

# Women Faith-Based Mediators in Kenya

Challenges and Opportunities  
Within Peace Mediation

  
Berghof Foundation

The Network  
for Religious  
& Traditional  
Peacemakers



This publication is part of the Women Faith-Based Mediators project, led by The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and Berghof Foundation.

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Acknowledgements to the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya for facilitating interviews with women faith mediators from the Kenya Women of Faith Network and a special thanks to those who helped to refine and support the development of this case study, including Bishop Betty, Halima Dida, Immaculate Mungai, Amisa Rashid, and Caroline Ambasa.

**To cite:** Ramadhan, Shamsia. *Women Faith-Based Mediators in Kenya: Challenges and Opportunities Within Peace Mediation*. The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/women-of-faith-based-peace-mediators/>. 2023.

**Cover image:** Canva, Uhuru Park in Nairobi, Kenya.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION



*Photo: Kwale Women of Faith Network Chairperson Immaculate Mungai during community sensitization at Kinango Kwale on women and children rights in July, 2023.*

Kenya has experienced ethnic and political conflicts amongst its communities, leading to mass violence across the country. Despite being a religiously diverse country, religious identity has also been used to mobilize violence, adding to the complexity of local dynamics. Women faith-based mediators (WFBM) in Kenya are crucial actors in peace mediation efforts at all levels of society. They often draw on religious and spiritual values and scriptures to motivate communities towards sustainable peace. However, their meaningful participation in mediation encounters challenges due to patriarchal systems, lack of education, lack of resources and physical and mental risks. Despite these challenges, there are several opportunities for local actors, the Kenyan government and international communities to support meaningful engagement with WFBM.

This case study draws on observations from interviews conducted in 2023 with WFBM across Kenya. It contains a variety of voices which reflect the diversity of experiences of WFBM and the contexts in which they work. The WFBM interviewed identify with a variety of religious denominations, belief systems and backgrounds, and identify themselves in very different ways. Despite this mosaic of experiences and differences between local socio-cultural, political and economic contexts, WFBM encounter remarkably similar situations.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING RELIGION, CUSTOMS AND CONFLICT IN KENYA

Kenya has experienced ethnic and political conflicts throughout every election year since 1991, when multi-party politics was introduced. Those running for office often put ethnicity at the center of their campaign, fueling ethnic divides and leading to organized, and sometimes large-scale election violence. The regularly recurring violence is connected to historical injustices over land, competition for political positions, corruption, high rates of youth unemployment, as well as social and economic inequalities, among other causes and drivers.<sup>1</sup>

Kenya is a religiously diverse country. Its communities are predominantly Christian, with 85.5 percent of the population practicing the faith. Islam is practiced by 10.9 percent of the population, while other religions, including Baha'i, Buddhism, Hinduism, and African Traditional Religions are practiced at 4.6 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Religious identity and platforms often play a key role in mobilizing political support. In the 2022 elections, for example, religious identity represented a significant factor, impacting which candidate Kenyans aligned their political preferences with. For instance, the Evangelical Christian Community was openly linked to the Kenya Kwanza political group, and in the post-election period, they remained very close to the government.

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<sup>1</sup> UWIANO Platform for Peace. Rep. Towards a Free, Credible, Inclusive and Peaceful 2022 General Elections, 2022 - 2023 Strategy. Nairobi, Nairobi: UWIANO Platform for Peace, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> KNBS. Rep. 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census VI. Vol. VI. Distribution of Population by Socio-Economic Characteristics. Nairobi, Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019.

Political conflicts happen in the backdrop of other community-level conflicts, often escalating during an election period. Other low-level conflicts exist between communities over grazing land, competition over resource access, and climate-induced conflict caused by increased drought cycles.<sup>3</sup> These conflicts have intensified with catastrophic outcomes due to the proliferation of illicit firearms that are linked to the increased rates of criminal gang and militia activity during election periods. While not always the primary driver, religion is a factor of conflict due to the ethnic affiliation of those involved, or may be perceived as such.<sup>4</sup> For example, a conflict between predominantly Muslim Somali pastoralists and predominantly Christian farmers in Meru is typically and mistakenly labeled as a religious conflict; in reality the conflict is predicated on resources.

In the northeastern and coastal regions, there are insecurity challenges related to terrorist activities by Al-Shabaab in Somalia, which have spiraled into bordering counties of Kenya. Both male and female youth have been radicalized and have traveled to Somalia to join the group. Others have been used to aid terrorist activities in Kenya. As a result, terror-related incidents have had pervasive fatalities, with largely targeting Christian establishments. Anti-terrorism enforcement has led to the profiling of Muslim youth, causing tension between religious groups.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Charles K Moywaywa, "The Management of Religious Conflicts in Kenya: Challenges and Opportunities," *International Journal of Education and Research*, January 1, 2018, 129–42.

### 3. WOMEN, RELIGION AND MEDIATION

In Kenya, WFBM have emerged as a vital force in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. ‘At the grassroots level, I identify as WFBM because the community is religiously diverse, with a large Muslim population that is openly religious, and it adds value to use religion to engage the parties in mediation,’ explains Halima Dida, the Coordinator of the Isiolo Women of Faith Network (IWFN). Drawing on religious teachings and practices, Halima supports mediation efforts within local communities across the county.

WFBMs are strategically positioned to engage in community mediation. In the Kenyan context, community mediation often refers to locally-led conflict resolution and management processes to address communal conflicts. WFBMs stated that they derive motivation to conduct their work from their religious practices. They use elements from their religious practice and scriptures to motivate and appeal to the conscience of the participants and communities, urging them to embrace non-violent actions.<sup>5</sup> To initiate dialogue between groups experiencing religious intolerance, Immaculate Mungai, a member of the Kenya Women of Faith Network in Kwale County, will reference the following verse, ‘This, you know, my beloved brethren, but everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; for man’s anger does not achieve God’s righteousness.’ Whether presented by Muslim or Christian communities, this verse appeals to diverse faith groups and is non-threatening, making it possible to begin dialogue and mediation between the groups.

Immaculate Mungai adopts an interfaith approach while engaging in mediation in Kwale. She used scriptures from the Holy Bible to mediate between youth from the two dominant political parties in the 2022 election. She encouraged the two parties, namely Kenya Kwanza and Azimio, to address discrepancies through non-violent action. ‘If your brother or sister sins, go and point out the fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. (Matthew 18:15–16).’ This verse appeals to hardliners, including politicians and their supporters, to encourage the use of mediation and dialogue techniques instead of violence, especially among Kikuyus and Kalenjins in Nakuru and Uasin Ngishu, and other communities with a history of conflict.

*At the grassroots level, I identify as WFBM because the community is religiously diverse, with a large Muslim population that is openly religious, and it adds value to use religion to engage the parties in mediation.*

*Halima Dida*

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, KWFN, Kisumu County, Halima Dida, KWFN, Isiolo, Amisa Rashid, Young Women Mediator, Kibra, Rose Mbone, mediator, Korokocho informal settlement and Immaculate Mungai, KWFN Kwale County.

In the predominantly Muslim pastoral communities in Isiolo, WFBM Halima Dida prepares for and initiates mediation efforts by using verses from the Qur'an to encourage community engagement. Halima's process first begins with engagement of a single party, such as conducting internal mediation between the Muslim religious leaders in the Sulhu Forum. She will cite motivational verses to engage them in mediation efforts with the pastoralists, such as, 'O you who believe, be upright for God, bearers of witness with justice, and let not the enmity and hatred of anyone incite you not to be fair; be fair, that is closer to piety.' (Qur'an 5:8). Likewise, she will use the same approach to encourage the participation of the pastoralists.

Bishop Betty is a church leader in the predominantly Christian-populated area of Kisumu. She uses bible verses to mediate among conflicting clans and address leadership struggles between clans. Additionally, she uses the verses to exemplify how mediation supports a spiritual experience and peaceful resolution. This framing is often a powerful motivation for conflicting parties to consider engagement in mediation processes.



Photo: Maskani visit by the Mombasa Women of Faith Network in Mombasa, Kenya, to advocate for peaceful co-existence in October, 2022.

While WFBMs emphasize that faith plays an important role in daily life,<sup>6</sup> there are times when those affected by conflict do not resonate with the faith approaches presented by WFBMs. Bishop Betty states, 'I participated in national dialogue and mediation processes after the 2007 election violence, and when we brought religious values into the conversation, those affected asked: 'Where was God when we were suffering?'' Depending on the context, WFBMs may choose to be present in community mediation without invoking religion in order remain in solidarity with those affected by violence and utilize an approach that makes them feel comfortable.<sup>7</sup> It also helps develop trust with the community as they understand times that are appropriate to integrate religious values without resistance.

*I participated in national dialogue and mediation processes after the 2007 election violence, and when we brought religious values into the conversation, those affected asked: 'Where was God when we were suffering?'*

*Bishop Betty Onyango*

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, KWFN, Kisumu County.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Grace Oraro, Young Women Mediator, Nairobi and Kisumu County.

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### Women's mediation networks

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Kenya has recognized the critical role of women mediators, and established national policies, institutions, and systems to ensure women's participation in mediation. The 2016 Kenya National Action Plan on United Nations Resolution 1325, 'Women, Peace and Security,' is a localization mechanism to ensure women's participation in matters related to peace and security. The National Action Plan inspired the creation of the Kenya Women of Faith Network (KWFN) by the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) as an internal mechanism to remedy the male dominated leadership within a faith-based institution that supports mediation efforts.<sup>8</sup> IRCK is a national inter-religious organization that brings together religious groups in Kenya and has frequently involved in national-level dialogue and mediation processes to address election violence. KWFN, hosted by IRCK, provides a platform for women of faith to engage in local advocacy and collaborative action to advance issues related to governance, peace, and security as well as socio-economic challenges at the community and county levels.<sup>9</sup> Within these networks, WFMB receive capacity and skill building in mediation through contextual theology.<sup>10</sup> Many of the interviewed WFMBs throughout this study are members of KWFN.

Women's networks have collaborated on a variety of initiatives. For instance, in the 2022 elections, several WFBMs supported the national mediation team by collecting early warning and response data and presenting the analyzed data for action by the national mediation team. In turn, this contributed to early response mechanisms for the rapid response and de-escalation of conflict following the 2022 elections in Mombasa, Nairobi, Kisumu, Nakuru, and Uasin Gishu. This information was also used to negotiate with the political aspirants to commit to using peaceful campaigns by signing a peace pledge.<sup>11</sup>



*Photo: Kwale Women of Faith in Community Dialogue.*

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Bishop John Warari, Executive Committee Member, IRCK, Nairobi County.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, KWFN – Kisumu County, Halima Dida, KWFN, Isiolo and Immaculate Mungai – KWFN Kwale County.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, KWFN, Kisumu County, Halima Dida, KWFN, Isiolo and Immaculate Mungai, KWFN Kwale County.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Irene Kizito, Deputy Executive Director, IRCK, Nairobi County.



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### Engagement in broader peacebuilding efforts

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WFBMs do not deal with mediation as a stand-alone activity. Rather, mediation is linked to broader peacebuilding initiatives as well as development and governance interventions in their contexts of operation. For instance, WFBM engage in activities such as conflict assessments, which provides them with an opportunity to confirm and document information related to conflict dynamics at the national, county, and community levels. WFBM's long history of service provision in underdeveloped and conflict contexts renders them critical stakeholders in community. Being present in the community accords them interaction with communities and understand how communities perceive different parties. This knowledge and community credibility serves as an entry point for involvement in local mediation.

In addition, WFBM play a critical role in the community to address social challenges, such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), underage pregnancies, early marriages, and violent extremism.<sup>12</sup> Working with victims and survivors of these social challenges has earned them respect and trust, making them key community stakeholders. Halima Dida highlights that her involvement in community work with vulnerable individuals, including survivors of SGBV, and the incorporation of faith in their mediation efforts have earned her and other WFBMs respect, trust, and confidence from the people they serve.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, KWFN, Kisumu County, Halima Dida, KWFN, Isiolo and Immaculate Mungai, KWFN Kwale County.

## 4. NAVIGATING RISKS AND CHALLENGES

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### Patriarchal systems impact the mediation space

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Amisa Rashid is the founder of the Nivishe and works in Kibra, an informal settlement often at the epicentre of violence during elections. She observes that community dialogues and resolution of conflicts are traditionally dominated by men partly due to cultural practices that discredit the participation of women in community decision-making processes. As a result, she prioritizes the engagement of religious leaders in her mediation strategy to support the religiously diverse communities and mitigate tensions between the two groups. She adds that as a young female, 'It is even more difficult for me to be involved in mediation. I am not what people expect of a mediator because I am young.'

In many communities, it is rare for women to be included within peace mediation processes as participants or mediators. As the community is led by elders, it is the responsibility of the elder to lead the mediation process, also further creating an intergenerational divide.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, WFBMs often fulfill other roles, while still utilizing their mediation skillsets. For example, Halima Dida will use information collected from local conflict analysis to initiate conversations with the mediators. In February 2022, she initiated a mediation process between pastoralist communities from Isiolo County and farmers from Meru County to de-escalate conflict over resource access due to drought.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Amisa Rashid, Young Woman Mediator, Kibra, Nairobi County.

*It is event more difficult for me to be involved in mediation. I am not what people expect of a mediator because I am young.*

*Amisa Rashid*

For WFBMs to engage as a facilitator, or as an active participant, especially in tracks 1 and 2 mediation, they face the challenge of cultural and religious gender norms that restrict their participation.<sup>14</sup> Faith actors frequently exclude WFBMs from mediation processes based on the social perception that religious leadership is meant for men. The term ‘leadership’ within a faith context is associated with sheikh, imam, pastor, bishop, and priest, all historically male figures. Even when a woman identifies as a religious leader, the men often challenge their legitimacy from a cultural and religious lens.<sup>15</sup> WFBMs currently have a limited space of engagement within mediation spaces, making it difficult to be accepted by their male counterparts and to be present where decisions are made. ‘WFBMs play an active role in community mediation in formal and informal spaces, including the household levels that would accord them space in track 1 and 2 mediation spaces. But, despite our work, we have minimal support to fulfill this task even better,’ explains WFMB Sabina Chege.

*WFBMs play an active role in community mediation in formal and informal spaces, including the household levels that would accord them space in track 1 and 2 mediation spaces. But, despite our work, we have minimal support to fulfill this task even better.*

*Sabina Chege*

Even though faith institutions have made provisions for the inclusion of women in mediation processes, there are still challenges that hinder their meaningful participation. The participation of WFBMs in mediation depends on the internal regulations of religious institutions. Versus within religious texts are interpreted that women are not allowed to speak in public and, thus are reiterated by men to prevent public engagement of women in matters such as meditation.<sup>16</sup> For Muslim women, religion and culture have hindered the progression of women’s engagement in mediation even at the county or community level. As a result of this theological interpretation, most WFBMs are confined to mediate conflicts and disagreements between women or at the household level.<sup>17</sup>



*Photo: Kwale Women of Faith Network Chairperson Immaculate Mungai at Maweni, Tiwi, during a community sensitization session on peace, women and children’s rights.*

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Bishop John Warari, Executive Committee Member, IRCK, Nairobi County.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Amisa Rashid, Young Women Mediator, Kibra, Nairobi County.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Immaculate Mungai, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Kwale County.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Immaculate Mungai, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Kwale County.

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### Lack of access to resources

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Despite WFBMs holding affiliation with faith institutions and as members of respective faith groups, they often serve in a voluntary capacity. While most WFBMs are committed to providing services to the community, many are providers for their families and engaged in microeconomic activities.<sup>18</sup> Meaning, they frequently lose financial opportunities in order to serve as a mediator. It is assumed that WFBMs are from religious institutions whose work is to serve people, and engagement in community activity is an act of charity.

When financial funds are provided for mediators of faith, they are often tailored for men, as donors prefer to engage with formal institutions, which are naturally led by men. As WFBM are not the primary recipients of funding, they are often forced to practice their work in informal structures without the needed resources.<sup>19</sup>

There are exceptions to this norm, such as Bishop Betty Onyango, who holds a leadership title within her religious institution and is included in national mediation. She also is engaged in informal mediation activities in the background, such as speaking to spouses of the political leaders involved in conflicts.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

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### Lack of access to education

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WFBMs are also excluded from faith-driven mediation as they are perceived as not having sufficient religious knowledge in par with male religious leaders, especially with senior leadership who primarily engage in high-level mediation. Although there are many capacity-strengthening activities in Kenya, none are specifically tailored to WFBMs. Despite WFBMs regularly practicing their religion, they perceive themselves as not having the theological knowledge at the level of religious leaders - and often this is true.<sup>20</sup> WFBM want to, and should have the access to resources, to increase their education on theological and sacred teachings that can be applied in mediation.<sup>21</sup>



*Photo: Kwale Women of Faith Network Chairperson Immaculate Mungai at Maweni, Tiwi, during a community sensitization session on peace, women and children's rights.*

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Halima Dida, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Isiolo, Rose Mbone, Yong Mediator, Korokocho, Nairobi County and Immaculate Mungai, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Kwale County.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, KWFN, Kisumu County, Halima Dida, KWFN, Isiolo, Amisa Rashid, Young Women Mediator, Kibra, Rose Mbone, mediator, Korokocho infomal settlement and Immaculate Mungai, KWFN, Kwale County.

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### Physical and mental risks

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Mediation often happens in the context of untold human suffering. Areas where WFBMs work, including Kibra, Isiolo, Kisumu, and Kwale, have a reoccurring history of violence every election cycle. The consequences of violence include SGBV, displacement and unemployment, all which create longstanding impacts on the physical and mental health of both survivors and WFBMs.<sup>22</sup>

Amisa Rashid is a mental health expert involved in mediation. Throughout her career, she has observed that as active listeners, WFBMs are exposed to traumatic incidences and events that if not addressed, lead their own mental and physical stress.<sup>23</sup> ‘Mediation in Kisumu is difficult and exhausting. We hear much divisive political language and hate speech during campaigns and on social media platforms that push us to engage in mediation but take a toll on our mental health,’ states Bishop Betty. While women frequently hold sessions to document the mediation process, there are no debriefing mechanisms in place that would allow WFBMs to cope with the secondary trauma they experienced during mediation.<sup>24</sup> Many women choose not to participate in mediation due to the lack of support systems available to address the secondary impacts.<sup>25</sup>

Women must also grapple with threats related to their physical security. Most smaller conflicts take place in under-developed communities, with poor infrastructure. As women are not invited to participate in higher-level mediation efforts, they most often mediate in this setting. While mediation requires consistency and long-term investment,<sup>26</sup> under-developed communities, coupled with sporadic attacks from armed groups, makes it difficult for the women to effectively do their jobs. WFBMs are often used as targets of violence and therefore constantly fearing the risk of sexual abuse and rape.<sup>27</sup> Rape is the main mechanism of violence against women in these communities and strongly hinders their willingness to work in these communities.

*Mediation in Kisumu is difficult and exhausting. We hear much divisive political language and hate speech during campaigns and on social media platforms that push us to engage in mediation but take a toll on our mental health.*

*Bishop Betty Onyango*

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Amisa Rashid, Young Women Mediator, Kibra, Nairobi County.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Amisa Rashid, Young Women Mediator, Kibra, Nairobi County.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Kisumu County, Halima Dida, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Isiolo, Rose Mbone, Young Mediator, Korokocho, Nairobi County and Immaculate Mungai, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Kwale County.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Halima Dida, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Isiolo, Rose Mbone, Yong Mediator, Korokocho, Nairobi County and Immaculate Mungai, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Kwale County.

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Halima Dida, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Isiolo County.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Halima Dida, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Isiolo County.

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### Politicization of religious actors

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WFBMs are frequently concerned that affiliation of religious actors in politics will undermine their role as faith actors in communities, especially in the post-election context.<sup>28</sup> WFBMs noted that in 2012 they were acting under the umbrella of national mediation convened by IRCK, as the community saw faith as a relevant mechanism for addressing violence.<sup>29</sup> However, religious leaders, notably Evangelicals, gradually joined the inner circle of the 2022 presidential candidate Kenya Kwanza. As such, communities gradually perceived religious leaders as taking sides in politics, thus eliminating their perceived neutrality and impartiality. Consequently, based on their affiliation with these religious leaders, WFBM also were perceived as biased and lost credibility as mediators. Irene Kizito, Deputy Director at IRCK and leader of the Kenya National Mediation Platform, emphasized that, ‘religious actors must remain impartial to avoid losing the credibility and trust that communities have in them, which will affect the work of WFBMs, since they are at the sub-national level as representatives of the national faith institutions.’

*...religious actors must remain impartial to avoid losing the credibility and trust that communities have in them, which will affect the work of WFBMs, since they are at the sub-national level as representatives of the national faith institutions.*

*Irene Kizito*

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Caroline Ambasa and Emelda Ombesse, Kenya women of Faith Network and FECCLAHA, Nairobi County.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Caroline Ambasa and Emelda Ombesse, Kenya women of Faith Network and FECCLAHA, Nairobi County.

## 5. OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

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### Deescalating political threats and ethnic divides

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At county and community levels, WFBMs play an important role as enablers and facilitators of mediation.<sup>30</sup> As people associate WFBMs with religious values, communities involved in mediation expect WFBMs to be fair and just in the process.<sup>31</sup> The title ‘Bishop,’ allows Bishop Betty to be accepted by communities. ‘The community expects me to step in because I am a religious leader,’ she states. She facilitated negotiations that ensured the process was inclusive and de-escalated the potential political conflict. Amisa Rashid, whose organization is in Kibra, the most populated informal settlement in Nairobi, strategically works with religious leaders in mediation. ‘In 2022 elections, we engaged in preventative mediation, and we brought all faith leaders of all denominations in Kibra and discussed how scripture can be used to prevent violence, especially among youth,’ she explained. In the election period, their engagement successfully de-escalated conflict between political supporters, leading to decreased incidences of political violence.

*The community expects me to step in because I am a religious leader.*

*Bishop Betty Onyango*

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, KWFN, Kisumu County.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

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### Understanding cultural norms for acceptance

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Immaculate Mungai has led mediation efforts between the majority Muslim communities and Christian minority communities to ensure the Christians have allocated land to construct churches. Even though she is a Christian working in a predominantly Muslim area, she ensures to respect the customs of both religions, including dressing appropriately as a sign of respect for the Muslim culture that prescribes a strict dress code for women. Showing respect for the values of other faiths makes it easy for them to an ‘outsider’ as a mediator and opens opportunities for collaboration.<sup>32</sup> They become more effective when they collaborate across faith traditions and with other non-secular agencies that believe in them and their efforts in mediation.

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### Engaging religious leaders in mediation practices

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Due to patriarchal limitations, WFBMs must be strategic in how they engage with local communities to ensure their participation. In Isiolo, women participate within existing patriarchal systems by collaborating with religious leaders. Often, the women will provide the leader with information on the context and conflict.<sup>33</sup> They use information sharing as an entry point, highlighting the issues that must be addressed in the mediation.<sup>34</sup> In Kibra, Amisa Rashid conducted community talks on radio and physical dialogue sessions with the support of religious leaders to prevent violence during the 2022 election.

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Rose Mbone, mediator, Korokocho informal settlement, Nairobi County.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Halima Dida, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Isiolo County.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Halima Dida, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Isiolo County.

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### Supporting interfaith perspectives

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In addressing interreligious conflicts, WFBMs adopt an interreligious approach in community mediation to address the sensitivities, ensuring that major faiths are represented and that scriptures referenced from Islam and Christianity consider religious sensitivities to deal with the perception of Evangelization or Da’awah. Christian WFBMs will base their presentation on biblical experience, and Muslim WFBMs will do the same from the Islamic perspective. They may also use a verse from either religion with a similar message. For instance, Halima Dida shared how she highlights the rights of women who experience violence, regardless of whether they are Muslims or Christians, meaning that their suffering is the same. Some of the verses quoted by the Christians are the Beatitudes – ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God,’ (Matthew chapter 5 verse 9) and ‘Do not repay anyone evil for evil. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, for it is written, it is mine to avenge, says the Lord. On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. Overcome evil with good,’ (Romans 12). Rose Mbone, a young woman mediator working in Korokocho, an informal settlement in Nairobi explains, ‘I refer to religious resources when the parties show affinity to religion through religious acts, such as prayer at the beginning of the session.’ She adds that in a conflict context with Muslim and Christian populations who openly profess their faith, having a mediator from each religion enables them to be readily accepted in activities. WFBMs application of religious text during mediation is situational and depends on how religion manifests in the mediation context.

*I refer to religious resources when the parties show affinity to religion through religious acts, such as prayer at the beginning of the session.*

*Rose Mbone*

## 6. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS



*Photo: Members of the Embakasi Women of Faith Network during an anti-sexual gender-based violence experience sharing workshop.*

Kenyan society is faced with a myriad of challenges, especially on matters of peace, development, and cohesion. As a result, there is a dire need for different actors to contribute towards a society that is less violently motivated. Women faith-based mediators are actively on the frontline advocating for a just, peaceful, equitable, and inclusive society on all fronts. The use of faith as the armour in this battle is a source of motivation.<sup>35</sup> They have leveraged their faith identity to engage communities and have forged alliances with other institutions to shape and engage in mediation. They are influential because of their faith identity and due to the trust that they have earned due to active participation in community matters. However, the efforts and potential of WFBMs are yet to be fully recognized.

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, for it is written, it is mine to avenge, says the Lord. On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. Overcome evil with good.*

*Romans 12*

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Halima Dida, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Isiolo, Rose Mbone, Young Mediator, Korokocho, Nairobi County and Immaculate Mungai, Kenya Women of Faith Network, Kwale County.

## *Recommendations provided by WFBMs*

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- 1. Provide tailored, accessible, and sustained funding opportunities** to empower and support the engagement of WFBMs.<sup>36</sup>
- 2. Provide capacity-building opportunities for WFBMs on faith-based mediation**, supporting a contextualized approach relevant for their community level priorities, as well as capacity-building on leadership skills.<sup>37</sup>
- 3. Ensure WFBMs are meaningfully involved in decision-making processes** to ensure their issues are adequately addressed.<sup>38</sup>
- 4. Support advocacy efforts to increase WFBMs' leadership positions** within mediation processes.<sup>39</sup>
- 5. Offer protection systems and legal support systems to help protect the safety of WFBMs.** This includes providing trainings on personal safety and protection from violence.
- 6. Offer mental health training and psychosocial support** for WFBMs.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, KWFN, Kisumu County, Halima Dida, KWFN, Isiolo County, Immaculate Mungai, KWFN, Kwale County.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, KWFN, Kisumu County, Halima Dida, KWFN, Isiolo County, Immaculate Mungai, KWFN, Kwale County; Interview with Irene Kizito, Deputy Executive Director, IRCK, Nairobi County.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Rose Mbone, Amisa Rashid, Bishop John (IRCK), Nairobi County.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Bishop Betty, KWFN, Kisumu County, Halima Dida, KWFN, Isiolo County, Immaculate Mungai, KWFN, Kwale County.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Amisa Rashid, Young Women Mediator, Kibra, Nairobi County.



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## ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

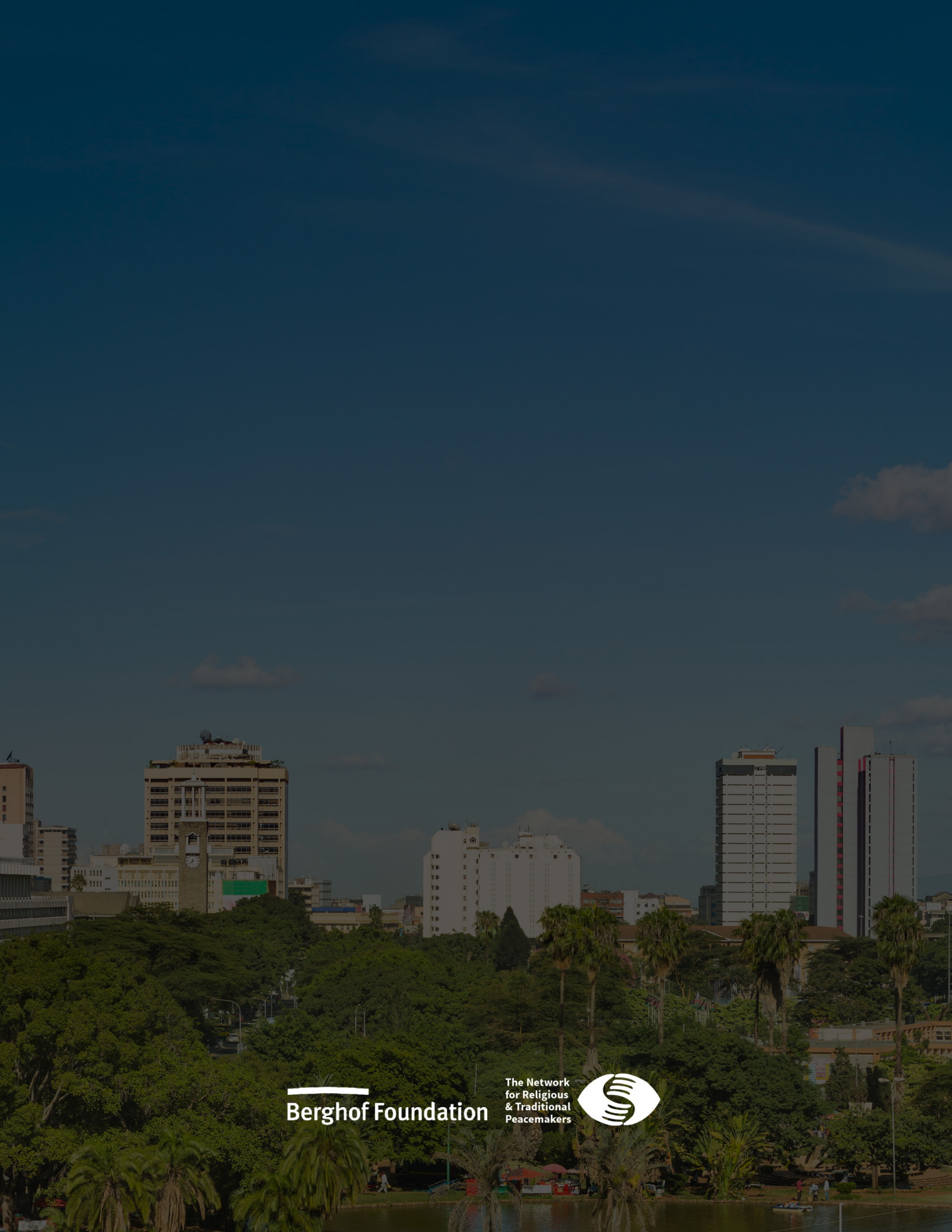
**Shamsia Ramadhan** is the Global Coordinator of Freedom of Religion or Belief for The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. She has over 15 years of experience and has extensive field operations in peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and Africa’s security issues. She worked in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Egypt, Nigeria, Niger, and Somalia and has experience in conducting peace and security assessments. Her expertise and interests include mediation, community peacebuilding, inter-religious peacebuilding, action, conflict-sensitive programming, and preventing/countering, and violent extremism. Shamsia has authored and co-authored several publications, articles, and resource packs on peacebuilding and preventing and countering violent extremism, including: ‘Connector Project Guide Sustained Interactions for Strengthened Relationships and Collective Wellbeing,’ ‘Peace Journalism in Post Election Kenya’, and many others.



### About The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (Peacemakers Network), builds bridges between grassroots peacemakers and global players to strengthen the work done for sustainable peace. Since becoming operational in 2013, the Peacemakers Network has supported individual traditional and faith-oriented insider mediators, intra- and inter-faith dialogues, and the advancement of reconciliation efforts. Network activities are conducted as a collaborative effort between Network Members, Supporters, and the Secretariat, and are based on requests from local or international peacemakers or partners. These collaborative actions and processes enhance the ownership of actors involved, measurably reduce the duplication of efforts, and evolve strategic collaborative actions that are sustainable in the long run.





  
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