ENABLING LOCAL MEDIATION

Discussion paper for the Qatar Mediation Forum

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Local mediation is central to the prevention, management and lasting resolution of violent conflict. It is the frontline response to the kinds of conflict and insecurity that most people experience. It is the source of creative and transformative peacemaking – pioneers of peace talks are often people living within communities affected by violence.

Local mediation also underpins sustainable peace by working on the underlying grievances, needs and interests that drive conflict, and it strengthens societies' resilience to triggers of future conflict.

External funding through Official Development Assistance (ODA) for peacebuilding and mediation by countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is dramatically reducing from an already low base. International peacebuilding and mediation support non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – who channel funds and provide technical and process support to local mediators and mediation initiatives – are being impacted. And community-level dialogue and mediation are particularly vulnerable to the reprioritisation of aid budgets.

Local mediation has long been subject to the ebbs and flows of donor priorities, and to the power dynamics of a skewed international aid system. A rhetorical commitment to 'localisation' by international donors has not resulted in a step-change in donor practice and resourcing levels. But there has been innovation, with some donors and international NGOs (INGOs) finding alternative funding approaches. Community mediators themselves often find financial support from local authorities, business sectors and diaspora. The increasing diversification of state mediation actors may offer new avenues for support.

Drawing on examples from Mindanao, the Philippines and Galkayo, Somalia, secondary literature and interviews with global practitioners, this paper:

1. unpacks the value of local mediation
2. describes the impact of a changing funding landscape on support to local mediation, and
3. outlines the kind of support that local mediation needs.

Finally, it sets out implications for policy and practice, calling on governments, multilateral organisations and INGOs to:

1. **maintain and mainstream the focus on local mediation, and**
2. **resource local mediation in ways that strengthen local agency and inclusion.**

Box 1. What is 'local mediation'?

'Local mediation' encompasses a wide range of mediation processes and actors and is used variously in different contexts.

Local mediation processes can refer to intra- and inter-community dialogues and reconciliation efforts, efforts to achieve local ceasefires, humanitarian pauses, or confidence-building measures between parties to a conflict. They can be informal, formal or semi-formal and may or may not be linked to national or international peace processes.

Local mediators can include state structures and representatives, as well as international NGOs, the UN and other international partners when these are mobilised to support local mediation. However, they are typically 'insider mediators': people rooted in local contexts with access to conflict parties beyond the reach of international mediators. Local mediators include those working outside formal civil society channels, whose practices are deeply rooted in cultural and indigenous traditions and value systems, and are key to addressing family and community disputes, tensions and violence.

CONCILIATION RESOURCES

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1. Unpacking the value of local mediation

The resolution of sub-national conflicts

Local mediation helps to resolve sub-national conflicts, which inflict trauma and suffering on communities, exacerbate grievances and undermine prospects for socio-economic development. These efforts also benefit the management and resolution of national conflicts which are closely entwined with conflicts within a state, and often enmeshed with wider regional and international dynamics. Parties to national dialogue processes can instrumentalise local conflicts for political gain – likewise, parties to sub-national conflicts can use them to exert influence on national-level processes.

Local mediators are able to leverage their local knowledge, trust and social ties to facilitate dialogue and resolve disputes.[1] They may be leaders of traditional institutions, who draw on deep cultural rituals for conflict resolution; faith-based leaders; prominent women and youth figures; respected local business actors; academics; as well as local government representatives, among others.[2] Local mediation processes can convene stakeholders and analyse and present alternatives to violence in ways that are often beyond the purview of national actors or other regional or international third parties. Moreover, even when national political processes are deadlocked, attending to local conflicts can generate a virtuous cycle which strengthens efforts at the national level in some cases.[3]

Box 2 on the next page describes examples of sub-national conflicts in Somalia[4] and Mindanao, the Philippines,[5] and the contribution of local mediation to their management and mediation.

Examples of the contribution of local mediation to sub-national, and by extension national peace processes, as documented by the UN,[6] include the Local Peace Initiative in Surobi, Afghanistan; local-level mediation initiatives to mitigate pastoralist conflict in South Sudan; sub-national mediation efforts in the Cordillera region, the Philippines; and the Bangassou Agreement in the Central African Republic (where 'mediation cells' of women were set up by MINUSCA and women mediators to facilitate local peace agreements between rebels and self-defence militia). The EU supports local mediation through projects such as 'Building Peace from the Inside' in Niger, Burundi and Zimbabwe.[7] International NGOs such as Conciliation Resources, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, the Life and Peace Institute and Berghof Foundation have documented similar successes.[8]

The prevention and de-escalation of violent conflict

Local mediation can bring immediate relief to civilians by preventing, de-escalating or containing violent conflict, and mitigating its impact. Given their proximity to areas and populations affected by conflict, interventions by local mediators can be more responsive and timely than those by external or national actors.

> *"Mediation has been traditionally reserved to, and dominated by, men and figures from elite families. But community-based and small, informal organisations often led by women play critical, often unrecognised roles – they engage in de-escalation, early warning, emergency response during displacement, and nurturing future mediators."*
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> **Mindanao case study insight**

Civil society representatives and local leaders negotiate rapid outcomes that improve community security and facilitate access to vital social and economic areas. Examples include agreements to avoid targeting specific locations (e.g. schools), pauses during specific times (e.g. during markets, or public or religious holidays), restrictions on certain weapons, or temporary humanitarian pauses for aid delivery.[9] Community engagement with non-state armed groups in Afghanistan, Uganda, Syria and Northern Ireland show how local mediators negotiated humanitarian access, hostage releases and truces.[10]

External mediators and third parties are able to look for opportunities to quietly support and build on locally mediated arrangements. Recent examples include temporary ceasefires between the government and armed groups in Shan State in Myanmar, leading to improved security for the civilian population, while in Colombia, the government's 'Total Peace' policy initially reinvigorated the peace process, including by reducing violence in hot spots.[11]

The transformation of local power imbalances

Locally-led peace processes and mechanisms can be exclusionary when they are led solely by local authorities.[12] However, when people who are otherwise marginalised drive or are at the centre of local mediation, not only do these efforts reach a wider section of society, but they also implicitly challenge exclusionary cultural norms in ways that begin to build more inclusive and cohesive societies.

Box 2. Sub-national conflicts and local mediation in Mindanao and Somalia

'Hybrid' local mediation systems in Mindanao

In Mindanao, local mediation processes cover a wide range of disputes – from marital and familial conflict to community issues (e.g. livelihood, illegal drugs, rape and other offenses), and from land and resource conflicts to political and governance disputes (e.g. rivalries among political families and clans). These issues often intersect and escalate into ridos – blood feuds, or a chain of revenge killings among families, clans or kinship groups provoked by an affront or disgrace to the honour of a kinship group or its members.

Rido is just one node in Mindanao's complex web of violence. It intertwines with larger conflicts and involves parties in other conflicts – the communist armed insurgency, the Bangsamoro separatist struggle, political and electoral rivalries, banditry, and land disputes among families, tribes and ethnolinguistic communities (Christian settlers, Muslims and indigenous peoples) – and even disrupts ceasefires and trust-building and peace processes in cases where it triggers confrontations between the insurgent groups and military and paramilitary forces.

Local mediation and conflict resolution bodies and mechanisms may use formal legal frameworks (such as the baranggay justice system), or the various customary systems, or a combination of both systems. Depending on the conflict and actors involved, these hybrid systems may mobilise various facilitators: from civilian government officials to traditional leaders or other trusted community members, and from state security officers (police and military) to representatives of non-state armed groups. There are also a variety of innovative or hybrid mechanisms that combine the mainstream or formal government framework with traditional ways of resolving conflicts.

Galkayo: a 'local' agreement in Somalia

Since the 1990s, Galkayo, Somalia's third-largest city, has been split into two conflicting parts. Galkayo North, as it was known, was part of Puntland, a strong and quasi-independent federal member state in Somalia. Meanwhile, Galkayo South was part of the less stable and largely neglected Galmudug region. The divide reflects and feeds into long-lasting conflicts among several clans and sub-clans.

The Mudug Accord in 1993 established an uneasy peace for decades, but events in Somalia often brought violence into the town and in 2015 tensions erupted into a major outbreak that lasted months. In response, a network of mediators within formal institutions and civil society facilitated a peacemaking process that straddled the local to international level.

After two years of ceasefires and negotiations the Galkayo Agreement was signed in 2017, establishing a joint police force operating across the town's divide. By returning stolen goods, for example, the force reduces triggers that renew grievances and prompt revenge killings. A federal security force now maintains security in the town's market area, a prime 'hot spot' for violence.

The Galkayo process was sustained by a network of individuals, several of whom could cross boundaries of 'local', 'national' and 'international' and therefore operate at different levels and influence different stakeholders. This bridging role helped transform what was a fragmented array of peace actors and stakeholders into a more connected and complementary 'peace network', where people at different levels worked to mutual benefit. The persistence of this peace leadership was particularly important when international and government commitment began to fade.

A study by the Berghof Foundation, drawing lessons from the EU-funded 'Building Peace from the Inside' project, found that in Burundi, Niger and Zimbabwe, while women still face cultural, logistical and security barriers to their participation in local mediation, 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.[13] The Berghof study also showed how the ability of youth mediators to adapt, use technology, and mediate effectively in resource-limited environments is a critical capacity needed to sustain peace and foster social cohesion.

Women mediators have self-identified a range of unique skills which benefit them in their work, including being able to understand social markers in conflict dynamics (drawing on their own experiences with discrimination); facilitating challenging conversations and building consensus in ways that their male counterparts are often less able to do; spotting opportunities to engage excluded voices earlier on in the mediation process and in culturally sensitive ways; and taking discussions beyond questions of territory, sovereignty and power.[14]

In Kenya, local women mediators mediated water-related conflicts between Garissa, Tana and Isiolo communities and established water and pasture management agreements, paving the way for more effective implementation of the Nanyuki 2 Peace Accord and Tana 1 Declarations. Using their familial networks and community access, the women mediators used the Abaay-Abaay (sister to sister) approach which provided neutral spaces for sharing food and stories across divided communities.[15]

The rollback on international commitments to gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security agenda – and similar challenges confronting the newer Youth, Peace and Security agenda – is of significant concern as many women and young people still face huge societal barriers to playing effective mediation roles.[16]

Societal resilience to future conflict shocks

Communities need mediation and peacebuilding capacities to sustain social cohesion in the years following peace agreements and conflict. In addition, local mediation capacities form part of a wider ecosystem of peace leadership that is inclusive of women, youth and marginalised voices, which strengthens societal resilience to emerging crises, shocks and conflict spillovers.

Local mediation capacity is vital to manage pressures on societies, such as political turmoil and polarisation, urbanisation, the effects of climate crisis, and advances in artificial intelligence and technology on social behaviour and labour. Community-level mediation supported people to navigate the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigated the risk of violence.[17]

Various international NGOs have rightly identified this critical function, and are implementing collaborative initiatives working with local mediators to arrive at agreements to protect natural resources and adapt community practices, and to mitigate disputes over land use.[18] In the Bangsamoro in the Philippines, Karamoja in Uganda, and in Kashmir, Conciliation Resources has supported local mediation to bring about improved collaboration between governments and communities, drawing on the local knowledge and expertise of people on the front line of climate change and conflict.[19]

Yet, local mediation is vulnerable to the same risks that it helps to manage. In Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, for example, the effects of climate change are leading to socio-environmental changes in the use of land and sea, displacement, and governance challenges. They also impact traditional community capacities for managing and resolving conflict, and increase incidents of sorcery accusation-related violence. Conciliation Resources is working with the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation and the Bougainville Women's Federation to address these pressures and support renewed confidence in local mediation processes.[20]

Challenges facing local mediation

Initiatives to transform or contain violence led by local people are largely invisible to the wider public, and to decision-makers and diplomats at national and international levels.[21] Civilian populations are often portrayed, including by the media, as disempowered and at the mercy of armed groups. The lack of visibility of, or interest in local mediation capabilities means that its real and potential contribution to conflict prevention can be missed.

Local mediation is also vulnerable – in some societies, knowledge of oral traditions, customary laws and traditional practices that guide community mediation and dispute resolution are declining, and initiatives can be captured by political or other interests.[22] Local mediators face personal risks, including to their own safety. Women mediators in particular face harassment and online abuse for their perceived work in challenging traditional gender roles and values, resulting in their work being discredited and leading some to withdraw or self-censor.[23]

2. The impact of a changing funding landscape on support to local mediation

Local mediation has long faced major challenges in leveraging financial and other forms of support and is particularly vulnerable to the current contraction in international development funding.

Peace mediation is one of a number of broader priorities for institutional donors, and ODA data does not disaggregate contributions specifically to peace mediation. This paper therefore infers the impact of changes in the funding landscape on mediation and local mediation from an overall contraction in funding for peacebuilding.[24]

According to OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) analysis of trends in ODA, peace ODA (i.e. the percentage of ODA channelled to peace-related interventions) amounted to 10.8% of total OECD ODA in 2021 (or USD 5.27 billion) – a 15-year record low.[25] Contributions were dominated by a handful of donors, particularly Germany, the US and EU institutions.[26]

This downward trend has continued since 2021. According to one analysis, by 2023, investment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding had fallen back to 2015 levels, despite sharp increases in conflict.[27] The same study estimates that 2025 will end with a 34% drop in global investment in non-military peace and security (as compared to the 2021-2023 spend), with the impact of the Trump administration's shutdown of USAID and its programmes contributing to this major reduction.

At the same time, military expenditure continues to soar, rising steeply over the past decade to unprecedented levels – according to the UN, to USD 2.7 trillion in 2024.[28] Mounting tension between European countries and Russia, new dynamics within NATO, and China's military expansion are all key factors. The war in Ukraine has prompted a renewed focus by European donors on 'neighbourhood' states at the expense of other regions. Yet, higher military expenditure does not guarantee greater peace or stability[29] – instead, it often exacerbates geopolitical tensions, fuels the arms race and increases risks of conflict, particularly when coupled with weak governance, rising inequality and systemic mistrust.

The divestment from conflict prevention and peacebuilding contradicts evidence of its cost effectiveness. In a recent study, the IMF estimated that investments in conflict prevention in countries that recently experienced violence, including mediation, generate returns of more than one hundred-fold.[30]

Trends in international funding for local mediation

Diplomats have long recognised the need to address sub-national conflicts and link peace processes to local-level mediation capacities. In recent years this recognition has become more formalised, with the UN, for instance, emphasising the importance of local mediation as part of the Secretary General's Sustaining Peace agenda from 2017. This interest in, and emphasis on, local mediation has grown alongside a wider interest in 'localisation'. Both agendas seek to centre those living closest to conflict in its prevention and resolution.

Yet, international aid-based funding systems struggle to adapt – billions of dollars are awarded every year to multilateral organisations, as well as global intermediary organisations and entities (such as INGOs and private sector development contractors).[31] Despite a rhetorical emphasis on localisation in the Grand Bargain of 2016 and subsequent commitments, in practice many donors fail to follow through due to the transaction costs and perceived risks associated with managing small grants to local organisations – let alone individuals.[32] There is a similar lag in practices that ensure local peace actors lead and determine priorities and approaches to funding strategy, programming and implementation.[33]

Innovative efforts to drive funding directly to local peace actors are overdue. A number of more accessible and flexible funding windows and mechanisms for locally-led peacebuilding have emerged in recent years, in which local mediation activity and actors may be explicitly or implicitly included. Their emergence provides evidence of deep reflection within the wider peacebuilding sector as to how to pivot to a more equitable and effective way of working that centres locally-led peace action. Box 3 provides a number of examples. The pace of structural change is, however, slow. Various analyses have found 'power' – and funding – remain firmly in the hands of donors and intermediary organisations.[34]

Box 3. Examples of innovation in support to local mediation

A study by Dag Hammerskjöld Foundation and the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) showed that pooled funding mechanisms, including Multi-Partner Trust Funds (MPTF), can be catalytic in funding local peacebuilders by increasing local agency, ownership and leadership for sustaining peace at the country level.[35] Pooled funding in South Sudan, Colombia, Indonesia and elsewhere allowed donors to converge around collective action, share perceived risks in supporting local-level peacebuilding, and scale successful initiatives. The Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace in Colombia, established in 2016, allocated over 40% of its resources to local peacebuilders.[36]

Many international peacebuilding NGOs and several philanthropic funding foundations, including PeaceNexus and Humanity United, are tackling issues of parity and transparency and other power dynamics by innovating with more accessible direct funding mechanisms.

Peace Direct's Local Action Fund supports community-led initiatives (including by youth and women) with small grants aimed at tackling the root causes of violence and responding to sudden outbreaks of violence. Grants are complemented with training, mentoring, information sharing, and opportunities for networking and advocacy.[37]

Conciliation Resources provides rapid grants and direct support to women peacebuilders and mediators as part of a United Nations and civil society partnership, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund's Rapid Response Window. The grants enable women to prevent conflict, respond to crises and seize urgent opportunities to influence peace processes.[38]

Similarly, regional networks, such as the Network for Traditional and Religious Peacemakers have introduced small grants facilities,[39] and the Innovative Peace Fund, co-designed by the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), Women's Alliance for Security leadership (WASL) and donors, provides financial support and technical assistance to women-led peacebuilding organisations.[40]

Other mechanisms that have begun to receive further attention, although not yet fully adapted to peacebuilding, include: cash transfer; community philanthropy; and innovative finance, involving adaptation of new tools (such as social impact bonds and outcome funds) and emerging technologies (such as blockchain).[41]

Funding via international NGOs and state actors

Based on the research conducted for this paper it is clear that the reduction in funding for international peacebuilding and mediation support NGOs is having an impact on local mediation, particularly where INGOs channel support to networks of local mediation and community facilitators directly, or via national civil society partnerships. Some INGOs and national civil society organisations have even been forced to close. Notwithstanding the need to shift power dynamics within the broader peacebuilding sector and new forms of South-South dynamism in peacebuilding,[42] the contraction in scope and range of global peacebuilding partnerships risks reducing the long-term accompaniment, solidarity and opportunities for cross-contextual learning for local mediation that international civil society organisations can provide.

International assistance to state actors in conflict-affected contexts in support of local mediation – whether channelled directly or through UN agencies – is a further casualty of the cuts. For example, in Mindanao regional budgets for local mediation support are patchy and reliant on contributions from international sources. Increased pressure on important dedicated global funding windows for peacebuilding such as the UN Peacebuilding Fund (whose portfolio includes many local mediation support projects) risks further stymying the scale and creativity of the entire field. Those interviewed for this study in Mindanao observed that recent discontinuation of the EU and UN Peacebuilding Fund support for initiatives in the Philippines, and overall cuts to development assistance, mean there are far fewer resources for local mediation. Further, it emerged through the research both in Mindanao and in interviews with global peacebuilding practitioners that women and youth-led initiatives are proving to be among the first to lose support when funding is cut.

Complementary, local funding sources

International development funding has only ever represented one – albeit important – component of the funding model for financing local mediation processes. Complementary, organic funding channels also play a role and have different strengths and weaknesses in relation to the quality of mediation processes. Illustrations from Mindanao and Somalia are described in Box 4 below.

Box 4: 'Local funding' examples in Mindanao and Somalia

Local mediation systems in **Mindanao** are primarily supported from three main sources of funding: community-level resource mobilisation, government support and ODA.

Resource mobilisation from the **community** takes the form of volunteerism, community and family donations, and, at times, relies heavily on the personal funds of traditional leaders, or on solicitation of settlement money from local politicians. While this demonstrates community ownership and commitment to building peace, these sources are often insufficient and unreliable. Reliance on them brings challenges: volunteer mediators often cover travel and logistical expenses (such as transport, communication, recording equipment, food and other essentials) for both mediation and follow-up processes, limiting their reach or capacity. When mediators and traditional leaders bear the costs of settlement, their role can shift from facilitative and resolution-focused mediation to adjudication and conflict containment. Dependence on local politicians also brings with it the risk of political capture of outcomes.

Government support primarily comes through the *baranggay* justice system. In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the Ministry of Public Order and Safety (MPOS) trains volunteer mediators and subsidises mediators' mobilisation costs (since 2019). The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (MIPA) also runs mediator support programmes. However, these two are the least resourced ministries in the BARMM and at times there are delays in budget release. To address some funding gaps, and in the face of acute resourcing needs across different aspects of the post-agreement normalisation agenda, the regional government partners with UN agencies and NGOs.

Peacebuilding in general, and local mediation in particular, have long been under-resourced through **ODA** and **external resources**, although it is difficult to establish the exact percentage of direct local mediation and local mediation support. This is particularly the case in 'red zones' (areas where there is armed conflict between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front). Only a few ODA-funded NGOs and multilateral organisations run specific and dedicated local mediation support programmes. Funding for local mediation and peacebuilding usually comes via pillars and projects on governance and stabilisation. Donors are seen to be more invested in formal peace processes than community-led, local mediation.

In the **Galkayo process**, alongside remittances and investments by diaspora populations in the town's economy, the Somali business community provide substantial resources to negotiation activities, particularly security, and transportation – crucial for reaching and involving rural populations. Such local sources of funding generate a sense of local ownership, insulate the process from the ups and downs of international funding, and can be mobilised and deployed quickly and locally. However, diaspora communities also influence conflict dynamics, mobilising clans and encouraging violence through social media platforms, and complicating the ability of elders to mediate and de-escalate violence.

3. What kind of external funding does local mediation need?

Any external funding mechanisms for local mediation need to prioritise local ownership, autonomy of decision-making and strengthening of mediation capacity in order for local mediation efforts to be effective. Both the quality and quantity of funding matter. Small and community-based organisations often cannot meet the stringent administrative requirements associated with traditional donor grants. Whether administered directly by a donor or via an intermediary such as an INGO, the emerging consensus from debates and research in this area suggests funding should:

- **Centre local needs and perspectives** in the design of calls through to the monitoring of impact, including through community-level participation.
- **Be flexible and multi-year**, allowing local mediation initiatives to adapt rapidly to threats and opportunities in conflict dynamics, while providing realistic long-term horizons to accommodate intractability in conflict at times.
- **Be accessible and risk tolerant**, translating funding calls into local colloquial languages, disseminating calls widely, tailoring reporting and administrative requirements to local capacity, and able to absorb the risks of initiatives implemented at local levels in conflict settings.
- **Build accountability into partnerships** between INGOs and local peace actors, adhering to key principles of inclusion, participation and equality.
- **Build on Indigenous practice and knowledge**, rather than provide generic Western-centric training and collaboration.

> *"[Support should] move beyond one-off mediation skills training and generic training modules toward sustained, context-specific capacity building that enhances the creativity and confidence of local mediators. Resources should also support the formation of platforms and communities of practice that promote peer learning, alignment of community mediation with the law, and development of shared ethical standards and accountability among mediators."*
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> **Mindanao case study insight**

- **Support the core and operational costs** of local organisations, including practical safety and accessibility needs, in order that they can sustain initiatives and build institutional resilience.
- **Fund people** who bring entrepreneurial energy and ideas to mediation processes, not only projects, programmes and organisations.

4. Implications for policy and practice

By focusing resources and political attention on strengthening military and security capabilities, states are reinforcing a reliance on top-down responses to conflict and diminishing the ability of people within society to manage tensions, mediate disagreements and mobilise around solutions to the problems in their midst. Multilateral responses to the increasingly complex and fragmented nature of contemporary conflict are deeply constrained. As this paper demonstrates, local mediation is effective, particularly when linked to national efforts, but hampered by a lack of investment and support in ways that draw on existing knowledge and experience and enable innovative solutions.

This paper calls on governments, multilateral organisations and INGOs to:

1. Maintain and mainstream the focus on local mediation

International consensus on the value and need for local mediation risks being sidelined by the urgency of rising insecurity, spiralling militarisation and top-down, short-term approaches to ending violence. It is important that:

a. more states and multilateral organisations **champion local mediation** in conflict resolution and prevention policies, and mainstream it into policy discussions on managing current and future risks to peace and social cohesion, such as climate insecurity, energy and natural resources, advances in technology and artificial intelligence. Mainstreaming in peacemaking practice means keeping local mediation efforts in mind in national processes, and vice versa – and looking for ways to link them.

b. donors and INGOs **hold to commitments on localisation** in peacebuilding and peace processes even as the mediation and funding landscape changes. They can do this by, for example, centring local agency in the design and delivery of funding and programmes, emphasising and showcasing the particular contributions of women and youth-led local mediation in high-level policy forums, asserting the protection of civic space, and adopting approaches which combine and connect external and internal local mediation efforts.

c. external interventions **inspire and encourage** local mediators and support the development of practice by creating opportunities for continuous learning. For example, this could mean creating and convening inclusive platforms for peer-to-peer exchange at global, regional, country or sub-national level, or a combination of these.

2. Resource local mediation in ways that strengthen local agency and inclusion

To counterbalance the impact of aid cuts on mediation and peacebuilding, research, innovation and dedicated funding streams are needed to provide consistent and flexible resources to locally-led mediation efforts:

a. A **dedicated funding stream** for local mediation could deploy resources in ways that enhance local mediation efforts and their inclusivity. This might be a hybrid resourcing model, where seed or core funding from external resources is complemented and sustained by pooled community resources. This model could offset two risks: of the impartiality and unpredictability of direct community-based resourcing, and the projectisation and lack of ownership that comes from dependence on external/ODA funding.

b. Research to map and analyse the **lessons of innovative funding** modalities to understand their relative benefits and disadvantages, and the potential to replicate and expand their usage. Research could include study of how mechanisms which exist under Islamic law could be adapted to support local mediation, such as waqf, a long-term charity endowment which supports infrastructure and services.

c. Research is also needed on how to amplify **customary dispute resolution practices** in ways that do not inadvertently reinforce exclusionary power dynamics. This might involve, for example, participatory development of culturally-rooted, ethical practice guidance, and research on topics such as: how to connect mediation efforts below the state to political dialogue and external diplomacy at national level; how to support and sustain local mediation in different types of conflict setting; the gender transformative impact of women-led local mediation; and the measurable short-, medium- and long-term impact of local mediation.

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28. UN (2025). The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Expenditure for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future. Report of the Secretary-General.
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31. Kantowitz, R. (2021). Designing Effective Financing for Peacebuilding: Financing Mechanisms to Support Local Peacebuilders. Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and GPPAC. See also: European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) (2022). EU support for local peacebuilding through the 'Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Crisis Preparedness' component of the NDICI-Global Europe Thematic Programme on Peace Stability and Conflict Prevention.
32. Kantowitz, R. (2021). Designing Effective Financing for Peacebuilding. The drag in rebalancing funding flows in peacebuilding echoes the wider slow pace of change in the international aid system as whole since the 2016 Grand Bargain. See for instance: #ShiftThePower (2024). Too Southern To Be Funded: The Funding Bias Against the Global South. Other efforts to take stock of progress since the Grand Bargain have similarly found limited progress: by 2020, only 4.7% of direct funding went from the donors to local organisations, for instance, while unequal distribution of leadership and decision-making between Global North and Global South organisations persist. Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Willitts-King, B. and Spencer, A. (2021). The Grand Bargain at five years: An independent review. HPG and ODI.
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34. The call for a 20-25% commitment has been made by organisations such as Peace Direct and the Alliance for Peacebuilding. Others have analysed the challenges stalling progress. See for instance: Paffenholz, T., Poppelreuter, P. and Ross, N. (2023). 'Toward a Third Local Turn: Identifying and Addressing Obstacles to Localisation in Peacebuilding', Negotiation Journal, 39(4), 349-375; and Li, M. et al. (2025). *Peace and Security Aid in Crisis*.
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36. Mårtendal, J. (2022).
37. Between 2019 and March 2023, LAF awarded 669 small grants and provided more than USD 2.08 million to local groups across Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Mali, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sudan. Peace Direct (2023). *The Local Action Fund model: shifting power to local peacebuilding*.
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39. Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (2025). *Announcement – 2025 AWG Small Grants for Inclusive Peacebuilding*.
40. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) (2025). *Grantmaking – The Innovative Peace Fund*.
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42. As evidenced for instance by the recent *Peace Connect* event in Nairobi, billed as "a global peacebuilding gathering, for local peacebuilders and their allies", convening hundreds of peacebuilders from the Global South.

CONCILIATION RESOURCES

منتدى قطر للوساطة
Qatar Mediation Forum