are used to settle a variety of conflicts ranging from interpersonal to inter-religious disputes. Nevertheless, given the social, political, and economic transformations Middle Eastern societies are currently experiencing, the role of traditional and religious mediators is diminishing. Today, as one interview partner critically noted, individuals are often ascribed the function of a religious leader even though most of the time these individuals do not have theological knowledge. The status of religious leader has been reified in titles such as sheikh<sup>1</sup> Arab (head of a tribal unit), sheikh *ṣulḥ* (sheikh of reconciliation), *quṭub* (a term referring to a notable) or *za'im* (leader – a term often used for the political elite). When individuals are ascribed such titles, they are also assigned a position of power within their respective context. When they are asked to serve as mediators, this is often due to their position of power rather than to their actual religious knowledge. The categorisation of individuals as religious and/or traditional leaders is therefore problematic.

Given Lebanon's historical legacy of civil war and its social structure (Lebanon has 18 officially recognised communities),<sup>2</sup> one might easily be tempted to assume that identity politics and confessionalism are the main variables shaping mediation processes within Lebanese society. In fact, mediation has become a common means of dealing with different kinds of disputes. These conflicts are approached and resolved as disputes between individuals. The forms and modes of mediation are as diverse as the conflicts themselves. Differences can be observed with respect to the techniques and procedures applied by me-

diators, the mediators themselves (individuals, groups or organisations), and the context in which mediation takes place. Mediation in urban contexts differs from mediation that takes place in remote areas, and mediation can have a formal, semi-formal or informal character. While in urban areas social conflicts such as inter-family disputes might be mediated by an NGO or civic institution, in rural areas people would more commonly appeal to a religious leader such as a sheikh or imam (prayer leader at a mosque). Alongside the context, the nature of the conflict (political, social, and economical) determines which agents may serve as mediators. Mediation can be used to solve disputes within the same community or across communities, between different political camps, or between regional armed groups and the Lebanese state. Mediation efforts thus take place at different levels. Mediation can be used both for the purposes of de-escalation and to restore calm after an outbreak of violence.

The present report, based on a one week-long field trip in May 2015, aims to elaborate on some forms of mediation that currently exist in Lebanon. To this end, it is structured as follows: the following section elaborates on the methodological approach adopted, while the third section gives an introduction to the role of traditional and religious actors in Lebanon. On the basis of the empirical data collected during the field trip, section 4 discusses mediation formats and examples from Lebanon. Section 5 analyses the approaches and resources used in mediation processes, while section 6 deals with the opportunities and challenges of mediation. The last section summarises the main findings and formulates recommendations regarding future questions.

## 2. Methodology

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The present field trip report summarises and analyses the data collected on the role of traditional and faith-based mediators in Lebanon. Furthermore, it gives insights into the processes, procedures, challenges and opportunities these actors encounter in their work and the support that is needed to enhance their efforts. The report is based on a literature review, semi-structured interviews, and participatory observation. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the Islamic community (Shari'a Sunni court judges, members of the Legislative Islamic Council, members of the Shi'a community), multi-religious NGOs, an imam in a Palestinian camp, and the inhabitants of various

villages (mainly in Arab Ljal). In total, I conducted eleven interviews. I also attended a mediation session at the reconciliation commission (*lağna iṣlāḥ dāt al-bayn*) based in the Shari'a Sunni court in Beirut. These data were complemented by informal discussions with an anthropologist at the American University of Beirut (AUB), researchers at the Deutsches Orient Institut (DOI) and the Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO).

The present study does not claim to be comprehensive. Given that Lebanon has 18 officially recognised communities, much more research has to be done to elaborate on the different forms of mediation that exist within and across

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1. The term sheikh is an honorific title that commonly designates the ruler of a tribe or an Islamic leader. In the Lebanese context it is mainly used with a religious connotation.

2. The 18 officially recognised religious groups include four Muslim groups, 12 Christian groups, the Druze, and Jews. The main branches of Islam are Shia and Sunni. The Maronite community is the largest Christian group. The second-largest Christian group is Greek Orthodox. Other Christians are divided among Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Copts, evangelicals, and Latins (Roman Catholic).

these different communities. Nevertheless, this report aims to give some initial insights into mediation efforts within urban and remote areas, efforts supported by NGOs, and mediation efforts in the “Ain al-Hilweh”<sup>3</sup> Palestinian camp in the city of Saida. While some interviews focussed on the interviewees’ specific personal mediation experiences, others discussed the work of the respective organisation in supporting mediation efforts and the challenges and needs

of the relevant organisation or commission. With the exception of the director of the reconciliation commission (lağna iṣlāḥ dāt al-bayn) at the Sunni Shari’a court, one member of the El Rahmée NGO in Saida, and the manager of the Irshad & Islah organisation, all of the interviewees were men. In rural areas in particular, mediation is predominantly a male field.

### 3. The role of traditional and religious actors in Lebanon

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In Lebanon, as in other Middle Eastern countries, there are usually two forms of conflict resolution institution. While the court system<sup>4</sup> represents the formal (state) channel, there are also informal dispute resolution processes (IDRP). What both approaches have in common is the resort to mediation in their peacebuilding efforts. In Lebanon, as in other Arabic countries, informal modes of dispute settlement and mediation are perceived to be more effective than the legal court system. The process is less costly, less sophisticated (since it requires almost no paper work), and less bureaucratic, thus allowing the conflicting parties to reach an agreement more quickly. Although Middle Eastern informal conflict resolution techniques differ from country to country, there are some common elements that are employed to resolve conflicts, especially family disputes or inter-religious feuds. Traditional and religious mediation processes comprise techniques of conflict resolution such as arbitration (taḥkīm), mediation/intercession (wisāṭa), conciliation/settlement (ṣulḥ), and reconciliation/peace-

making (muṣalaḥa). The rituals of ṣulḥ and wisāṭa are institutionalised forms of conflict management. Though the judicial system in Lebanon does not include ṣulḥ as part of the conflict management process, these ṣulḥ rituals are approved and encouraged in rural areas (cf. Irani 1999, 11-12). In large cities like Beirut, however, individuals involved in conflicts are more likely than villagers to resort to the formal legal system to settle their disputes. Nevertheless, in certain neighbourhoods where social relations are organised in a similar way to the villages from which the neighbourhood inhabitants originate, disputes are still settled informally. In general, urbanites do not approach religious leaders for mediation. Nevertheless, in urban settings people also perceive the legal system as being ineffective and corrupt. Accordingly, citizens in urbanised areas also usually seek solutions outside of the formal legal system. Unlike those living in rural areas, however, urbanities would be likely to approach political leaders (za’īm) and ask these to function as mediators.

### 4. Mediation formats and examples

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#### 4.1 Interpersonal dispute resolution

##### 4.1.1 Informally institutionalised group mediation in remote areas: An example from ‘Arab Ljal

In remote areas such as ‘Arab Ljal, informal mediation processes are commonly used to solve disputes and conflicts within and between different communities. Though social relations are not organised according to tribal structures in Lebanon, there are still some areas (mainly in villages) where social relations are organised on the basis of kinship groups. When disputes arise in such areas, the conflicting parties prefer to use informal forms of mediation than to approach the police or legal system. Depending on the nature of the conflict, either the head of the tribe (Sheikh al-Arab) or a religious leader (imam) is asked by the conflicting parties to mediate. The mediators are also

called sheikh ṣulḥ, which means ‘sheikh of reconciliation’. In Lebanese rural areas, these notables are called aqṭāb (singular: quṭub). Being a patriarchal society, only the male members of families participate in mediation processes. Given that these actors do not have the formal authority to impose solutions, they need to be perceived by all conflicting parties as credible and legitimate. In order to be considered legitimate, mediators not only need to be impartial and neutral; they also need to have culturally specific knowledge of the principles of conflict resolution based on Arabic tradition and a knowledge of the dynamics of the conflict and the history of the parties involved. The mediation (wisāṭa) can be implemented either by an individual or by a wasīṭa delegation of influential and prominent elders to deal with a range of issues ranging from marital problems to family feuds.

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3. The camp was established in 1948. Conditions in the camp have been exacerbated by an influx of previously Syrian-based Palestinian refugees due to the Syrian civil war. As a result of this influx, the camp’s population has swelled from 70,000 to as much as 120,000 (cf. Sykes 2014).

4. Lebanon acquired the main elements of its judicial and legal systems under the French mandate (1920-1943). Within the jurisdictional system, personal status courts for matters of family law are the prerogative of each of Lebanon’s recognised religious communities (cf. Mallat 1997, 29).

Mediation processes in rural contexts are participative, since the solutions that are offered to the other conflicting party are usually agreed upon within the family or community in advance of the mediation process. The mediation process (*wisāṭa*) usually includes three components; 1) mediation via a go-between and dyadic intermediation, 2) a delegation of elders (*ḡāha*), and 3) reconciliation/peace-making (*ṣulḥ*). The mediation process begins with the selection of the mediation team (*ḡāha*) and the agreement of the mediators on a date. The mediation process usually takes place in a neutral setting such as a guesthouse (*manzul*). The mediators first attempt to collect information about the nature of the conflict. To this end, both parties are given the opportunity to describe the events from their respective perspectives. Where the conflict has a violent aspect, the victim is listened to first. Following this fact-finding stage, the mediators develop a compromise solution that will be accepted by the conflicting parties. In order to do so, the mediators proceed back and forth, gradually facilitating agreements. The last stage of the mediation process is the stage of reconciliation (*ṣulḥ*). If the conflicting parties are able to reach a decision, then the arbitration is complete; if not, the case is referred to an official judge.

#### 4.1.2 Semi-formal mediation formats

##### *State actors as mediators*

Even where mediation efforts involve state actors such as judges, they may still be based on religious belief systems. As one judge at the Shari'a Sunni court in Saida, South Lebanon, explained in an interview, if he is asked to mediate then people approach him in his role as a sheikh. People perceive him as a religious leader who has both theological and legal knowledge. These forms of mediation are usually used to deal with inter-personal issues, for example if married couples wish to divorce. Mediation usually begins as an informal process, since the sheikh, though a legal official, mediates between the conflicting parties as a religious leader. Since it involves a state agent mediating in an informal setting, I call this kind of mediation a semi-formal mediation format. If the mediation process is successful and the participating parties are able to reach a decision, the mediation process ends. If an agreement cannot be reached through mediation, the case is referred to an official judge. The above-mentioned sheikh explains that if the mediation process fails, mediation becomes arbitration and takes on a legally binding character. Due to his religious and legal authority, he can make binding decisions in cases involving domestic matters, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

##### *The reconciliation commission in the "Ain al-Hilweh" Palestinian camp*

A second example of a semi-formal mediation format is the kind of mediation offered by this reconciliation commission (*laḡna iṣlāḥ dāt al-bayn*). Unlike the reconciliation

commission that is part of the Shari'a court system (see below), the commission in the Palestinian camp is informal; this means that its members are not appointed by an official state body. The commission is comprised only of men who are either acknowledged as influential (political) camp leaders, such as the mukhtar (who has legal authority),<sup>5</sup> or people who are perceived as religious leaders. Religious leadership is either practiced by local notables or by imams. The latter are also employees of Dar al-Fatwa.<sup>6</sup> Local notables and imams do not necessarily need to be theologically trained in order to serve as religious mediators. On average, the commission has four to five members. Due to the unstable security situation in the camp and given that the majority of camp inhabitants are armed, the commission aims to intervene in disputes before they develop into violent conflicts. Alongside conflicts revolving around day-to-day issues, there are also politically motivated conflicts, such as those based on competition over the political leadership of the camp. The commission either takes the initiative and offers to provide a mediation team, or the commission is approached by the conflicting parties.

#### 4.1.3 Formal mediation structures in the Shari'a courts

The reconciliation commission (*laḡna iṣlāḥ dāt al-bayn*) is part of the Shari'a court system in Lebanon. Alongside Palestine, Lebanon is the only country to have institutionalised this form of mediation as part of its legal system. In contrast to the camp commission, the mediators in this Shari'a court commission need to have a knowledge of legal procedures and structures. In contrast to mediation processes in rural areas where mediators are expected to propose solutions based on the evidence acquired during the first stage of the process, the mediators in this commission perceive themselves more as facilitators who aim to help the disputants jointly arrive at a solution. The commission mainly mediates between married couples who approach the court to get divorced. In order to open divorce proceedings, the legal procedures prescribe that the couple must participate in a mediation process. There are also couples who approach the commission seeking advice on how to avoid a divorce. Though the mediators of the commission do not perceive themselves as religious leaders, they draw on Islamic values and narratives in their mediation efforts. During one mediation session, which I was allowed to attend as a participatory observer, the mediators used Qur'anic verses to argue against domestic violence. Mediators also receive training in communication and psychology.

Mediation as implemented by the commission is seen as a long-term process that is divided into several stages. In the first stage, the mediators seek to learn about the background of the disputants. It therefore mainly consists of the mediators posing question regarding the participants' age, profession, education level, housing situation

5. A mukhtar is a local notable who is also authorised by the state to issue documents such as marriage contracts, birth certificates, and registration cards

6. Dar al-Fatwa is the state body representing the Sunni community at the national level

and so forth. During this stage the mediators also listen to each of the conflicting parties separately, in order to hear the perspectives of all of the parties involved. By allowing each party to express their view and to vent their anger, this stage serves to build-up trust and create an atmosphere of confidence. After this fact-finding stage, the disputants are subsequently brought together. The discussion is facilitated by a commission member and aims to help disputants to take responsibility for the process and come to an agreement by themselves. As one interview partner explained to me, the ownership of the process increases the ultimate authority of the outcome, since the disputants perceive the agreement as the product of their own efforts. Given the commission's approach to mediation as a long-term process, its efforts do not end once an agreement is achieved. The members of the commission also offer their assistance in the post-agreement phase by helping to facilitate communication between the disputants, so as to overcome misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

#### 4.1.4 Mediation by NGOs

Masaabih al-Hoda Saida al Rahma is an NGO based in Saida (South Lebanon) which works in the field of gender and women's empowerment. Some members of the organisation also work as mediators, as my interview partner informed me. My interlocutor either receives a call from the conflicting parties themselves requesting mediation, or she is asked by the Shari'a court judges to take on a mediating role. Since the infrastructure of the Shari'a court in Saida is less elaborate and does not include a reconciliation commission like the courts in the capital, the judges call on certain organisations or individuals that usually serve as mediators. As my interview partner emphasised, this form of mediation is very much based on personal networks. In order to be able to serve as a mediator, particularly as a woman, one needs to have a certain standing in society. As my interlocutor noted, people are asked to serve as mediators due to their social or political status. My interview partner's authority is not only based on her own achievements in life: she also stated that she was the daughter of notables and the sister of a very much respected person. Her approach to mediation is based on moral principles and cultural values. Although Islamic values and rituals play a part in her approach to mediation, they are not made explicit. In addition, female mediators in the organisation receive regular training from sociologists, lawyers, and family therapists. In order for mediation processes to be successful, the mediators must be accepted and trusted by all parties. Like the reconciliation commission in the Shari'a courts, her organisation, my interlocutor states, understands mediation as a long-term process. This means that providing relief after a conflict is not seen as the end of mediation efforts; the process also includes further support to find a long-term solution to the problem.

#### 4.1.5 Inter-group forms of dialogue und mediation

##### *Inter-confessional mediation*

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom in Lebanon. The constitution provides for

equal rights and duties for all citizens without discrimination or preference and establishes a balance of power among the major religious groups. In light of Lebanon's disastrous civil war (1975-1990) tensions or disputes that may turn into an inter-confessional conflict are taken very seriously. More than in other mediation settings, the identity of mediators is a critical component for the success of inter-confessional mediation efforts. These processes are usually conducted by political leaders (*za'im*, plural: *zu'amā'*) with a long history of involvement in community affairs. These political leaders determine the outcome of feuds between clans or conflicts between individuals belonging to different confessions. The aim of these mediation efforts is primarily to restore social order. To this end, approaches to mediation are either based on offering material incentives to the respective community or on exerting pressure. This form of mediation has to be understood in the context of the essentially asymmetric patron-client relations that shape social relations in Lebanon. Clientelistic ties have played an important role in facilitating the distribution of public welfare among the population and harnessing popular support for leaders. As intermediaries, *zu'amā'* play an important role in providing humanitarian aid and access to public resources. These structures thus have profound implications and provide a major framework for reconciliation and conflict reduction processes.

##### *Creating spaces for encounters*

Since the end of the civil war in 1991, a vast number of initiatives focussing on inter-faith dialogue and coexistence in Lebanon have been launched. Nevertheless, conflicts continue to arise along sectarian lines. In the following I will describe two efforts to counter sectarian conflicts in Lebanon.

##### The Islamic-Christian National Committee for Dialogue.

The committee regularly brings together religious leaders to address problems in their communities and to attempt to quell conflict between different sects. It was established in the aftermath of the civil war. The committee comprises representatives of all eighteen of the officially recognised communities in Lebanon. The members of the committee are appointed directly by the highest authority in their respective religious community, whom they represent and report to. Committee members are de facto members of the Arab Group for Islamic-Christian Dialogue, which is affiliated with the Middle East Council of Churches. The committee members both issue joint public statements when certain political or social incidents occur, and intervene if there are tensions arising between the Muslim and Christian communities. This intervention can either be proactive, i.e. when members of the committee offer to act as mediators, or the committee members may be asked by communities/the government to serve as mediators. The committee meets on a regular basis to deal with issues related to Islamic-Christian dialogue and joint concerns; in emergencies they keep their meetings open-ended in order to follow up with the field contacts responsible to take context-specific actions.

Adyan (Lebanese foundation for interfaith studies and spiritual solidarity). Adyan, which is the Arabic term for religion, is an interfaith organisation whose founding members are Christians and Muslims. Adyan is active in education, bridge-building, conflict prevention, and interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Through its projects, Adyan aims to create spaces for interfaith encounters that encourage a culture of mutual understanding between people from different religious groups. It works to foster appreciation of religious diversity and to promote the coexistence of communities in relations of mutual respect. To this end, Adyan works with various target groups and at different levels. In its community programme, for example, it brings together pairs of religious leaders and members of their respective religious communities to collaborate on joint projects. Religious actors play an active and effective role as educators, advocates, and intermediaries. The aim is to heighten the positive experience of such encounters and to enhance collaboration. In this context, Adyan organises a Lebanese spiritual solidarity day which is an annual national interfaith event that provides an occasion for religious leaders and people from different religions to jointly affirm a spiritual commitment to peace. The organisation also stages workshops for secondary school students to promote interfaith relations and coexistence. Since Lebanon is host to more than 800,000 Syrian refugees, Adyan also

launched a project to strengthen dialogue with Syrian refugees. At the national level, Adyan, in cooperation with various religious authorities such as Dar al-Fatwa, the Higher Shi'a Council, the council of the Druze community, and the church succeeded in issuing a National Charter for Education on Living Together. The charter introduces the concepts of inclusive citizenship and religious diversity into the Lebanese national curriculum. The charter was signed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and other educational institutes in March 2013. It is now used as a reference point in the development of educational policy. Adyan and its partners subsequently worked to develop a curriculum based around the concept of inclusive citizenship, with the aim of integrating it into national educational programmes and textbooks.

#### 4.1.6 Mediation at the national level

Commission of Muslim Scholars (Hay'a 'ulama' al-Muslimin). The commission was established in 2012 and comprises five hundred Sunni scholars. Though the commission is perceived to be weak due to internal tensions and is increasingly losing credibility on the ground, it was involved in the mediation process between Jabhat an-Nusra and the Lebanese state to negotiate the release of 16 kidnapped Lebanese soldiers in August 2014.

## 5. Approaches, strategies and resources

Although mediation processes differ with regard to their format (formal or informal) and the actors serving as mediators, almost all traditional and faith-based insider mediators embed their work directly or indirectly within a religious context, drawing on religious values, rituals, narratives, and traditional norms as tools for their mediation efforts. This is also true of organisations that use religious texts and narratives to promote peace and coexistence and to advocate for human rights and democracy. Nevertheless, these approaches are also combined with secular psychological, therapeutic or communicative approaches.

- 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. Throughout the process, mediators refer to religious texts, narratives, myths and stories to stress the religious relevance of reconciliation and peace. At the same time, faith-based actors make use of communicative, directive, and solution-oriented strategies to help the parties come to an agreement.
- Mediating organisations and the reconciliation commissions consider faith and religion as a resource. Religious texts and values constitute the broader context in which mediation efforts are embedded. But since they under-

stand themselves as facilitators, these actors also employ psychological, therapeutic, and communication-oriented approaches. Facilitation, however, does not imply a passive role; mediators actively intervene in the process by helping to overcome misunderstandings, thereby improving communication.

- Inter-group mediation processes that aim to restore social order and/or prevent feuds between different confessions focus on the concept of unity in plurality. These approaches stress the unifying features of the conflicting parties as a means of ending hostilities. In doing so, mediators invoke religious myths and stories that exist in both confessions, so as to preach forgiveness and mutual understanding and emphasise the importance of justice, reconciliation, and peace.
- Inner-sectarian, semi-formalised mediation efforts, particularly those involving political leaders (zu'amā') or authoritative actors (e.g. court judges) may seek to persuade conflicting parties by offering them incentives. They can also have a more repressive character when mediators with considerable (formal) authority exert pressure on disputants to agree upon proposed solutions. Mediators who possess political power also use their political and social status to increase their influence on the parties and to pursue conflict management.

- Informal mediation processes based on Arabic tradition employ cultural norms such as shame, public embarrassment, and guilt as mediation strategies. At the same

time, these processes also involve Islamic values and procedures such as justice for all, forgiveness, and human dignity.

## 6. Success and challenges

In different interviews, the participants mentioned several issues that are important for the success of mediation processes:

- **Reputation and integrity of mediators:** the identity of the mediator is closely related to the credibility of mediation efforts. If an individual is seen as a morally legitimate mediator, this gives him or her leverage to intervene in a conflict and resolve it in ways that are acceptable to the different communities.
- **Impartiality and neutrality:** these characteristics were mentioned as key features of successful mediation efforts. Both parties need to be convinced that mediators are not aligned with one of the disputants. Neutrality implies that mediators do not have any interests of their own but are primarily engaged as mediators because they want to help resolve the issue in question.
- **Motivation for mediation:** some interview partners mentioned the mediator's motivation as being an important element of successful mediation efforts. Actors who are primarily motivated to serve as mediators due to their religious belief in promoting reconciliation are seen as more even-handed and more morally and spiritually committed than people whose interests are in any way entangled with the resolution of a conflict (for example *zu'amā'*).
- **Forgiveness and a willingness to compromise:** informal mediation efforts, particularly those that take place after acts of violence, require the willingness of the offender to acknowledge his wrongdoing, to apologise to the victim, and to ask for forgiveness. If these prerequisites are fulfilled and both parties show a willingness to accept the proposals made by the mediators, the process can be brought to an end successfully.
- **Desirability of preserving relations:** successful mediation efforts between the different sectarian groups depend on a desire to restore ongoing relations. This implies a willingness to abstain from violence as a means of settling problems.
- **Transparency:** organisations and commissions such as the Commission of Muslim Scholars need to be transparent about their infrastructure, finances, and approaches. Given the entanglement of religion and politics, any suspicion of being supported by certain (external) political forces decreases the credibility of the whole institution and its mediators.

Where challenges were concerned, the following issues were repeatedly mentioned:

- **Lack of human and economic resources:** those interview partners who were working within an institutionalised framework emphasised that their organisation lacked sufficient financial means to pursue the mediation process in a more comprehensive manner. Given that mediation is an expensive and time-consuming process, the lack of economic and human resources affects the quality of their work. The majority of those who serve as mediators do so on a voluntary basis. All of my interview partners confirmed that their mediation work is unpaid. Since individuals have their own jobs and commitments, mediators are not always available.
- **Lack of theological training:** some of my interlocutors noted that some mediators who claim to be religious leaders have never had theological training. They therefore lack theological knowledge but claim to undertake mediation on the basis of religious texts, values, and procedures. The interviewees saw this as a risky undertaking. As one interview partner emphasised, a lack of theologically grounded knowledge may serve to exacerbate the conflict rather than to resolve it.
- **Religious and traditional leaders losing status:** as almost all interview partners confirmed, religious and traditional leaders are increasingly losing their status as powerful mediators, particularly in urbanised settings. The increasing number of well-educated people accelerates these tendencies.
- **Resistance:** female mediators in particular mentioned the challenge of being rejected by male disputants. Female mediators thus often need to invest more time and be more patient than their male colleagues. They need to build-up an atmosphere of trust before starting the mediation process. Participants are less willing to take a leap of faith with female mediators than with their male colleagues.
- **Increasing potential for conflicts:** rising regional tensions, inflamed by the sectarian overtones of the Syrian conflict, are becoming a source of friction and violence between some religious communities and at the local level.



## 7. Opportunities and risks for support

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Across the various interviews, the interlocutors mentioned the following support needs:

- **Financial support:** in almost all of the interviews with organisations and institutions, financial support was mentioned as a much needed form of support.
- **Capacity building:** some organisations mentioned that they require support in organising training for their staff. This does not necessarily imply trainers coming from abroad. They rather need Lebanese experts such as lawyers, psychologists, communication scientists and so forth to give lectures and introduce them to concepts that they can integrate into their practical work.
- **Regional and international networking:** learning from regional and international mediation processes (the approaches and methods employed, etc.) and building up networks with international organisations and initiatives were two aspects that were mentioned several times in different interviews.

- **Funding possibilities:** some interview partners expressed a desire to receive training on how to apply for funding, i.e. proposal writing and staying informed about calls for applications, how to connect to the international community, how to find out which donor is right, and so on.

Though several interview partners mentioned that they do not see any obvious risks, some of them mentioned the following points as potential risks:

- **External intervention:** some organisations expressed the fear that direct funding could easily be interpreted as external intervention.
- **Lack of credibility of certain donors:** some interview partners referred to certain anti-Islamic incidents in Europe and argued that support from these countries could be problematic, particularly if mediation is implemented on an Islamic basis.

## 8. Further questions/research issues

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Since the present report is biased insofar as it is mainly based on interviews with interlocutors from the Muslim community, much more research is needed. Given that Lebanon has 18 officially recognised communities, more research has to be conducted to include the experiences

and perspectives of other communities. Furthermore, the notion of traditional and religious leaders should be rethought. In two interviews, I was confronted with the statement that our approach incorporates a very orientalist view of the Middle East.

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The **Berghof Foundation** is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organisation that supports efforts to prevent political and social violence, and to achieve sustainable peace through conflict transformation. With the mission of "Creating space for conflict transformation", Berghof works with like-minded partners in selected regions to enable conflict stakeholders and actors to develop non-violent responses in the face of conflict-related challenges.

[www.berghof-foundation.org](http://www.berghof-foundation.org)

