

MEDIATION PRACTICE:
PERCEPTIONS OF PRACTITIONERS
FROM THE AFRICAN INSIDER
MEDIATORS PLATFORM

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2013

MEDIATION PRACTICE:
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BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MPhil (Conflict Transformation and Management)
to be awarded at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

DECEMBER 2013

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ABSTRACT

In African countries emerging from periods of violent crisis a layer of civil society practitioners and peacebuilders appear to play a critical role in mediating the inevitable disputes and tensions that arise. This treatise focuses on a sample of these mediating practitioners who perceive themselves in a variety of different ways, as peacebuilders, as conflict managers, as conflict resolution practitioners and as conflict transformation practitioners. The practitioners who participated in this study work at multiple levels to support the mediative processes that are needed in contexts of crisis and transition. They form part of a wider group of practitioners who have taken the initiative to organise insider mediators into a learning community of practitioners, under the auspices of the African Insider Mediators Platform (AIMP). This platform provides scholars with a useful research opportunity.

The overall aim of this study is to explore the relationship between conflict transformation theory and the establishment of the AIMP as perceived by AIMP practitioners. It captures the perceptions that mediators have of the nature of the conflicts in which they are engaged and the influence of theoretical approaches on their practice. The treatise focuses on the perceptions of selected mediation practitioners associated with the AIMP. It draws out the conceptual lenses that are used to inform perceptions of effective mediation practice and that connect the perceptions of practitioners with the concepts contained within the conflict transformation theory. In so doing it describes the perceptions of practitioners and discusses the extent to which these perceptions resonate or deviate from theoretical conceptualisations of conflict in Africa and the theoretical frameworks that outline what constitutes an effective mediative response to this conflict.

The insights into effectiveness that emerge from this approach are outlined in the treatise, drawing from background research that has informed the formation of the AIMP as well as from interviews carried out with selected mediation practitioners. The research findings suggest that there are several perceived connections between the theoretical underpinnings of conflict transformation approaches and the practice of the insider mediators involved in this study.

The discussion of the data puts forward the proposition that the conceptual perceptions of the insider mediators involved in the study, in their description of elements of mediation practice and the nature of conflict, resonate strongly with the theories associated with conflict transformation thinking. In addition several additional theoretical influences appear to have been incorporated into an overall approach to discrete and collaborative mediation efforts that reinforce a strong connection between conflict transformation thinking and the practice of insider mediators. These relational connections between theory and practice are outlined in some detail in the description of the study that follows.

KEY WORDS

Conflict Transformation

Insider Mediators

Track I, II, III and 1.5 mediation processes

African Insider Mediators Platform

African Peace and Security Architecture

Protracted Social Conflict

ACRONYMS

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
ACTION	Action for Conflict Transformation
AFRICOM	Africa Command Structure
AIMP	African Insider Mediators Platform
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ASC	ACTION Support Centre
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
BCPR	Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery
CCR	Centre for Conflict Resolution
CFHD	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
CMA	Centre for Mediation in Africa
CSS	Centre for Security Studies
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EISA	Electoral Institute for Southern Africa
MSP	Mediation Support Project
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NPC	National Peace Council
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General

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DECLARATION

I, *Richard Melville Smith, s210238704*, hereby declare that this *treatise* is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

Richard Smith

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the participants in this study who gave willingly of their time and without whom none of this research would have been possible. In addition my appreciation goes to the members and Working Group of the African Insider Mediators Platform and the Steering Committee of the ACTION Support Centre who have had the trust and confidence in this research process to give it their full endorsement.

To my family, who allowed me to disappear for hours on end as I struggled to find the time to work on this, my daughters Amelia Mara and Jessica Jemba, and especially to my wife Charlotte Hulley, your ongoing support is the reason this is completed.

To my mother Paddy Smith for betting against me ever finishing this, and thus contributing to ensuring that it is now done, I offer an additional note of thanks.

Finally I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Lyn Snodgrass for not giving up on me and for always saying go well!

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Overview of the Research Topic

The topic of this treatise, 'Mediation Practice: Perceptions of Practitioners from the African Insider Mediators Platform' articulates the intention to provide a perspective on mediation practice that is informed by a qualitative research study. The treatise outlines the process and findings of a qualitative research study that aims to explore the relationship between conflict transformation theory and the establishment of the African Insider Mediators Platform (AIMP).

The implementation of formal peace agreements that often form part of the cessation of widespread violence appear to require the intervention and involvement of local level mediators. Similarly the tensions that arise as societies emerge from transition and deeper forms of social transformation are introduced, often lead to escalated conflicts that are less likely to become destructive if insider mediators are able to respond effectively. The contributions of these insider mediators form the focus of this treatise as it seeks to better understand the theoretical influences on the practice of mediators involved in preventing violence and building peace.

The recurring conflicts and cycles of violence that contribute to the vulnerability and fragility of the African context present a particular challenge to peace and conflict theorists and practitioners. By exploring the perceptions of practitioners involved in the AIMP, and the underlying assumptions that inform the approach of the platform, insights can be derived regarding the theoretical underpinnings that appear to resonate with mediation practice. This attempt to draw out the connections between mediation theory and practice may be useful to practitioners and scholars as lessons emerge that have both theoretical and practical application.

Part of the response to seemingly intractable conflicts that escalate into violence at national level, and to the forms of armed conflict that threaten national and human security, usually includes senior level international mediation processes aimed at reaching formal agreements between the political leadership of conflicting parties and the representatives of power blocs perceived to be involved. The dynamics of the conflict change as senior level agreements are first forged and then implemented, often leading to disputes at other levels and new forms of conflict that

are influenced by dynamics that are not adequately addressed within the formal agreements reached. These dynamics create secondary conditions for instability that easily undermine peace processes and enable the resurgence of violence.

When peace agreements do hold the changes that accompany the transformation of the deeper structural and systemic elements of conflict, that forms part of transition processes, often exacerbate residual forms of social tension. The shifting dynamics that accompany processes of change are often accompanied by informal insider mediation efforts working at several levels. Insider mediators from within the context appear to play a crucial role in ensuring that peace processes gain traction and contribute to longer-term deeper forms of social transformation. These mediators are not just managing the emerging conflicts that accompany processes of change; they appear in practice to be mediating a conflict transformation process.

The research process included a literature review that explored theoretical approaches to mediation and the nature of conflict and conflict transformation, as well as an in-depth review of published and unpublished material produced in the formation stages of the AIMP. This theoretical foundation laid the basis for the qualitative research process that explored and engaged with the perceptions of a sample of active mediation practitioners. These practicing mediators work in a variety of individual contexts including their collaboration in the formation and development of the AIMP, a collective effort to strengthen mediative capacities in response to African conflicts.

The African Insider Mediators Platform was initiated in November 2011 as a strategic response from practicing mediators to the identified need to strengthen internal national mediation capacity and to build local ownership of mediation outcomes. This was seen as a strategic response to the particular needs of the conflicts affecting Africa. The AIMP is a loose formation of practitioners active in a range of mediation initiatives who have come together in an attempt to strengthen their individual contributions by accessing a wider range of learning experiences and closing the gaps between mediation efforts at different levels.

In its stated intentions the AIMP outlines an attempt to link the immediate short-term response to conflict to a longer-term set of transformative mediated processes (AIMP 2010). This implies a location of the AIMP initiative within an approach to conflict that draws strongly from conflict transformation theory.

The AIMP and the collaborating practitioners who have initiated this longer-term mediation response provide a rich source of learning that this treatise begins to explore. By eliciting the perceptions that practitioners have of the extent to which conflict transformation theory has informed their approach to mediation, and the extent to which a particular theoretical approach has informed the establishment of the AIMP, the research presents findings for discussion that will be useful both to the field of mediation and to the further development of the underlying theory of conflict transformation that the insider mediation approach appears to be informed by.

1.2 Rationale

Within complex conflict settings there are many examples of groups of insiders and individuals who are embedded in the context and who work consciously to provide essential connections between different levels and layers of peacebuilding processes. Existing research that informs this study suggests that the forms of conflict with which mediators are engaging cannot be separated from the deeper underlying tensions of societies in transition (Smith and Deely 2011).

It could thus be reasoned that effective responses to conflict that aim to build a durable peace should approach conflict in a manner that seeks to integrate peacebuilding efforts at multiple levels. Initiatives aimed at linking short-term mediation responses to longer-term forms of transformation present opportunities for learning that the research study begins to document. By locating mediation practice within the framework of conflict transformation theory this study will explore the perceptions of practitioners in an effort to uncover insights into how to effectively work with the layered dynamics of conflict in Africa.

1.3 Research Context

1.3.1 Contextual Analysis of African Conflicts

Without attempting to give a comprehensive analysis of all of the forms of conflict currently affecting the African continent this outline seeks to point to a continent that is still caught up in an ongoing cycle of protracted social conflict. The high level mediated outcomes that have sought to bring an end to violence at national and regional levels have often not been able to effectively contain the residual forms of tension that accompany political and economic periods of transition. The effect of change processes on communities inevitably leads to volatile contexts in which local

level disputes can quickly spiral into widespread forms of escalated tension and violence.

Several contexts across Africa continue to be characterised by residual conflicts and tension connected to poorly managed transitional processes, including mismanaged demobilisation and integration programmes for combatants, ineffective reconciliation efforts and an insensitive handling of transitional justice issues. Recognising the fragility of state institutions and structures is central to understanding why so many mediated outcomes do not appear to be able to prevent communities and national contexts from slipping back into recurring cycles of violent crisis. Post-colonial states have for the most part been unable to transform weak, ineffective and partisan social, economic, political and judicial systems, inherited from a colonial era of domination. In some instances the systems that were designed to divide and rule have been adapted to be used in post-colonial contexts for the purposes of maintaining control.

With millions of people living in poverty on the continent, growing economic inequality that appears to be exacerbated by unequal economic development, and high levels of unemployment, the conditions are rife to make people, and youth in particular, vulnerable to external manipulation by stakeholders that benefit from instability and the lawlessness that often accompanies periods of violence. The devastating effect of war and violence on the webs of social relationships that enable human agency compounds the complexity of this challenge. The impact of violence has also had specific and different long-term debilitating effects on men and women.

The manipulation of sections of the population often seeks to take advantage of ethnic differences between groups or to use polarized party political systems to deepen the differences between groups and mobilise people around destructive agendas. Interest groups use these strategies to shift forms of ownership and control or to destabilize the situation in order to take economic advantage.

Within these conditions Africa has also been affected by a rise in other forms of extremism, including those developed around religious, faith based or identity related agendas. In an increasingly polarized world African conflicts are influenced by the use of large-scale military operations in response to acts of violence, and to the use of fear tactics and terror that often deepen divisions and fan the flames of conflict. Conditions are ripe in Africa for increasingly violent forms of conflict, and a rise in extremism, that could take hold and become part of the strategies and tactics used

by those who seek to undermine state institutions and structures.

The increased militarisation of Africa and the growing military presence of the United States, through the Africa Command Structure (AFRICOM), and direct military intervention by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies in African conflicts, is also a source of major concern that feeds into and fuels violent forms of conflict. The accelerated scramble to control and exploit African mineral resources has also raised the stakes for affected communities. Seldom accruing much benefit from the resource related development that takes place, communities are also often vulnerable to being relocated or to having natural resources such as forests and water that are essential to their forms of livelihood, polluted or destroyed.

The phenomenon of rents and rent seeking in relation to natural resource exploitation, whereby related activities generate profits that are much higher than the minimum level of cost required to keep activities going, encourages the emergence of corrupt systems that undermine efforts to build stability. The mineral resource sector in particular creates the conditions for dysfunctional politics wherein instability becomes the self-serving paradigm of those who stand to gain economically from loose or non-existent regulatory mechanisms.

In addition, natural resources provide an obvious source of financing for rebel groups who become trapped in war economies. These war economies are cycles of violence and instability that use illicit resource accumulation to finance armed conflict in contexts that require armed groups to secure access to and control over lucrative resource opportunities that are made more lucrative under unstable conditions.

Shifts in power at the global geopolitical level, and in Africa, have also accelerated the scramble for resources. As China begins to assert a more aggressive economic presence in Africa, the previous dominance of traditional colonial powers, including France, the United Kingdom and other member states of the European Union, has been challenged. The economic opportunities that accompany political influence and resource control and the incentive this provides to work outside of weak and ineffectual systems cannot be delinked from the forces driving instability, inter-state conflicts and undemocratic or unconstitutional changes in leadership at national and local levels.

Ownership transfers and the accumulation of large-scale land tracts as well as

changes in land ownership systems are also a source of conflict and a contributing factor to the conflict landscape. The further economic and social marginalisation of vulnerable communities that often accompanies land transfers exacerbates the conditions for escalated tension.

The democratisation agenda, and the rapid introduction of polarising forms of multi-party politics into systems that are not prepared to manage the resulting tensions also exacerbates levels of tension. The heightened politicisation of all spheres of government that accompanies polarised party politics is often compounded when the private sector is weak and the state dominates most forms of economic activity. Escalated tensions and conflicts related to economic control, as well as within the relationship between the state and organised labour, and within the relations between the state, the private sector and industry also appear to be on the rise.

Current electoral models, including those that encourage a winner-takes-all approach and those focused on a power politics that builds support around personalities and identity or ethnicity linked political parties often become flashpoints for violence. State failure to effectively deliver on social services also creates the conditions for violent forms of conflict linked to the mobilisation of a frustrated and dissatisfied citizenry.

While poor service delivery is often the result of a lack of capacity within the state, it is also sometimes a deliberate intention to marginalise the needs of specific groups of people, a form of structural violence. These conflicts are also connected to a lack of transparency over how and why decisions are made, and a breakdown or absence of inclusive and effective dialogue processes.

The resulting tensions and the forms of community organization that emerge around these structural and systemic failures, and the frustration and anger that accompanies the dominant unequal development trajectories of most African countries is an important emerging form of conflict that requires urgent attention. The relationship between the state and its citizens is central to this element. Economic migration and tensions connected to prejudice against migrant communities and tight competition for scarce resources and inadequate service delivery systems provide further examples of a rising conflict trend that needs to be more holistically addressed.

In response to these cycles of interconnected conflict dynamics and the systems that

they form part of mediation practitioners have sought to develop an integrated set of responses that connect mediation efforts at multiple levels. A shift in approach that speaks more to the concept of the mediative accompaniment of change processes rather than the mediation of discrete events appears to resonate well with the needs of the context.

This treatise explores this approach, through the lens of mediating practitioners involved in the African Insider Mediators Platform, and seeks to uncover the extent to which the conceptual underpinnings of conflict transformation theory inform the practice of these mediators.

1.3.2 The Relevance of Conflict Transformation

Conflict Transformation Theory is an emerging academic focus area that has developed significantly over the past fifteen years. Conflict transformation theory describes a particular approach to engaging with conflict that recognises conflict as a dynamic tension that arises out of the interplay between complex sets of factors. Galtung (2000) and Lederach (2003) provide examples of prominent scholars firmly located within this emerging science, who contribute consistently to furthering the development of a theory of conflict transformation.

The theory of conflict transformation sets out an interdisciplinary approach that assimilates personal, relational and structural elements of conflict, into an integrated framework for understanding conflict and violence and building peace. Conflict transformation theory emphasises the interconnections between short and long term responses to conflict, and the essential linking of responses to conflict to a long-term social transformation agenda. This theoretical approach to engaging with conflict has its roots in the work of practitioner scholars including Chris Mitchell (2002), Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2005), Lederach (1997, 2003) and Galtung (2000).

Conflict dynamics in Africa appear to be consistent with the characteristics of conflicts that are described as deep-rooted or protracted. The conflict transformation approach appears to be particularly well suited to these dynamics. A review of conflict transformation literature and a discussion of its relevance to mediation in Africa, as well as the relevance of conflict resolution and conflict management approaches, is outlined in more detail in Chapter Two. The notion of deep-rooted and protracted conflict is introduced in the following section.

1.3.3 Deep-rooted and Protracted Social Conflict

The articulation by Burton (1990:87) of how deep-rooted conflicts result from unmet fundamental human needs provides an important starting point in understanding the social conflicts with which the practitioners involved in this study are engaged. Human needs theorists like Burton attempt to classify the ontological or universal needs that if unmet provide the seeds out of which protracted and deep-rooted conflict can grow. Lederach (1997), Burton (1990) and Azar (1990) emphasise the importance of identity needs in particular as potential drivers of protracted conflict. Azar (1986:31) points out that identity needs are understood to be non-negotiable individual interests that are often expressed collectively through the membership individuals have with social groups.

Many of the conflict dynamics that affect communities in Africa, and that appear initially to be identity needs related are also deeply rooted in historical, territorial and resource related claims and, ultimately in struggles for power as the means to securing group and individual interests. These conflicts are inter-connected across multiple levels and appear to create the conditions for deep-rooted tensions and violence at community level, particularly in contexts where communities are recovering from periods of intense crisis. The complexity of this form of conflict is well described by Azar in his influential proposition of the notion of protracted social conflict (Azar 1990).

The concept of protracted social conflict is largely ascribed to a theory put forward by Edward Azar that builds on the notion of deep-rooted conflict. Protracted social conflict is described by Azar (1991:93) as “the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation.” Azar (1990:6) points to the multiple causal factors and dynamics of protracted social conflict, the blurred demarcation between internal and external sources and actors in the conflict and the absence of clear starting and terminating points as key characteristics of this type of conflict.

The multiplicity of interconnected conflict elements appears to suggest that successfully mediated peace agreements or stand alone community peacebuilding efforts will not be effective unless efforts are made to connect and integrate their intended impact. The mediation practitioners that form the focus of this treatise and

the formation of the AIMP provides an example of an initiative that seeks to achieve this.

1.3.4 Mediation as a Response to Protracted Forms of Conflict

In its basic form mediation is generally defined as an intervention in a negotiation or a conflict by an acceptable third party. Usually this party has limited or no authoritative decision-making power but assists the involved parties in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute. This classic definition is given greater relevance in relation to the particular role played by insider mediators through the acknowledgement that in addition to addressing substantive issues, mediation may also establish or strengthen relationships of trust and respect between parties or terminate relationships in a manner that minimizes costs and psychological harm (Moore 1996:34-36).

In 'Mediation and Facilitation in Peace Processes' Mason describes a third party actor as including internal actors from the conflict setting, NGOs from civil society, other states, regional organisations and intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations (UN). Mason argues that it is not only government diplomats that are needed to deal with conflict but various third parties on all levels of society (Mason 2007:16).

Mediation literature has now largely accepted the formulation of mediation processes as belonging either to a formal Track I, Track II, and III or Track 1.5 approach (Wolleh 2007:4). Track I approaches are considered to be official and more formal in nature. They usually take place at a senior level and involve international bodies including the UN, the African Union (AU) or one of the Regional Bodies such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Track II initiatives are less formal and involve both a wider range of actors, including civil society groups, as well as a wider range of dialogue based tools that are utilised in support of formal processes. Track III mediation interventions involve actors at local or community level, often employing local tribal, traditional and religious leaders, though other respected and accepted mediators are also often part of these processes.

The increasing use of the term Track 1.5 is an acknowledgement that there are often linkages between the formal and informal ways in which actors contribute to a process, and that the gap that exists between them is often an impeding factor in moving a mediation process forward. This emergence of Track 1.5 is at least in part due to the increasingly important role played by insider mediators and the value attached to the contribution of civil society actors to peacebuilding processes.

In support of an argument that the shifts in form of mediation are in response to the reality of what works in practice, the HD Centre statistics contained in their 2007 report point to regional organisations as the most successful mediator. The UN though is still the single most active mediator, followed by Norway and the United States (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2007).

In an interview with Julian Portilla Track I mediator Chester Crocker (2003) reflects with characteristic frankness on his own experiences in mediation processes. Of particular interest is his response to a question on what advice he would give to Track II actors on dealing with Track I in which he stresses the importance of understanding the individuals involved in the Track I initiative and in recognising the human and relational elements involved in looking for opportunities for linking and developing relationships between levels (Crocker 2003).

This is particularly useful for insider mediators attempting to link to senior levels that are beginning to include greater numbers of mediators with whom they may already have some relationship, or from whom they are separated by fewer degrees. The added emphasis on relationships also confirms the useful approach more commonly associated with insiders.

This research links conflict transformation theory to a collaborative effort by insider mediators to explicitly connect the work of mediation practitioners at community level to higher-level mediation processes. The research findings may contain lessons and insights that would be useful in the development of a mediation component to conflict transformation theory and in increasing the effectiveness of mediative processes.

These insights may also assist in defining more clearly why such an approach is more likely to result in effective interventions aimed at resolving and transforming the complex social conflicts facing the African continent.

1.3.5 The Formation of the AIMP

The AIMP is a collaborative initiative of practicing mediators from within civil society who came together to build a platform for learning, experience sharing and strengthening the mediation contributions of insider mediators active in a wide range of contexts and at multiple levels across the African continent.

The founding meeting of the African Insider Mediators Platform was held in Johannesburg on the 10th and 11th of November 2010 (AIMP Final Concept Paper 2010). This meeting followed a research study undertaken by the researcher on behalf of the PeaceNexus Foundation, a Geneva-based peace institute and commissioned by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

The PeaceNexus research study focused on providing "... a clearer understanding of the characteristics defining effective insider mediators, their potential contributions, and how this potential could best be enhanced" (Smith and Deely 2011). The report recommended a long-term process of partnership building between representatives of key African peacebuilding networks from across the African continent.

At the founding meeting, which was financially supported by the PeaceNexus Foundation, 14 civil society members, representing a wide range of institutions and existing practitioner networks, agreed to establish the AIMP. A concept paper outlining the strategic intent of the AIMP was produced that has served as the founding document of the AIMP. The Concept Paper outlines the Overall Goal of the AIMP as follows:

"To establish a support base for African mediators working on conflict systems at multiple levels that enhances internal national mediation capacity and contributes to local ownership of mediation outcomes" (AIMP 2010).

A subsequent gathering of the AIMP was held in Mombasa in July 2011. This also marked the beginning of the institutional relationship between the AIMP and the United Nations Development Programme Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (UNDP BCPR). UNDP BCPR provided resource support to this meeting as well as the AIMP Consultative Conference that took place in Johannesburg in 2013.

At the Mombasa meeting in July 2011 a collective analysis of key conflict trends and related threats and opportunities was undertaken by the 22 participants and a more focused strategic intent for the AIMP was developed in response to this analysis. The

meeting called for the forging of “collaborative and inclusive coalitions” and set out the intentions of the AIMP as being that of a “catalyst” and a “capacity multiplier” (AIMP 2011).

At the AIMP Consultative Conference held at Liliesleaf in Johannesburg in September 2013, 38 participants from 27 African countries adopted the Liliesleaf Declaration that specifically mentions the African Union Commission (AUC) as a key partner and outlines the intention of the AIMP to work “in support of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)” (AIMP 2013).

These meeting outcomes culminated in the articulation of a clear Vision and Overall Aim for the AIMP. This strategic direction, declared as a “consolidated strategic civil society response to the call by the African Union Commission to build an African Peace and Security Architecture” is captured in the final Report of the Proceedings that was produced following the Johannesburg meeting (AIMP 2013).

The Report outlines the Vision and Aim as follows:

“Vision

A support base for African mediators working on conflict systems at multiple levels that enhances internal national mediation capacity and contributes to local ownership of mediation outcomes;

The AIMP will serve as a capacity multiplier that will use innovative forms of learning and experience sharing to strengthen national level mediation capacity in support of a collaborative inclusive partnership approach to mediative processes.

Overall Aim

To collectively strengthen a platform for practitioners working on mediative processes that strengthens internal mediation capacity in Africa through a focus on experience sharing, innovative and experiential forms of learning between mediators, efforts to find complementarities with all stakeholders and the provision of direct support to mediative processes at multiple levels” (AIMP 2013:4.)

The ‘strategic imperatives’ outlined in the Report are clustered around 4 main pillars. These include the establishment of a Community of Practice, the provision of Training and Capacity Building, Direct Support to Mediation Processes and Partnership Building (AIMP 2013). These 4 imperatives include a commitment to forging strategic partnerships with the AUC and to finding synergies with the efforts of the AUC to build an APSA. This Architecture consists of the Peace and Security Council, a Panel of the Wise, a Continental Early Warning System, an African

Standby Force and a Special Fund established to support the work of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), (PSC Protocol 2002).

The AUC initiatives provide the continent with a policy and institutional framework that is further strengthened by the legal, strategic and operational frameworks of the various Regional Economic Communities, including SADC, ECOWAS and the East African Community (EAC). The 2010 Assessment Study of the APSA noted several areas in which progress had been made towards implementing the Protocol but in addition a number of challenges were identified particularly in the areas of vertical and horizontal coordination, sustainability, subsidiarity, coherence and partnership (APSA Assessment Study 2010).

Part of the reported intention of the AIMP is to respond to the needs identified within this Assessment Study and to explore opportunities for collaboration and partnership building that will connect the efforts of insider mediators active at community and national levels to the AU efforts at regional and continental levels (AIMP 2013).

The formation of the AIMP and the strategic direction that has been identified is not explicitly designed as a conflict transformation intervention. Nevertheless the overall approach does appear to contain elements of conflict transformation practice that are consistent with some of the theoretical elements contained within an understanding of conflict transformation. The extent of this connection between conflict transformation thinking and the formation of the AIMP is considered in more detail in Chapter 4 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This research study focuses on a sample of nine participants selected from within the AIMP in an effort to gain deeper insight into the perceptions and strategies of insider mediators working at multiple levels. Studying the connections between conflict transformation theory and mediation practice helps to derive useful insights that contribute to the emerging body of knowledge on effective responses to conflict in Africa.

The lessons arising out of this study will be shared with other initiatives in an effort to arrive at a deeper understanding of the relative effectiveness of different approaches. The combination of these research outcomes will assist in linking theory and practice within the framework of a conflict transformation approach.

The praxis cycle approach to learning associated with Freire (1970) that underpins conflict transformation thinking explicitly values the manner in which practice can inform theory and the way the development of enhanced theory contributes to improved practice.

1.5 Research Problem

The extent to which the emerging field of conflict transformation theory explicitly informs mediation practice is relatively unexplored despite the evidence that suggests that these links do exist.

Scholars who are not directly involved in mediation have carried out most of the existing research on mediation practice and there is relatively little research carried out that captures the perceptions of the population of insider mediators from which the sample group for this study is selected.

The intentions and effectiveness of collaborative efforts by insider mediators, including the AIMP, are poorly documented and there is little evidence of published research that focuses on these efforts. Existing studies on mediation focus more on external interventions, rather than the interventions of insiders.

Relatively little is known about the theoretical lens through which insider mediators perceive their own practice and the lessons and insights into effective practice and useful theory that these perceptions may contain.

1.5.1 Research Objectives

The overall aim of the study is to explore the relationship between conflict transformation theory and the establishment of the AIMP as perceived by AIMP practitioners.

The study has the following objectives:

- To explore the relevance of conflict transformation theory to mediation practice in response to social conflict in Africa
- To capture the perceptions mediation practitioners involved in the AIMP have of how conflict transformation theory has been influential in their approach to mediation practice
- To explore the extent to which the establishment of the AIMP can be understood as a conflict transformation intervention

1.6 Research Question

The Central Research Question posed by this study is what effect conflict transformation theory has had on the formation and approach of the AIMP.

The study explores this question through a sub-focus that engages with the perceptions and reflections of mediation practitioners on how conflict transformation theory informs mediation practice, and how theories have informed the conceptualisation and establishment of the AIMP.

Additional questions explore the lessons that can be derived from the research outputs that can be used to inform the development of conflict transformation theory and to guide better mediation practice.

1.7 Methodological Overview

This qualitative research study is focused on the perceptions of nine selected practitioners involved in the African Insider Mediators Platform. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, from amongst the members of the AIMP. Semi-structured interviews were carried out that have produced data that enhances a review of existing literature and unpublished background materials. These information sources have been used to gain deeper insight into the central questions related to the relatively unexplored extent to which conflict transformation theory informs mediation practice.

The methodological paradigm underlying the research is located within a conflict transformation approach. Within the field of conflict transformation there is a body of work that seeks to develop a theory of social conflict that acknowledges the validity of the need for structural transformation contained within radical conflict theory and the social activism agenda of an interpretivist such as Weber.

This body of work also sets out to provide a useful framework for analysis and actions at multiple levels that can harness the potential positive elements contained within the structural tensions of an unequal society and prevent the potential for the destructive impact of violence that escalated conflict often produces. This theoretical framework contains elements that are useful to scholars and practitioners in their shared quest for a deeper understanding of conflict and for actions that can respond strategically and effectively to this understanding.

This is a qualitative piece of research that will be both analytical and descriptive in its approach. It seeks to study the experientially derived learning that emerges in a focused engagement with active practitioners. Chambers recognises the need for experiential learning when he writes, “This is a good time to be alive as a development professional. For we seem to be in the middle of a quiet but hugely exciting revolution in learning and action.” (1997:xxiv).

It is within this paradigm that the study engaged with and involved the selected participants in the research. Working closely with the members of the AIMP, the researcher carried out semi-structured interviews using an approach that was aimed at encouraging insights and valuing individual perceptions and diverse perspectives.

The data produced by the interviews were initially analysed to identify categories of responses that were then further studied to identify major themes and sub-themes. Additional research material was produced out of consultative conferences of AIMP members that brought together significant groups of mediators, including most of the selected research participants. Follow-up questions and participatory focus group discussions amongst insiders enabled a deeper exploration of the themes as they emerged. A number of lessons and insights emerged out of an interrogation with these themes, adding additional value to the study.

As an active member of the AIMP the researcher was able to draw on an established relationship of trust in building ownership of and buy in to the research process amongst AIMP members. The epistemological underpinning of the AIMP provided the basis for a shared interest between the researcher and AIMP members in the depth and quality of the learnings and insights generated through this study.

1.8 Conclusion

This treatise sets out to present a qualitative research process that explores the perceptions of practicing mediators and to discuss the interconnections between conflict transformation theory and insider mediation practice. The perceptions of insider mediators, gathered during a semi-structured interview process with nine selected practitioners from the AIMP, form the basis for a deeper discussion of the relationship between conflict transformation theory and the formation of the AIMP.

The presentation of the perceptions of insider mediators will be located within a research context that recognises the protracted and systemic nature of conflict in Africa. This research context also includes an emerging theoretical understanding of

conflict transformation as an approach to engaging with conflict of this nature. Shifts in understanding mediation within this context and the mediative processes that are driven by insider mediators appear to be informed by a conflict transformation approach.

The treatise explores this relationship, located within an understanding of the theoretical context and the context of conflict in Africa, and discusses the extent to which this insider mediation approach presents an appropriate response to the interconnected dynamics and deep-rooted nature of African conflicts.

1.8.1 Outline of Chapters

This treatise is organised into the following Chapters.

- Chapter One introduces the treatise, providing an introduction to the research context, including a contextual analysis of African conflicts, the relevance of conflict transformation within this context, an outline of the dynamics of deep-rooted and protracted social conflict and of mediation as a response to these dynamics. The formation, vision, mission and strategic intent of the AIMP are also introduced, informed by a review of relevant AIMP documents. The chapter also includes an outline of the purpose of the study, the research focus and an overview of the methodology.
- Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature pertaining to conflict in general, and the nature of conflict in Africa, as well as conceptual elements of deep-rooted and protracted social conflict, intractability and the potential for resolution and transformation in response to these conflict systems. A review of literature on mediation and a document review inform the final sections on mediation effectiveness in response to deep-rooted social conflict, including the role of civil society actors and the contribution of insider mediators.
- In Chapter Three the phenomenological qualitative research methodology is presented and discussed in some detail, including the sampling process, the generation and gathering of data, the analysis of this data and the ethical considerations that inform the study.
- Chapter Four presents the research findings and discusses the connections between the perceptions of the research participants and conflict transformation theory. This chapter includes an outline of perceptions on the

formation of the AIMP as a conflict transformation initiative, in support of one of the objectives of the study, as well as a description of the perceived role insider mediators are playing and the characteristics of these insiders.

Research participant perceptions on the nature of social conflict, the application and influence of conflict transformation theory on practice, and the influence of other theoretical approaches are also outlined and discussed. The chapter ends with a presentation of perceptions on how the AIMP should respond to perceived gaps in existing mediation approaches and the perceived added value that the formation of the AIMP will bring to the field of mediation. These findings inform concluding remarks on the relationship between conflict transformation theory and the formation of the AIMP.

- Chapter Five presents a summary of the research, an outline of the limitations of the study and a set of recommendations aimed at responding to some of the perceived gaps in current approaches that could inform the future direction of the AIMP. This lays the basis for some concluding observations and insights emerging out of the discussion of the research findings and a discussion of the extent to which the research process and outcomes accomplished what was initially intended.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A review of literature relevant to the research focus of this study includes published and unpublished work in four thematic discussion areas. This includes material outlining the nature of conflict and the deep-rooted nature of social conflict in Africa, the formation of the AIMP, the development of conflict transformation theory as well as literature on the need for an integrated set of actions in response to conflict.

Pertinent also to this research is a review of literature pertaining to mediation theory and studies on insider mediation efforts in Africa as well as a review of the background material produced by the AIMP. This background material includes unpublished reports produced by the researcher and colleagues as part of a previous research study on insider mediators supported by the Swiss based PeaceNexus Foundation (Smith 2010; Hislair 2011; Smith and Deely 2011; Smith and Wachira 2012).

The three thematic discussions presented in this chapter are intended to outline the theoretical basis for a perspective on the formation of the AIMP as part of an integrated response to complex conflict systems in Africa. This perspective is consistent with a theoretical framework that draws from conflict transformation theory and that is informed by contemporary thinking on what constitutes an effective mediative response to deep-rooted African conflicts.

The discussions are presented as follows:

Firstly an overview of the nature of conflict in Africa and the notion of protracted social conflict is outlined. The resistance of this seemingly intractable form of conflict to resolution interventions and the potential of conflict transformation to present a more comprehensive response are also outlined.

Secondly an outline of the origins and development of conflict transformation theory is presented. This includes an outline of key conceptual elements contained within the literature on conflict transformation thinking, an outline of arguments in support of the need to take an engagement with deep-rooted social conflict beyond resolution,

an exploration of conflict transformation as an appropriate response to conflict systems and an outline of thinking with regards to mediation as an element of conflict transformation processes.

Finally the discussions lay out a review of contemporary thinking on mediative approaches that informs effective mediation practice in an African context. Mediation effectiveness is discussed as well as a presentation of published research findings on the role of civil society mediation actors, external mediation tracks and the contribution of insider mediators.

These discussions lay a theoretical foundation for the deeper analysis of the perceptions of the research participants and the document review of internal reports from AIMP Working Group meetings and consultative forums that will follow in subsequent chapters.

2.2 The Nature of Conflict in Africa

2.2.1 Overview

Conflict theories that describe conflict as deep-rooted are useful in their outline of how social conflicts are complex, multi-dimensional and dynamic. The forms of social conflict affecting Africa outlined in Chapter One appears to fit well into the theoretical frameworks that describe deep-rooted and protracted social conflict. These theories draw attention to the historical and contemporary roots that need to be analysed as part of an effort to understand and engage with social conflict. They also point to the manner in which dynamics at different levels of society interact and either reinforce or weaken each other. This contribution has been an important part of the ongoing conceptual development of an integrated theory of social conflict and social change that is particularly relevant to the context of conflict in Africa.

The notion of protracted social conflict arose out of an attempt to better understand the resistance of conflict to contemporary conflict resolution interventions by external third parties. Using the concept of deep rooted or protracted social conflict assists in explaining the complex interconnected systems that form part of social conflict, and the dynamic interplay between external and internal factors. Scholars such as Azar (1990:6) have sought to provide a clearer lens through which conflict can be viewed. The application of this lens also assists with the formulation of more effective conflict intervention strategies.

Hugh Miall (2001:5) demonstrates how the model put forward by Azar (1990) can be used to trace the origins and development of protracted social conflict. Such conflicts have roots in their historical context, including the weak or fragile forms of state that are often inherited from changes in the form of governance, such as those following the colonial period or changes from forms of authoritarian government to more inclusive democratic systems of government. Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya each provide a useful example of post Portuguese, Belgian and British colonies, and post-liberation forms of authoritarian rule, that appear to exhibit such characteristics.

These historical roots often also include the denial of rights or skewed patterns of access for communal groups within a society intertwined with the manipulation or distortion of identities. South Africa, Burundi and Zimbabwe, with the complex politics of race and ethnic identity that formed part of their colonial history, provide useful examples in relation to this aspect of the conditions for protracted social conflict. The denial of access to services and opportunities and a failure to meet human and security needs for previously marginalised groups protracts the conflict dynamics in these societies still further.

Drawing further from Azar (1990) Miall (2001:5) outlines how these historical factors combine with the roles played by the state and the dependent international political and economic linkages that are maintained to produce the conditions out of which protracted conflict emerges. If the state adopts a confrontational or repressive approach to managing the conflicts in society a destructive outcome is likely. This destructive outcome contributes to, and forms part of, a more dependent and exploitative pattern of development and to a distorted pattern of governance that is often militarized, leading to a further denial of basic needs. South Africa under apartheid, and arguably the current South African governments response to service delivery protests would fall clearly into this category. Zimbabwe in the period following independence also appears to exhibit these tendencies.

According to Miall (2001:5) the result of this dynamic interplay between the historical contexts, the needs based factors, and the internal and external roles and relations of the state, result in a protracted cycle of institutional deformation and destructive conflict. Unless this cycle is broken it appears to drive the society into ever more destructive patterns of conflict and violence. Azar (1990:15) points out how within this type of context even well intentioned actions by the state are interpreted in the most

threatening light and “tend to be perceived on all sides as mechanisms for gaining relative power and control.”

Using the preconditions and process dynamics outlined by Azar in defining protracted social conflict it would appear as though much of the post-colonial developing world is vulnerable to conflict of this nature. There are very few examples of societies in Latin and South America, South East Asia or across Africa that do not exhibit many of the characteristics outlined by Azar. Most African countries for example have inherited a post-colonial state that is still fragile, wherein one dominant group, or a coalition of dominant groups holds state power, and where the overwhelming extent of the needs in these societies inevitably leads to perceptions that one group is being favoured over another, even where this is not the intentional policy of those in power. The global economic system maintains a dependency of these developing nations on external financial support, either through aid or skewed patterns of trade, further placing conflicts within these societies firmly within Azar’s notion of protracted social conflict.

This resonates with Azar’s (1990:15) own observation that “Studying protracted conflict leads one to conclude that peace is development in the broadest sense of the term.” It would thus appear that efforts to resolve conflict between groups in these contexts is inextricably linked to the need for transformation of the overarching international economic and political systems and the structures of the state itself. It is this combination of needs that informs the decision to explore the perceptions of insider mediators as they pertain to conflict transformation theory and mediation practice.

The discussion will begin by outlining in more detail the contributions from prominent scholars out of which the notion of deep-rooted and protracted social conflict has arisen. This will include a look at the origins and development of the concept from its inception to the manner in which it is currently understood and used. The discussion will then explore elements that are considered to be common to protracted social conflict, including an outline of several contexts that appear to contain these elements. The notion of protracted social conflict as a distinct conflict type will also be analysed in more detail.

The discussion sets out to demonstrate that disparate conflict resolution interventions become part of complex social conflict processes, both affecting and being affected

by, the dynamics of these processes. In the same way efforts aimed at transforming deep rooted protracted social conflict are better understood if they are seen as contributions to broader long-term social transformation and development processes. The discussion proposes that it is this understanding of the complex dynamic interconnectedness of individuals, relationships and systems that lies at the root of effective change processes.

2.2.2 The Concept of Deep-Rooted and Protracted Social Conflict

Bradshaw (2008:15) describes human conflict as a “ubiquitous social phenomenon ... experienced by all of us much of the time.” Many scholars are narrower in their definitions. The concept of social conflict outlined by Rhodie (1991:2) specifically links social conflict to competition over scarce resources and Himes (1980:14) links social conflict to a power struggle between parties and groups of actors. These definitions however appear limiting in that they exclude conflicts within society that may be rooted in issues relating for example to the suppression of human needs and a reaction to the frustration that can arise when an individual is inhibited by the norms of a society, as articulated by Burton (1979:79).

Pruitt and Kim (2004:35) define conflict as a perceived divergence of interest that occurs between parties when no alternative seems to exist that will satisfy the aspirations of both parties. Pruitt and Kim (2004:7) cite examples earlier in their text that include both interpersonal and intergroup levels of conflict, arguing that there is not as much difference between conflict at different levels as we might think. Conflicts between groups are linked to the formation of group identities, using social identity theory, group aspirations and conflict group mobilisation (Pruitt & Kim, 2004:29-33).

Fisher, Abdi, Ludin, Smith, Williams and Williams (2000:4) provide a working definition of conflict adapted from Mitchell that suggests that:

“Conflict is a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have, or think they have, incompatible goals” (Fisher et al. 2000:4).

This working definition is accompanied by a model, adapted from the work of Hizkias Assefa that distinguishes between surface, latent and open conflicts in the interplay between compatible and incompatible goals and behaviours (Assefa quoted in Fisher et al. 2000:5).

The working definition appears to be useful in that it is open enough to include conflicts at all levels. It also includes a dynamism associated with conflict that is implied in the concept of conflict as a relationship. There is also space within the definition for the inclusion of the underlying structural elements of conflict associated with Galtung (2000:3) and the latent conflict that exists but that has not yet shown itself referred to by Deutsch (1973:14), without excluding the potential for the relationship to be informed by causes that emanate from various levels of society and from other conflicting elements within the context.

In Azar's model of protracted social conflict the power imbalances between the dominant group within the state and those that are marginalised or excluded create a conflict cycle of increasing frustration. Azar (1990:7) refers to the "disarticulation between the state and society as a whole" as the state increasingly pursues policies that are contrary to the needs of the entire society. The pivotal role of the state in addressing the collective needs of communal groups is hampered by the "incompetent, parochial, fragile and authoritarian" nature of the state that Azar argues (1990:10) forms part of a context out of which protracted social conflict emerges. According to Azar (1990:15) the dependence of the state on international linkages, particularly political economic relations of economic dependency, provides further evidence of its own weaknesses that compound the protracted nature of this conflict cycle.

2.2.3 Protracted Social Conflict as a Type of Conflict

The overwhelming number of social conflicts in the developing world and the apparent links between underdevelopment and protracted social conflict bring into question whether protracted social conflict is a type of conflict or a description of the dynamic characteristics of conflict in unequal societies.

Various scholars offer similar insights into the nature of conflict that are provided by the dynamic interplay between the clusters of variables used by Azar (1986:31). Deutsch (1973: 46-47) for example offers 8 propositions about conflict that include the observation that where conflict is resolved through suppression or repression without addressing the "underlying motives" of the weaker party the conflict is likely to return, if in a disguised form, "whenever the vigilance or defenses of the more powerful tendency are lowered." This resonates strongly with the protracted conflict cycle espoused by Azar.

Similarly, though Deutsch does not refer specifically to identity needs, he outlines further propositions that suggest that conflicts rooted in fear or that threaten self-esteem will be more difficult to resolve cooperatively. These propositions differ from the typology of conflict proposed by Deutsch (1973:15-19) that looks at types of conflict that are based on “the relationship between the objective state of affairs and the perceptions of the parties”.

Chris Moore (1996:14) proposes a typology of conflict that is based on the perceived source of the conflict. These include data conflicts, interest conflicts, value conflicts, relationship conflicts and structural conflicts. Contained within these five types are many of the variables outlined by Azar (1986:31). This poses the question of whether protracted social conflict is a type of conflict or a description of the dynamics that arise when all or some of the various sources of conflict, contained within the variables Azar puts forward, are present.

Coleman, Vallacher, Nowak, and Bui-Wrzosinska (2007:32) use a dynamical systems perspective to describe intractable or protracted conflict as a type of self-organised social system. They refer to patterns of thinking, feeling and acting that are maintained as a result of the interactions between the conflict elements. The elements outlined by Coleman et al. (2007:32) include the stakeholders to the conflict, including groups and institutions, the social norms and beliefs in society and the relationship processes it contains.

According to Azar (1991:95) protracted social conflict is a form of analysis that attempts to ‘synthesize the realist and structuralist paradigms into a pluralist framework’ in order to better explain prevalent patterns of conflict. This may suggest that protracted social conflict is better understood as a lens through which conflict can be viewed more clearly rather than as a particular type of conflict. This resonates well with the concepts informing a conflict transformation approach.

2.2.4 Intractability, Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation

In exploring the resolution potential of deep-rooted or protracted social conflict it is useful to include a brief look at the notion of intractability often associated with these conflict patterns. Kriesberg (2003) points out that the time frame applied to measuring or describing intractability is in itself problematic. According to Kriesberg (2003), conflicts inevitably change over time. Intractability may thus be little more

than a highlighting of the particularly complex nature of a given conflict at a very particular point in time.

Norbert Ropers (2008:92) points out that those stakeholders within a pattern of protracted social conflict as well as those who are viewing it from the outside “have their own and mostly quite different narratives about the conflict, the reasons behind it and how to settle, solve or transform it.” These different perceptions give rise to multiple perspectives on whether or not protracted social conflict can be resolved, and indeed what the notion of resolution means when applied to conflict patterns of this nature.

A critical review of the contribution to theories of social change in relation to protracted social conflict put forward by Mitchell (2005) and Daniela Körppen (2006:4) argues that theoretical explorations of which elements within a conflict are more or less tractable, serve simply to widen the gap between theory and practice. Körppen argues strongly that local stakeholders and local perspectives should be included in any analysis of the dynamics of a particular conflict and should inform the direction of any intervention. On the notion of intractability Körppen (2006:5) believes that processes of social change should be regarded as such, driven by process over time and not focused on outcomes. According to Körppen (2006:5) “dynamics in social systems are cyclical and to a certain extent unpredictable. It is impossible to trace linear lines into the past, construct them for the future and define goals on how processes of social change should come about and develop.”

The tendency of classic conflict resolution to focus on outcomes appears to be in tension with the systemic nature of protracted social conflict. Scholars such as Coleman, Vallacher, Nowak, and Bui-Wrzosinska (2007:1460), argue for a “dynamical systems” approach to address protracted conflicts in a comprehensive way. Coleman argues for interventions that aim to change the patterns of interaction between parties rather than an attempt to achieve one particular outcome.

Writing with Hacking, Stover, Fisher-Yoshida and Nowak, Coleman (2008) links the description of patterns of protracted social conflict to the forms of engagement that are required. Coleman et al. (2008:34) argue that both top-down and bottom-up forms of engagement aimed at multiple levels are likely to be most effective, “since elements of unresolved conflict on any level can reinstate the conflict at other levels.”

Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2005) are also led by the complexity of contemporary conflicts in their support for more comprehensive forms of engagement. Ramsbotham et al. (2005:27-28) propose that long-term peacebuilders have to address the deeper sources of conflict and that interventions might need to include contextual change at international level, structural change at the level of the state and relational change between the parties to induce a conflict and cultural change at all levels.

In placing particular emphasis on the social group identities of parties to a conflict Azar (1990:7) argues that the process dynamics between the actions and strategies of communal groups and the state, as well as the built in conflict mechanisms in a society, work to either activate or defuse the tensions contained in 4 clusters of variables that form part of the preconditions for protracted social conflict. The communal content of a society, or the manner in which individual interests and needs are mediated through membership of social groups in a society forms the most important of these 4 clusters. Azar (1990:7-12) also includes human needs, the role of the state and the nature of the international linkages in a society as other components of the clustered set of variables that give rise to protracted social conflict.

Azar (1990:12) argues that individuals attempt to fulfill their needs collectively through the groups with which they identify. Where these needs are deprived, grievances arise which are expressed collectively. The human needs referred to by Azar (1990:7-10) include political access, security and the need for religious and cultural acceptance. Political access is referred to as the effective participation of individuals in decision-making, security needs include material needs such as food and shelter while religious and cultural acceptance is essentially the need for social recognition linked to identity.

This approach emphasises and underlines the integrated multilevel approaches to conflict transformation put forward by Lederach (1997:79) in his outline of the dual lenses of structure and procedure required for effective conflict transformation.

Efforts by scholars to articulate and explain the resistance to resolution interventions of deep-rooted and protracted social conflict provide useful insights into the complex and dynamic nature of social conflict in Africa. These efforts enable a deeper understanding of the roots of these conflicts and of the variables and relational

elements that inform the patterns that characterize them. The protracted nature of social conflict in Africa rests within these complex patterns.

Furthermore studies of protracted social conflict demonstrate how the interaction between the elements within these conflicts produce cycles of increasing tension that reduce the effectiveness of outcome focused conflict resolution interventions. The deeper understanding of social conflict challenges conflict theorists and practitioners to develop multi-faceted integrated and complex approaches to engaging with conflict. These approaches are well articulated in the systems based conflict transformation interventions that match the components of the intervention to the components that make up protracted social conflict.

Rather than pointing to deep-rooted and protracted social conflict as insurmountable challenges resistant to change, the analysis provided by scholars that have explored these concepts can guide and inform efforts to end violence and promote peace. These efforts will need to be focused on peacebuilding and conflict transformation processes that are long term.

The theoretical elements of conflict transformation contained within a review of current literature are now outlined to provide a deeper conceptual understanding of what is meant by conflict transformation theory. An outline of conflict transformation theory assists in establishing the basis for the insider mediation approach to engaging with and responding to the dynamics of social conflict in Africa.

2.3 Conflict Transformation Theory

2.3.1 Overview

Conflict transformation theory appears to provide a useful lens through which to understand the complex nature of social conflict in Africa. A conflict transformation lens also suggests an alternative approach that assists in understanding why so many efforts to use contemporary mediation as a response to political conflicts appear to have limited results. Conflict transformation theory seeks to develop a theory of social conflict that can draw from and speak to the multitude of disciplines that contribute to and that would benefit from a more integrated understanding of social conflict in Africa. This theory also presents a framework on how to effectively respond to the dynamics of such conflict.

There is a general tendency in the literature to suggest that inter-personal conflicts and conflict between groups are separate from forms of social conflict. This theoretical divide is often used as the basis for suggesting that mediative approaches, which are often focused on the dynamics between people, are disconnected from broader efforts to encourage social transformation that addresses the underlying systemic and structural elements of a conflict affected context. An insider mediation approach that is informed by a conflict transformation lens suggests instead that mediated processes facilitated by insider mediators are necessary at all stages of social transformation.

Deutsch (1973) attempts to straddle the meta-theoretical divide by making a distinction between “intrapyschic” conflicts, the internal conflicts that occur within individuals in society, and intergroup conflict. Deutsch (1973:33-72) places these group forms of conflict, including class conflict and race conflict, more firmly within the realm of social conflict. This theoretical approach, associated with conflict transformation, is concerned with deepening our understanding of the underlying meta-theoretical frameworks that define social conflict as the basis for an approach to engaging with conflict. The theory is located within an interpretivist paradigm but that recognises also the validity of the radical restructuring and the shifts in power associated with conflict theorists. Conflict transformation theory sets out an interdisciplinary approach to conflict that assimilates personal, relational and structural elements of conflict, into an integrated framework for understanding conflict and building peace.

Lederach is well recognised as a scholar and practitioner in the field of conflict and peace studies and his contribution to the field, ‘Building Peace’, is often described as a classic (Lederach 1997). The work of Lederach entrenches an approach to understanding conflict that argues that sound theory is only as useful as its practical application. This understanding outlines conflict theory as a particular way of looking at things. This lens is outlined in the section that follows.

2.3.2 Lenses and Paradox

Conflict transformation, according to Lederach (2003:14), is:

“To envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social

structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships” (Lederach 2003:14).

In the same publication that outlines this understanding, ‘The Little Book of Conflict Transformation’, Lederach (2003:8) talks of a set of three conflict transformation lenses. The first lens is for seeing the immediate situation, the second seeks to understand and address what is happening at the level of the relationships involved and the third to enable us to create a platform to address the content, the context and the structure of the relationship. From this platform, Lederach argues, parties can begin to find a creative way forward.

In another key element of the contribution Lederach makes, he outlines the importance of understanding and accepting the role of paradox in engaging with conflict. According to Lederach (1995a:19)

“A paradoxical approach suggests the energy of the [irreconcilable] ideas is enhanced if they are held together, like two sides of a coin” (Lederach 1995a:19).

Lederach (1995a:19-25) describes four examples of these aspects of paradox that are helpful to understanding conflict, and that form two sides of the conflict transformation coin. The first is the interdependent processes of personal and systemic transformation processes, whereby each process facilitates the transformation of the other. For example the personal transformation of South Africans out of a racist mindset assists in the systemic transformation of South Africa out of apartheid. Both are essential for real social change.

The second deals with the concepts of mercy and justice, often seen as mutually exclusive concepts. Lederach argues that in order to build a just society, a key part of transformative and restorative, communities need to be united by ties of trust, compassion and mercy. Justice intent on revenge will break these ties, ultimately undermining efforts to build long-term justice in a society.

The third paradox lies in the perceived tension between individual empowerment and the strengthening of communities through an emphasis on the mutual interdependence of people within it. Often the goal of individual empowerment appears to undermine the need for unity and cohesion within a community. Lederach argues that the empowerment of an individual needs to happen through and within the community that they are part of, and that communities become stronger because

the individuals within it are strengthened.

Finally, Lederach describes the paradox of process and outcome. Too often in for example, mediation processes, the focus on process appears strained by the pressure to achieve an outcome. Lederach (1995a:23) refers to this pressure between means and ends as the "Gandhi Dilemma". Lederach suggests that this dilemma can be overcome by ensuring that a common goal, the pursuit of truth and the restoring of relationships, define the purpose of both process and outcome. Commitment to process becomes understood as a commitment to a particular philosophy and lifestyle: the pursuit of truth and the restoration of relationships.

It is this ability to find the linkages between what have been commonly understood to be discrete and separated entities that forms one of the most significant aspects of Lederach's contribution to the development of a theory of conflict transformation. His ability to facilitate paradigm shifts unlocks theoretical and real-life doors that provide access to new ways of thinking about conflict and new ways of working with conflict. It is this potential for finding innovative ways of responding to conflict that informs the direction of this treatise as it seeks to explore the connections between conflict transformation theory and the mediation approach of the practicing mediators within the AIMP. The next section explores some of the differences between conflict resolution and conflict transformation in an effort to further demonstrate the relevance of conflict transformation as an approach to engaging with conflict in Africa.

2.3.3 Resolution and Transformation

In 'Preparing for Peace' Lederach (1995a:17) responds to Curle (1990), Kriesberg (1989) and Rupesinghe (1994) in arguing that conflict transformation has "emerged in the search for an adequate language to explain the peacemaking venture." He proposes that the concept of conflict transformation responds more effectively to the dynamic nature that social scientists such as Coleman (1956) and Boulding (1962) have suggested is an important part of understanding social conflict.

In further explaining his preference for taking an engagement with conflict beyond resolution, Lederach (1995b:201) argues that the concept of conflict resolution "perhaps unintentionally ... carries the connotation of a bias toward 'ending' a given crisis or at least its outward expression, without being sufficiently concerned with the deeper structural, cultural, and long-term relational aspects of conflict".

In an interesting analysis of the two concepts of resolution and transformation Mitchell (2002:19) acknowledges that his initial position was skeptical of any major differences, but he recognises in his conclusion that there is at least one significant difference that goes beyond emphasis in approach. As Mitchell (2002:19) points out conflict transformation assumes that structural change will necessarily form part of the conditions by which an effective outcome to a given conflict will be found.

Furthermore according to Mitchell (2002:20), conflict transformation recognises that the processes of rebuilding relationships will not automatically take place once the immediate crisis surrounding a conflict is diffused, relationships have to be deliberately rebuilt through directed effort. Mitchell (2002:20) recognises the interdependence of these levels of change and concludes that without both of these aspects either one is unlikely to head off future tensions and the return of conflict and crisis.

This acknowledgement of the importance of relationship building provides an important entry point for acknowledging the role played by insider mediators in their accompaniment of broader social transformation processes.

2.3.4 Responses to Conflict Systems

The role of mediation within the conflict transformation approach of Lederach is further outlined in some detail in his co-authored paper with Paul Wehr that focuses on conflict in Central America and the responses of local mediators (Wehr and Lederach 1991:85-98). As Lederach puts it "to resolve the conflict or, to put it in a Central American way, to "untangle a net" means to restore the relationships among the people and reconnect the network" (Lederach 1989:82-83).

Azar (1989:7-10) argues that there are strong links between group identity formation, the desire for or denial of basic human needs, repressive or incompetent internal systems of governance and dependent international relations, and puts these forward as comprising the various factors that give rise to protracted conflict within a society.

Implicit in this connection is a dialectical relationship between the unique set of conditions in each conflict system and the unique responses of people to these conditions. Human behaviour in response to these conditions cannot be pre-determined and ascribed to an ideal type that will always respond to the particular dynamics of conflict in a particular way.

According to Burton (1984:46), arguing against the concept of an ideal type in his essay on Dissent and Deviance:

“The individual is more and more being found to be, not the invented one, convenient to ... particular theories ...but a being who has certain potentialities that will be pursued, regardless of the consequences to society and self” (Burton, 1984:46).

This assertion by Burton resonates with the ideas outlined by Azar and contributes to a set of interconnections that clearly inform the contribution that Lederach makes. In other words the unique responses of people involved in contexts of conflict suggest that mediating the relationships between people affected by the dynamics of conflict is a key component of transforming conflict, even when the changes that are being made are systemic or structural in nature.

Highlighting the multi-layered interconnected and dynamic links between personal, relational, systemic and structural factors enables Lederach to suggest a nested time frame of activities that can be carried out in response to the changes required at each level. Lederach (1997:79) suggests that we need two lenses, a structural and a procedural lens. These lenses, Lederach argues, work together to create an integrated framework:

“Structure suggests the need to think comprehensively about the affected population and systematically about the issues. Process underscores the necessity of thinking creatively about the progression of conflict and the sustainability of its transformation by linking roles, functions, and activities in an integrated manner” (Lederach, 1997:79).

Lederach (1997:82) takes this model of nested paradigms further in explaining that the concept of conflict transformation refers to change that works at both a descriptive and a prescriptive level. Descriptively it refers to the effects that social conflict brings about. Prescriptively it refers to the deliberate interventions that are made in response to conflict, in an effort to direct the dynamics of conflict in a particular direction.

Lederach’s contributions illustrate the linkages between the multiple levels at which conflict impacts on society, and the interdependent and interconnected personal, relational and structural elements of society. This assists in deepening our understanding of the centrality of people and the relationships between them in developing effective responses to the complex social phenomenon of conflict.

Lederach's arguments have the ability to link theoretical models to concrete ideas and suggestions on engaging effectively with conflict. This also adds a valuable element to the theoretical aspects of social conflict that enable us to break down the boundaries between academia and those that are active in the field. Mediators that focus on the relationships between people as they seek to develop effective responses to the underlying systems and structures in contexts of conflict appear to be acting in a manner that is consistent with the concepts outlined in this theoretical approach.

As a proponent of the inevitability of conflict associated with the analysis of radical conflict theorists the work of Lederach suggests that there is potential to make use of the opportunities for social change that form part of the constructive aspects of the tensions and conflicting elements of our society. In this sense Lederach enables us to view conflict not only as a force that has the potential to become destructive, but also as an opportunity for galvanizing societal forces behind a transformation agenda.

2.3.5 Mediating Relationships in Conflict Transformation

Burton (1993:55) suggests that scholars need to move beyond research on institutions in their social analysis and make an effort to create political theory that is focused on people. This theory should begin by focusing on people, and the relationships between them, with the aim of creating cooperative relationships that can then form the basis for the development of policies that place the political philosophy of human needs satisfaction at the core.

A similar view of the kind of relationships that need to be achieved for conflict transformation to occur can be found in the work of Hiskias Assefa (1993:5-7) who argues that a necessary process involved in such a change moves a society or community from a social order based upon hierarchy and coercion to one based upon equality, respect, participation, voluntarism and mutual enrichment. These kinds of relational shifts require a particular approach to mediation that goes beyond the outcomes of mediated political settlements.

Together with capacity building, relationship building forms one of the major parts of Lederach's transformational approach to conflict and peacebuilding and is, he argues, that aspect of the process that "...responds to the longer term and

coordination requirements needed to sustain peacebuilding...” (Lederach 1997:109). These responses to conflict, viewed in relation to the integrated framework he presents, suggest that Lederach is indeed providing precisely the kind of relational, human needs centred political theory that Burton argued was so clearly needed. This understanding appears also to inform the approach of insider mediators involved in this study. The notion of an insider mediation approach is explored in the following section.

2.4 Mediation

2.4.1 Overview

Lederach and Wehr (1991:88) cite Pruitt and Rubin in their call for an inclusive definition of mediation “in which a hundred flowers can bloom”. From this perspective mediation is defined simply as “one who attempts to help the principals reach a voluntary agreement” (Wehr and Lederach 1991:89). Wehr and Lederach argue that this definition is closer to an acceptable theory of mediation as is revealed by both research and practice.

Beardsley, Quinn, Biswas and Wilkenfeld (2006:57-59) suggest that unpacking the extent to which a mediator inserts their own agenda into a mediation process assists in categorizing mediation efforts. “Facilitative mediation” is understood to refer to a non-directive form of mediation, where the mediator mainly facilitates the dialogue and helps to bring the parties together. “Formulative Mediation” entails listening to the parties, and drafting agreements that are then presented and adapted by the parties.

“Manipulative or directive mediation” concerns two dimensions: on the micro-level of the mediator, it entails a directive mediation style, where the mediator is more assertive than in facilitative mediation, strongly controlling the process and the framework in which it takes place and on the macro-level of the mediation itself where the mediator focuses more on the outcome than the process and pushes the parties to reach an agreement (Beardsley, Quinn, Biswas, & Wilkenfeld 2006).

Mediation processes on a national level have usually employed a combination of facilitative and directive approaches. Facilitative approaches are more likely to lead to longer-term tension reduction, while manipulative approaches are more likely to lead to agreements in the short term (Beardsley, Quinn, Biswas, & Wilkenfeld 2006).

At local level mediation is more likely to be facilitative, though traditional approaches often combine elements of arbitration if the conflicting parties are unable to reach agreement. Even in cases where disputes are ultimately arbitrated, the form of justice that is applied includes a strong focus on relationship building and repairing the damage of the conflict. A classic example of this form of medi-arbitration is often cited in which a locally mediated dispute between parties at local level results in the fine of a goat, that is then bought by one party, cooked by another, and eaten together.

The multi-layered nature of conflict in Africa and the importance of the relationships between people within each of these layers suggest that mediators have a key role to play in response to conflict that goes beyond the formal processes that are facilitated by high level external mediators. The United Nations Secretary-General's 2012 report states that there is "growing recognition that mediation is not the exclusive purview of external mediation actors. Local mediators who come from the conflict country can usefully lead local mediation efforts or complement regional or international initiatives" (UNSG 2012:6).

Kumar and De la Haye (2011:13) suggest the need for a hybrid model of mediation that includes the contributions of external and internal mediators in the search for a response to new forms of conflict that can transform the escalated tensions into "opportunities for greater reform and inclusion". This suggests that the classic understanding of mediation as the domain of a neutral third party is not necessarily the most appropriate in the search for effective responses to the forms of conflict affecting Africa.

2.4.2 Assessing Mediative Effectiveness

One of the dilemmas faced by mediators and researchers on mediation processes is the difficulty of ascribing a causal relationship between mediation processes and their relative success or failure. Success and failure are relative to the situation before the peace process, and often subject to the impact of the continually changing context. There is also a subjective dimension to success as it depends on the perceptions of the people affected by the conflict and the peace agreement (Mediation Support Project (MSP) 2008).

So for example in Kenya, despite the widespread perception of success of the mediation process following the disputed election in December 2007, in that it was able to stop the violence, many of those involved in the Kenyan Truth and Justice movement felt that the final outcome failed, in that it allowed perpetrators of violence to assume power with impunity, and without an electoral mandate (Smith 2010).

The 'success' or 'failure' of a mediation process is also largely dependent on the context within which it takes place. Simon Mason (2007:28) refers to a context that is either 'Supportive' or 'Impeding' making the essential point that context matters a great deal. He notes however that contexts also go through phases, and that an impeding context at one point might become a supportive context, as the external and internal conditions change.

Shifts in approaches to mediation have changed in recent years, appearing to acknowledge the need to explore alternative approaches to mediation and mediative processes. These shifts are located in an understanding that there is a need to remove mediation efforts from the exclusive realm of the formal International Community and United Nation led processes of the past, and that the involvement of mediators with inside knowledge and a strong relationship with conflicting parties is often a helpful factor in moving a mediation process forward.

In mapping how mediation processes have shifted in form it is useful to draw from the contribution of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in the article by Teresa Whitfield (2010) that looks at external actors in mediation, contained in the February edition of the Mediation Practice Series. Whitfield (2010:6) refers to three distinct shifts that can be discerned. One is a move away from mediations led exclusively by the UN towards regional organisations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States and to states acting on their own initiative.

A second shift entails the creation of mini-coalitions of states. These groups are able to contain or prevent the potential for a lack of coordination between external actors to confuse a mediation process, or for outside interests to act as spoilers. The third shift is indicated by a rise in the involvement of independent international mediators who have established a reputation that can facilitate their acceptance to conflicting parties, such as Kofi Annan and his Foundation in the context of Kenya (Whitfield 2010:6-7).

These shifts in form are closely linked to the types of actors associated with mediation processes. There is a tacit and growing acceptance that mediation efforts are more likely to succeed through the combined and coordinated efforts of multiple actors at multiple levels.

2.4.3 Civil Society as a Mediation Actor

A focus discussion on mediating electoral related conflict at a gathering of representatives from the UN, African regional organisations, and governments, as well as independent analysts, at the African Mediators Retreat in Tanzania organised by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CFHD) and the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation in 2009 contained insights useful to this research (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2009).

Panelists used the case of the last presidential elections in Ghana to argue that a more holistic approach to elections should be considered, that moved elections into the political realm away from being seen as regular democratic exercises. This would include the need to have access to all conflict-mediation tools, usually associated only with the resolution of armed conflicts, and to ensure that the legal and conflict management frameworks necessary to deal with conflict risks were in place well before an election took place.

During the Retreat the discussion noted that including religious and traditional leaders with high moral authority in these processes could build confidence in the election and its outcomes and acknowledged that civil society groups are increasingly reliable in helping to ensure peaceful elections (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2009).

The inclusion of civil society in mediation processes is not uncontentious. Legitimate concerns over who from amongst the wide range of potential civil society representatives to include, and a lack of trust with regards to the potential for spoilers from within civil society to break bonds of confidentiality form part of these concerns. Deeper concerns over the manner in which the inclusion of additional actors 'complexifies' a peace process have also often been cited in arguments against the inclusion of civil society actors at the negotiating table.

Where mediation processes include the need for parties that have been involved in violence to make concessions it is easily argued that civil societies, who are not

directly involved in the violence, may be less amenable to this form of bargaining, particularly when issues of justice and impunity enter the debate. This has the potential to 'shrink the set of potential concessions' thereby reducing the options available for ending the violence and reaching an agreement (Nilsson 2012:251).

Wanis-St. John and Kew (2008), in a contribution on the impact civil society has on international negotiation and mediation processes, put forward a hypothesis that the absence of civil society groups from the peace process significantly undermines the chances that an agreement will lead to sustained peace.

Nilsson tested this hypothesis by carrying out an extensive quantitative study of 83 peace agreements in an effort to test the impact of civil society inclusion on the success and durability of peace processes. Nilsson (2012:263) argued strongly that on the basis of the research findings and an analysis of the statistics produced the inclusion of civil society actors in peace accords not only served to increase the prospects for peace but also that it is important for the durability of peace to include a combination of political parties and civil society actors.

2.4.4 External Mediation Tracks

Typically a Track I mediation process is led by a single senior mediator formally identified as the Chief. A Chief Mediator is usually a former head of state or a person with status derived from their political or military positions of power. Chief Mediators also often have the formal backing of an institution such as the UN or the AU. A Chief Mediator would ordinarily have a large team of mediators and experts behind the scenes.

These people are often more technically capable, and take responsibility for the process of the mediation, and in the drafting of documents where this is required. They include technical expertise in particular specialist areas. These often include organisations like the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and experts seconded by states from the international community.

African conflicts are now more likely to be mediated by African chief mediators with international experts and financial incentives playing a role in support of the dialogue process. The need for coordination of third-party actors is essential within this framework. (Mediation Support project (MSP), Centre for Security Studies (CSS) and Swisspeace 2008; Nhlapo 2007).

The form of coordination of third party actors often groups these actors into informal coalitions of Friends or Contact groups. While this enables better coordination it also contains some areas of concern. Mediators need to caution against the strength of the group undermining or overwhelming the direction of the mediation if there are differences in opinion as to its merits. A clear sense of what each external actor can contribute to the overall mediation strategy needs to inform its involvement from the beginning.

Whitfield (2010:7) argues that mediators should prioritise an approach to external mediation that is imaginative, flexible and case specific rather than based on any formulaic approach. This imaginative approach will need to be extended to include the contribution of local level mediation efforts to those that take place at senior levels. This research study argues that there are lost opportunities in failing to make the links to Track II and III contributions that are highly apparent. For the most part it appears to be the insider mediators that play this connecting role.

2.4.5 The Contribution of Insider Mediators

A useful distinction can be made between “circumstantial” and “invitational” insider mediators. The first group responds to the circumstances in which they find themselves, stepping into the role of an insider mediator almost because the situation demands it, while the second are invited to participate in an initiative or a formal structure in recognition of the skills and contribution they have to make. Circumstantial mediators that demonstrate an aptitude for mediation are often later invited to play a mediating role (Smith 2010:24).

Insider mediators often find themselves caught up in the dynamics of a conflict because they are being affected by the rising levels of tension and are compelled through their own set of personal values to act. This was certainly the case in Burundi and Kenya, where the magnitude of the violence, and the levels of emotion attached to the stark polarization of society led to the direct involvement of hundreds of insiders. Where opportunities to mediate arose these insiders used their innate and experience based skills to engage (Smith 2010:26).

Religious and traditional authorities like the Council of Churches in Kenya, the Inter-religious Forum in Mozambique and the Acholi Traditional Leaders in Uganda are often compelled to demonstrate leadership in the face of adversity, and appear to act

out of a moral obligation or to avoid being accused of shirking their responsibilities to society.

In other cases, like that of Ghana, members of the National, District and Provincial Councils, and in the Democratic Republic of Congo the members of the Conflict Management Panels are identified by a coordinating body that then extends an invitation. For many insider mediators being invited to participate in a formal body is taken as a duty that their personal life missions then compel them to respond to.

John Paul Lederach and Paul Wehr (1991) have long recognised the useful role played by insider mediators, informing more recent contributions from Francis, Ropers and Whitfield (Francis 2007; Ropers 2009; Whitfield 2010). The mediator's personal knowledge of the disputants histories and the issues at hand is likely to be extremely useful in helping parties to resolve their differences. An insider can discern nuances that an outsider would likely miss and subtle differences in tone and language, specific to a particular culture and known only to an insider, can facilitate effective communication (Wehr 1996:56).

Insider mediators are usually respected members of the community who derive their legitimacy from their position. These include professionals like teachers, development workers and paralegals or traditional actors like elders and local authorities who are approached by conflicting parties because of their high standing and the expectation that they will be able to listen and act in an impartial and respectful manner (Smith 2010:38).

2.4.5.1 Enhancing a Culture of Dialogue

In a study carried out by Smith on mediated disputes in Ghana, the DRC, Mozambique, Burundi and Kenya there was a common emphasis contained within the mediation processes in each country that facilitated inclusive relationship building processes and the ownership and participation of all stakeholders. This emphasis on relationship building laid the foundation for longer-term dialogue and democratisation projects. The role played by insider mediators in this relationship building process appears to ensure a long-term engagement, and a nuanced responsiveness to the cultural needs and the political dynamics of the context in which the process takes place (Smith 2010).

In Ghana, the DRC and Mozambique, insider mediators have played a role that is

aimed at encouraging contesting parties in an election to engage in discussions in the build up to an election that are aimed at deepening democracy and sustaining the peace that was brought about by the various peace agreements to which warring parties were signatories. By focusing on the common interest in peace they provide the basis for developing a culture of dialogue that goes deeper than the contestation for power contained within an electoral process.

In Uganda and Burundi, traditional leaders play a particularly important role. While the contestation between modern and traditional practices often seeks to shift legitimacy away from customary processes there is a strong culture of dialogue embedded within for example the culture of the Acholi of Northern Uganda, and the Bashingantahe of Burundi. Local communities often turn to these traditional insider mediators during times of crisis and increased tension.

Chris Fomunyoh (2009:16) argues that the role of local level mediation, including traditional authorities and civil society leaders, is particularly important during the campaigning phase of an election Fomunyoh also includes a specific reference to the role of insider mediators in the recommendations contained in his useful paper on Mediating Election-related Conflicts. He argues that encouraging involvement of broad based groups of civil society leaders, where appropriate, to support local level mediation of tensions arising from the electoral process throughout the elections, during campaigning, polling, counting, verification and the announcement of results, could all help in enhancing a more effective approach to election-related conflicts in Africa (Fomunyoh 2009:16).

Nathan talks about the role of mediators as being not only about resolving the immediate differences between disputants but facilitating a paradigm shift from oppositional enmity to opposing partners within a political system. This paradigm shift seldom takes root within the short confines of a time bound Track I mediation process, leaving it up to the insider mediators to carry the momentum forward. This is where the importance of longer-term multi-track approaches of mutually reinforcing dialogue efforts from insider mediators at all levels becomes paramount (Nathan 2010).

2.4.5.2 Multiple Contributions at Multiple Levels

The ongoing efforts of insider mediator led organisations to build local dispute resolution capacity and to foster a culture of democratic dialogue across a society should not be delinked from the more formal processes of mediation that are associated with responses to periods of crisis. The contribution of insider mediators to dialogue processes needs to be understood both at the micro-level, where they often play an essential role in resolving the interpersonal disputes between people and defusing tensions between groups of people, as well as at the macro-level where they play a role in contributing to dialogue processes that form part of a wider peacebuilding and democratisation agenda.

Mason reports that according to the experience of many outsider mediators, insider mediators in informal peace processes are essential at all stages of a peace process, for information, for contacts, for support and as those who hold the threads of society together when it is collapsing. With specific reference to a contribution from Julian Portilla, active in a number of senior level mediation processes, Mason (2009:11) goes on to describe the long-term engagement of the informal mediation processes as nourishment without which the formal processes have no chance of working

The section in the Guide to Mediation by CFHD that focuses on Principles for Constructive Support To Peace Processes, written by Slim (2007), contains useful insights that can assist insider mediators and civil society initiatives in best defining an effective role within high level mediation processes. These principles, aimed at both external state and non-state actors, speak strongly to the need for a common sense of purpose, for support to the process, for unity, for patience and for sufficient follow-through in the implementation of an agreement (Slim 2007).

Insider mediators play an important role in each of these areas. In Kenya the Concerned Citizens for Peace structure, and the contributions of Ambassador Kiplagat, George Wachira and Dekha Ibrahim Abdi in particular appear to have played an important role in building unity and support for the AU led process (Wachira 2010). The long term nature of most insider mediators involvement in peacebuilding work, civil society activism and diplomatic service give them strong insider insights into the long term nature of change processes, and the importance of sustained and consistent follow-up.

In Ghana the work of the National Peace Council is an ongoing contribution by insider mediators to peace processes and dispute resolution. Many of the insider mediators in Mozambique were part of the initial process that led to the signing of the peace agreement and remain actively involved through their work in supporting and implementing the longer-term elements it contains (Smith 2010).

The contribution of insider mediators to the effective de-escalation of conflict and the prevention of violence in all of the countries that form part of this report appear to illustrate the theories of John Burton who considers force and coercion to be an inappropriate and counter-productive way of responding to deep-rooted conflicts. This theory stresses the importance of addressing the human needs of conflicting parties and speaks directly to the role played by insider mediators (Burton 1987).

The strength of this approach lies in the focus insider mediators provide to the relational aspects of engaging with conflicting parties. These are long-term processes rooted in the attitudinal changes required to bring about transformational change. The importance of building trust and confidence between and within parties is another important element of the role insider-mediators appear to have been able to play. That often the conflicting parties in a dispute already know the insider mediators further facilitates the relationship building process.

2.4.5.3 Mediating Conflicts of Interest

There are often conflicts of interest between the perceived or actual agendas of external actors close to mediation but influencing from the outside, and those attempting to move the process forward. Ambassador Welile Nhlapo argues that the existence of dominant external interests actually make the players at the table ineffective, because they are not engaging from a genuine position of interest in the outcomes or of sincere buy-in to the discussion (Nhlapo 2007).

In addition to the impact of external interests on the parties to a discussion they also affect the mediator directly. According to Whitfield (2010), mediators may be subjected to extraordinary levels of pressure from external actors who seek to influence the process in accordance with their own interests in its outcome. Conflicts of interest also arise over differences in opinion on the best approach to mediation. Nathan (1998) argues that state and inter-governmental mediators frequently resort

to power-based diplomacy that is insensitive to the socio-psychological dynamics of conflict and heightens the suspicion, fear and anger of beleaguered disputants.

The case of Kenya provides a useful example of how too many actors can undermine the efforts of the chief mediator and create a conflict of interest between mediation actors. Kibaki actually delayed his initial meeting with Annan in order to meet privately with Ugandan President Museveni, a close friend and ally, who was proposing his own peace plan. It took considerable effort to establish the Kofi Annan led forum as the only legitimate option for dialogue facing the opposing parties (Lindenmayer 2009).

Nhlapo (2007) also makes reference to internal struggles within institutions that are party to mediation efforts and explains how this impacts negatively on peacebuilding efforts. With specific reference to the DRC he outlines how decision making within the UN, and rivalry between for example the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs can lead to mixed signals that add confusion to a mediation effort. By establishing the trust of the parties involved and maintaining a strong focus on relationship building, insider mediators have found themselves at odds with other interested parties in the mediation process. Where significant human rights abuses have taken place insider mediators are often forced to overlook issues of immediate justice or condemnation of the actions of parties to the conflict. This has led to them being accused of having been co-opted by those in power, or of literally allowing perpetrators to get away with murder.

Tensions between human rights defenders, local civic groups and members of the international community pursuing a transitional justice agenda, and insider mediators who argue for delayed justice in the interests of peace, all form part of the complex balance of interests within many mediation processes.

2.4.5.4 Managing Spoilers

Monica Juma (2006) argues that the presence of spoilers is one of the criteria likely to make a conflict intractable. Spoilers largely work to undermine the legitimacy of a dialogue process, and to ferment violence in an effort to assert their self-interested agenda. Spoilers will also work to undermine any attempts to resolve disputes peacefully and attempt to use tensions surrounding a dialogue process to manipulate the outcome in their favour.

Spoilers include groups linked to the dispute at hand, but where violence or unresolved conflict has derailed a dialogue process, external actors may use the opportunity to discredit a mediation effort, establish a rival process or exploit the gaps between senior level processes and their ability to manipulate and mobilize supporters at community level.

Managing spoilers successfully lies in the ability of a mediation process to firstly be inclusive of all conflicting parties, secondly to ensure the coordination and involvement of all external actors, ideally behind a common agenda, and thirdly to establish an agreed framework by which disputes and disagreements are managed. Insiders can play a key role in bringing these parties together using the relationships they have already established with the disputants. Through their networks they are also able to manage a coordination process between polarized groups.

Implicit in the need for greater coordination is the promotion of a shared recognition of the primary vehicle for mediation, and the subsequent devaluing of any efforts to establish rival processes. Decisions over which vehicle is the most legitimate, and the most likely to succeed, can obviously be a highly contested and highly political decision, particularly at the early stages.

At local level spoilers can include interests that are driven either by economics or political power that use the backdrop of tension to pursue a self-interested agenda. These interests are often threatened by the promotion of peace or a smooth transition of political power through an election process. Spoilers at this level are often best managed by marginalizing the drivers of destructive processes, creating a critical mass of supporters of peaceful non-violent change, driving a wedge between self-interested leaders and their supporters through awareness raising and information campaigns, and calls for unity, and by exposing the agendas of those intent on fermenting violence. It is at this level in particular that respected and accepted local insider mediators appear to have a critical role to play.

2.4.6 Effective Mediation in Theory

Within the field of mediation literature there is a growing acknowledgement that the complexity of social conflicts give rise to the need for more integrated and more innovative responses that make use of a variety of mediation approaches. The systems nature of conflict affecting communities and countries in Africa suggests that

effective responses, including mediation processes and mediated settlements, need to be seen as part of longer term more interconnected peacebuilding efforts that require mediation capacity at multiple levels.

Theories associated with conflict transformation thinking, and practices that are guided by these theories, or that are consistent with the thinking that these theories expound, appear to provide a useful framework for action, appropriate in their response to these conflict systems.

The effectiveness of mediation processes and the durability of mediated outcomes when measured against their ability to deliver on the required conditions for long term peacebuilding appears to be connected to the inclusion of all stakeholders, and of civil society actors in particular.

Civil society initiatives that seek to build mediation capacity to respond to the dynamics of conflict in multiple ways and at multiple levels, and to integrate these efforts behind a shared purpose that connects responses at different levels, may hold useful opportunities to increase response effectiveness, particularly if they are guided by the thinking that underlies conflict transformation theory.

Chapter 4 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION will explore whether or not these connections exist in practice based on the perceptions of practitioners from the AIMP. These perceptions form the basis of the data that was collected through the research process.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter began by presenting an overview of the deep-rooted and protracted nature of conflict in Africa, drawing on the work of scholars who point to the dynamic interplay between conflict elements in certain contexts. This dynamic interplay creates the conditions for a recurring escalation of conflict and the re-emergence of conflicts that appear to be intractable, or that do not respond well to resolution efforts.

In an effort to build a deeper understanding of the origins and development of emerging conflict transformation theory and the conceptual thinking that informs this theory the chapter goes on to outline the published work of scholars who identify their work as contributing to this theoretical approach. A number of the concepts outlined as being part of conflict transformation thinking will be used as the basis for exploring

the relationship between conflict transformation theory and the establishment of the AIMP, the overall aim of the study.

The chapter also reviews contemporary thinking on mediation theory and outlines how approaches to mediation are shifting in response to the needs of contexts in which traditional approaches do not appear to be effective. Mediation appears to be moving towards an acceptance that more innovative and integrated mediative responses to the complex forms of social conflict in Africa are required. This includes recognition of the role that civil society actors can play in support of mediation efforts and of the key role that insider mediators can contribute to mediation processes. Connecting mediation efforts at Track I, II and III levels forms part of this shift in approaches to mediation.

Finally in laying the theoretical base for the treatise the chapter provides a useful starting point that will enable a deeper discussion of the perceptions of the research participants as it seeks to provide a perspective on mediation practice. These perceptions were generated out of the methodological approach to this qualitative research study that is outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The overall aim of the study is to explore the relationship between the theoretical underpinnings of a conflict transformation approach and the establishment of the African Insider Mediators Platform as perceived by AIMP practitioners.

The study has the following objectives:

- To explore the relevance of conflict transformation to mediation practice in response to social conflict in Africa
- To capture the perceptions mediation practitioners involved in the AIMP have of how conflict transformation theory has been influential in their approach to mediation practice
- To explore the extent to which the establishment of the AIMP can be understood as a conflict transformation intervention

This qualitative research study is situated within a phenomenological paradigm in that it recognises that the perceptions of the research participants were influenced by their own specific perspectives, informed by the unique experiences and the contexts of each subject, and that the answers that were recorded and observed in response to the questions that were asked were filtered through the lens of the researcher.

Working closely with selected members of the AIMP, the researcher carried out a series of semi-structured interviews that were aimed at encouraging insights and valuing individual perceptions and diverse perspectives. As a qualitative piece of research the study explores how the theoretical concepts contained within a conflict transformation approach inform individual practitioner approaches to mediation. It also documents and discusses the perceptions that the selected mediation practitioners have of the extent to which conflict transformation theory has informed the establishment of the AIMP.

The research was carried out with a selected group of nine insider mediators who formed part of the African Insider Mediators Platform Working Group meetings held in 2010 and 2011. Supplementary data were gathered from a document review of internal reports of the proceedings of AIMP meetings, held in 2010, 2011 and 2013.

The insights gained from the study are reflective of the perceptions of a key group of experienced practitioners active in the field. The findings of the research do not attempt to extrapolate to the field of mediation practice in general and will thus not necessarily be transferable to a wider group of practitioners, or to other forms of mediation, or to mediation interventions more generally.

Nevertheless the insights that are captured, and the findings in relation to how useful conflict transformation theory is in locating the collaborative establishment of the AIMP within a theoretical framework, may contain perspectives that will be useful across a broader range of mediation interventions.

3.2 Qualitative Research

This is a qualitative research study informed by the worldview of the researcher as a conflict transformation practitioner. The research is guided by a value-based approach that seeks to empower and enhance the agency of other practitioners. As such the approach and findings of this research should be seen as both drawing from and contributing to a growing body of knowledge generated in the context of a learning community and through the experiences of innovative and reflective practitioners. It is in no way an attempt to arrive at facts and conclusions that discourage further debate.

Corbetta (2004:13) links methodology to epistemology and ontology and suggests that all three areas need to be carefully considered prior to undertaking any research. Corbetta contends that it is only by understanding these underlying meta-theoretical frameworks that an appropriate set of research tools can be developed, tools that are applicable to the particular research problem on which the researcher is focused.

In the view of Corbetta (2004:50) qualitative and quantitative research are not simply two different technical manifestations of what is substantially the same vision of the social world and of the purpose of research', they are the 'direct and logically consequential expression of two different epistemological visions, the methodological manifestation of two different paradigms which imply alternative conceptions of social reality, research objectives, the role of the researcher and technological instruments.

Meta-theoretical frameworks that inform approaches to social research are aptly described as paradigms. The underlying assumptions contained within meta-theory, about the nature of society and the validity of knowledge have implications that go

way beyond whether a researcher employs a particular research methodology. There are fundamental ideological and political implications of meta-theory, associated with how one understands power and the power relations between society and the individuals within it. These feed into the social agendas of the researcher and those who use their research in support of particular views and actions.

Acknowledging the starting point of any research endeavor, by explicitly seeking to outline any ideological value laden assumptions, would appear to be a less duplicitous way of maintaining the integrity of the research process. Efforts to mask ideological assumptions behind claims of objectivity and neutrality run the risk of at worst deliberately misleading and at best not fully informing the reader of the researcher and his or her intentions.

Within the field of conflict transformation and peacebuilding research, with its associated emphasis on values and the explicit social change agenda it informs, this becomes all the more important. Efforts to build bridges across meta-theoretical differences hold some important opportunities for practitioners intent on forwarding a social change agenda that is both deep-rooted and sustainable.

Meta-theory works in such a way that it shapes the nature of all research. The underlying assumptions about the nature of society and the people within it that are contained in every piece of research are usually rooted in the meta-theoretical framework through which a piece of research is undertaken.

Wallis (2010:78) states this explicitly in his attempt to arrive at a definition of what he refers to as meta-theory:

“Metatheory is primarily the study of theory, including the development of overarching combinations of theory, as well as the development and application of theorems for analysis that reveal underlying assumptions about theory and theorizing.”

Awareness of the manner in which these frameworks influence knowledge, and how we think can be useful as an empowering and liberating tool of heightened consciousness. The concept of consciousness is well expressed in the contribution from Alvesson and Willmott (1992:432) who describe emancipation as “the process through which individuals and groups become freed from repressive social and ideological conditions, in particular those that place unnecessary restrictions upon the development and articulation of human consciousness.”

There are some fundamental differences between approaches that contain important ideological variances on the nature of social science. These ideological variances, and the worldviews they contain affect the outcomes of the research process and the validity of the knowledge they contain. As Bhaskar (1998:25) points out “it is the nature of objects that determines their cognitive possibilities for us.” In selecting or becoming aware of the meta-theoretical assumptions behind the particular worldview of a researcher it is easier to identify some of the implicit assumptions about the findings arrived at by a particular piece of research.

In other words if we know where a researcher is coming from we can expose the political and ideological intentions that are often invisible in the manner in which the research and its findings are presented. For a social activist or conflict transformation practitioner this can assist in ascertaining whether a particular piece of research, irrespective of the particular discipline from which it emanates, is likely to assist in sharpening and making more effective a particular strategy.

3.3 Type of Research

The research conducted is described as both grounded and descriptive in that while it does not attempt to draw any generalised conclusions from the discussion of data gathered it does draw out insights and learnings that are the result of both inductive and reductive learning. This is associated with the grounded research approach of Strauss and Glaser (1967).

The researcher combines a discussion of the perceptions of practitioners gathered during the research process with the non-empirical connecting of emerging theory, and the insights and learnings that formed part of reports reflecting the internal discussions of AIMP practitioners as they sought to define and establish the platform.

The connecting of existing practice with the lessons emerging from reflection on the effectiveness of the approaches used in practice and the theoretical frameworks that seek to explain an effective response to conflict were used in combination to arrive at an understanding of the extent of the relationship between conflict transformation theory and practice.

The study is also descriptive in that no statistically valid claims are made regarding the data as it seeks to describe the reality of the participants in the research, as they themselves understand it. This is consistent with the understanding put forward by

Maree (2007:4) who talks about developing an understanding of meaning by “seeing through the eyes of the participants”.

Schwandt (2007:64) argues that descriptive studies are merely “accounts of what we perceive”, affected by the worldview through which we are doing the seeing. The researcher thus constructs a reality on the basis of what is seen or heard and then interpreted in accordance with a unique theoretical background, historical experience and cultural affinity, that shapes the nature of the lens through which the seeing, hearing and interpreting is done.

In this sense the world is understood as a construct of people in which different people all have their own equally valid realities of this world. The perceived realities that form the basis of this study arise out of a data collection process that engaged with a specific sample group of selected participants using a purposive sampling process. This sample and the sampling process are outlined in Section 3.4 that follows.

3.4 Sampling

Using purposive sampling the sample group was purposely selected to contain a diverse group geographically and institutionally, in terms of the focus of their practice and along gender and age lines (Babbie 1992). All participants were fully aware of their involvement in the study and had indicated an interest in and a commitment to the research process. The nine participants were selected from amongst the targeted population of practitioners actively involved in the AIMP and engaged in mediation practice and in providing support to mediative processes.

The nine participants in the sample group were selected by the researcher on the basis of availability, willingness to participate and geographical location in order to ensure diversity of context, and an elective commitment to the epistemological value of the research as understood by the participants themselves. This purposive sampling method is informed by the methodological approach outlined by Babbie (1992) and Darkwa (2000).

The selection process was done on the basis of a written invitation that was sent to the nine participants requesting their involvement in the research process. All of the nine participants who were approached agreed to engage with the research process, and made themselves available for interviews.

Written consent forms were distributed to each prospective participant outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of their identity within the study, and the assurance that their acceptance or rejection of the invitation to participate in the study would not jeopardise their future involvement or opportunities within the AIMP.

Table 1: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE provides some of the biographical details of the nine participants selected to take part in the study.

Table 1: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

Nationality	Gender	Age Range	Geographical Focus	Level of Practice	Academic Training
Burundi	Male	30-39	Burundi & Rwanda	Local	Matric
Eritrea	Male	40-49	Southern Africa	Local, national and regional	PhD
Kenya	Female	40-49	East Africa	National and regional	Undergrad
Mali	Female	30-39	West Africa	National and regional	Undergrad
Mozambique	Male	30-39	Mozambique and Guinea Bissau	Local and national	Undergrad
Nigeria	Male	40-49	International	Regional, continental and global	PhD
Kenyan Somali	Female	50-59	Africa	Local, national, regional, continental and global	Diploma
South Africa	Female	50-59	Southern Africa and Sudan	Local, national, regional and continental	Masters
Ghana	Male	20-29	International	National, regional and global	Matric

The nine practitioners who participated in this study all became involved in mediation as a result of direct involvement in contexts of conflict. Their initial contributions to resolving, preventing or transforming the conflicts around them were driven by gut feel and instincts and informed by the values and characteristics inherent in their need to respond to the escalation of conflict that affected them. The skills and experiences they utilised were not the product of learning workshops or academic training and their effectiveness was measured not in indicators of success but by the immediate response of the conflicting parties to their efforts and the direct feedback they received.

Over time however many have attended numerous skills trainings, experience sharing sessions and formal academic courses relevant to the field of mediation. All

of the participants are associated or affiliated to a number of networks and institutions that are involved in direct or indirect support to a wide range of mediation processes. Each participant also has direct experience of working as an insider mediator in a conflict context that has affected him or her directly.

The research participants form a skilled and experienced sample group of practicing mediators who have sufficient knowledge in the field of mediation to be able to articulate insightful reflections on their approach to mediation. The past involvement of the study participants in initiatives that encourage reflective learning have further enabled a self-critical understanding and a level of self-awareness that have informed the responses that are presented in the discussion that follows in the next section.

The participants range in experience of working with conflict and peacebuilding from six years to more than twenty-five years and in age from the early thirties to the late fifties. Of the nine participants seven had gone beyond formal schooling and had studied at university undergraduate and post-graduate levels in a range of disciplines.

Six of the participants were still working in the national contexts into which they had been born while three of them had relocated and were now working in other contexts, even though their initial experience was gained in the contexts into which they were born. All of the participants were sufficiently fluent to allow the interviews to be carried out in English, though for all of the participants English was either a second or third language.

Three of the participants were born into what could be considered to be middle-class homes in urban centres while the remaining six were from rural areas, and could be considered to be from peasant or poverty affected backgrounds. The balance between male and female participants in the sample also provides an important opportunity to ensure that the perceptions and experiences of both men and women inform the research findings.

With four women and five men involved in the study the voice of women within the process was given particular attention to ensure that any differences between the perceptions of men and women were not overlooked. Although the final presentation of the findings does not attempt to separate the contributions of men and women the perspectives of all participants are deliberately included.

The institutional affiliations of the broader population of AIMP members, from which the sample has been selected, are outlined on the next page in Figure 1, AIMP INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATIONS. The specific affiliations of the sample members are not part of the data presented here, in an effort to protect the anonymity of the participants, in line with the ethical considerations that have informed the research process. The institutional affiliations that are presented in Figure 1 give an overview of the types of institutions to which the sample group are connected and outlines the support given by both the ACTION Support Centre (ASC) and UNDP BCPR to the AIMP Secretariat.

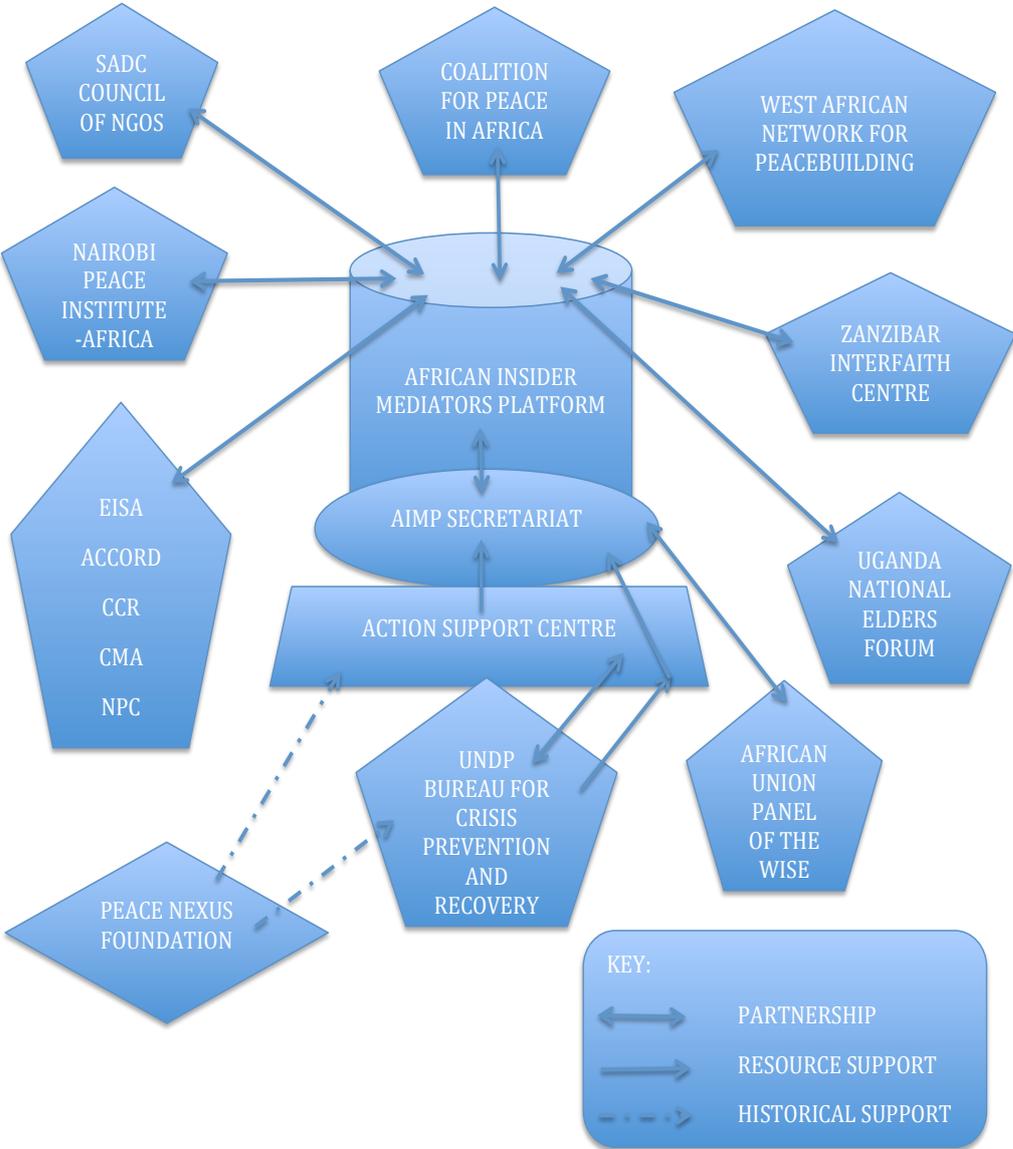


Figure 1 AIMP INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATIONS

3.5 Generating Data

3.5.1 Data Instrument

The researcher made use of in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews to obtain the necessary core data from the participants. This method was selected to provide some structure that guided the conversations while still allowing for flexibility in approach, enabling the researcher to follow themes as they emerged and to probe more deeply.

The interviews were guided by a framework of questions that sought to involve the participants in an engaging conversation on the nature of their practice and their perceptions and insights into the theoretical influences on that practice.

The following questions formed the basis of the semi-structured interview process and serve as the data instrument for this study:

- What are your views on the nature of social conflict in the context within which you are active as a mediator?
- What is your understanding of conflict transformation as an approach to mediation practice?
- To what extent does this approach inform the techniques and methods of your mediation practice?
- Are there any other theoretical approaches to mediation that inform your practice?
- Which theories do you think have the most influence on your approach to mediation practice?
- How do you think the AIMP will add value to your interventions?
- What do you think the gaps are in existing approaches to mediation in Africa?

Questions that arose out of the initial data analysis process, and the issues they presented, were used to guide the follow-up Skype conversations that were held. In one instance Skype was not functioning effectively and the follow up conversation was conducted telephonically.

Interviews were conducted in English by the researcher. Although the participants were fluent in English it served as a second or third language to all involved. Effort was made to ensure that concepts were fully understood as they were expressed and to be sensitive to language influences on the discussion.

3.5.2 Data Gathering

The research process combined an overview of existing literature on conflict transformation theory and mediation practice with an in-depth review of documents produced by the AIMP. Reports were produced by the AIMP secretariat following the AIMP Working Group meetings that were held in Johannesburg in November 2010, in Mombasa in July 2011 and the AIMP Consultative Conference that took place in Johannesburg in September 2013. The AIMP Concept Note that was produced following the initial Johannesburg meeting provided additional material useful to this research process.

In its establishment the AIMP has produced a number of additional research outputs, case studies and concept outlines. These are well captured in a set of unpublished research outputs produced with the support of the PeaceNexus Foundation (Smith 2010; Hislaire 2011; Smith and Deely 2011; Smith and Wachira 2012).

This existing material informed the series of semi-structured interviews carried out with the sample group. An initial written set of questions was distributed to the selected practitioners. The answers to these questions then formed the basis for a semi-structured interview. These interviews were conducted face-to-face with all nine of the participants and follow up conversations were held using Skype with four from amongst these nine and telephonically with one.

In summary the research process proceeded as follows:

Step One - Initial contact was made with the selected participant via email, outlining the purpose and modalities of the study, in an effort to ensure the selected participant was comfortable with participating in the study

Step Two – A set of questions was distributed to the participant in advance of the face-to-face interviews. This set of questions is outlined above in the description of the data instrument

Step Three – A face-to-face interview was arranged with the selected participant

Step Four – The semi-structured interview was carried out using the data instrument questions as a guide to inform a deeper conversation between the researcher and participant that sought to elicit the perceptions of the participant

Step Five – The interview recordings were transcribed and the field notes were written up

Step Six – An initial reading and re-reading of the transcribed and written-up notes prompted further clarification questions for five of the nine interview participants. These clarifying questions were then put to the research participants in a follow-up discussion that took place via skype, in four of the five cases, and telephonically with one.

Step Seven – The data generated by the interview process were then analysed, categorized and classified

Step Eight – Additional material generated by the AIMP secretariat in preparation, and by way of providing a record of the proceedings, for the AIMP Consultative Conference held in Johannesburg in September 2013 was used to supplement this data, and is included in the presentation of the research findings

Effort was made to ensure that the interviews were conducted at a time and place suitable to the interviewee and took place over a period of six months, coinciding with opportunities that brought the interviewee and the researcher together into the same location. Attention was also paid to ensuring that the participants were comfortable with the purpose and intentions of the research process and aware of how the data would be used in furthering the complementary aims of the research itself and the epistemological aims of the AIMP.

The researcher transcribed the recorded data generated during the interview process within forty-eight hours of the interviews being carried out, and the transcribed recordings were used to supplement the written notes that were taken during the interview process. The written interviews were then shared with the participants and where necessary follow-up conversations were arranged via Skype.

Participants were fully informed of this approach, and of the intention to record the interviews, as well as the undertaking to destroy the transcribed material and the recordings once the study was completed. The intention of this research is not to present the responses of individual participants in the study but rather to look at the collective response of the sample group and through a process of analysis of the raw data to develop an outline of the conceptual perceptions of the sample group which are presented in line with the five key questions contained within the data instrument.

3.5.3 Data Collection Techniques

As part of the preparation for the data collection process the researcher approached the secretariat of the AIMP and requested the involvement and support of the AIMP in the research study. This support was gladly given once the researcher declared his intention to share the research outcomes with the AIMP on the completion of the research process.

As an active member of the AIMP the researcher already had an established relationship of trust with the AIMP members. As an epistemological initiative the AIMP indicated a willingness to support this form of learning process and an active interest in the research was established.

In order to ensure that the research outcomes are owned by the AIMP the researcher shared the draft outcomes of the research with the participants in the study. The researcher was willing to take any concerns raised in the initial output into account and to make any necessary modifications to the research output that were required. However no concerns were raised and the draft products were accepted and appreciated by the participants.

3.6 Data Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of the research, careful attention was made to the manner in which the responses that were recorded and transcribed during the research process were analysed. The volume of primary data generated, based on transcripts and notes generated through the 9 semi-structured interviews that were carried out, meant that a sophisticated coding process was not necessary.

Nevertheless the conceptual basis of the axial coding methodology outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) in their proposition of Grounded Theory was still used to inform the selection of categories and deeper classifications that are used to order and present the analysis of the data.

This study does not seek to derive theory from the limited data available. Rather it seeks to describe and draw connections between the different perceptions that the participants have of the influence of theory on their practice and of conflict transformation theory in particular. In addition it seeks to capture the perceived experience of the selected mediators as they share information on their engagement

with conflict processes. This is aimed at generating insights and lessons useful for future practice and exploring the connections between theory and practice.

The data analysis process began with a thorough reading and re-reading of the responses, of both the transcripts and the notes that had been taken. As the researcher became more familiar with the material it became clear that the structure of the interview could serve usefully as a set of categories, with each category containing analysed data that was then further classified.

The categories are presented in line with the key questions that were asked, and within each category responses are further classified into those that fall into any of several conceptual constructs contained within conflict transformation theory or within the constructs of other cited theoretical bases. This data is then discussed, pulling out lessons, insights, and making connections between the apparent practices and the theories to which they are connected.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

In any research process ethical considerations must take into account the potential negative impact the research process and the outputs of the research may have on the participants involved in the research. In a context of conflict, and particularly a context characterized by tension and the potential for violence, this is potentially even more of an important issue to consider.

Given that the research focused on a reflective understanding of the theoretical considerations of the mediation approach, and on the perceptions of individual participants who would remain anonymous, the potential for negative outcomes is minimal, though still an issue that needs to be taken seriously. Participants are fully aware of the intended purpose of the study and have assisted in ensuring that the risks of negative outcomes, as a result of the research, are further minimized.

Participants were also assured that their privacy would not be compromised as a result of the study and that their individual responses would not be attributed to specific individuals, assuring that confidentiality of response would be maintained. This is clearly an ethical principle that will need to be closely adhered to in the manner in which the analysis of the data is presented.

In addition the research does not concern itself with the details of specific mediation cases, or with the details of any particular mediation interventions with which the sample participants are involved.

The process of selection of the sample set out to ensure that there was a full understanding on the part of the participants of what is entailed in the research. The researcher also endeavored to ensure that the AIMP as a whole was aware of the research being conducted and understood the intentions of the research from its outset. Specific permission was sought from the AIMP secretariat to involve the participants in the research process.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter identifies the methodological approach to this qualitative research study as being both grounded and descriptive in the manner in which it elicits the perceptions of the research participants on how their mediation practice has been influenced by theory. It begins by arguing that a qualitative study situated within a phenomenological paradigm is the most appropriate given the unique perspectives that inform all the perceptions of the participants.

An outline of the sampling process demonstrates that the research participants provide a diverse rich pool out of which the data has been generated. The purposive sampling technique that is outlined has identified a selection of participants who have the experience and ability to articulate their perceptions on the connections between theory and practice. This ability to articulate insights during the reflective interview process enabled a useful set of responses during the data gathering process.

The data gathering process generated an overwhelming amount of information that was then categorized, classified and coded in an effort to produce manageable data that could be used in the presentation of the findings. The semi-structured interviews that were informed by the data instrument appeared to be adequate in enabling a flexible approach that produced data that did not seek to influence the perceptions of the participants while still allowing for sufficient structure to pull out responses that could be used in the discussion and presentation of the research findings.

The ethical considerations of ensuring that participants felt comfortable enough to respond freely to the interview questions without compromising their ability to discuss

some of the conflict contexts in which they are active also form an important part of this chapter.

The methodological outline speaks also to the reliability of the data, contributing to the validity of the presentation of the research findings that follows in the next chapter. While these findings are specific to the perceptions of the research participants they contain insights that may be useful to practitioners and scholars beyond the scope of the study.

Chapter Four

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents the research findings of the study. These are the findings that emerge from an examination and analysis of the data generated out of the interviews with selected participants.

The interview transcripts and field notes were categorized into five key themes, each pertaining to the core purpose of the study. Each of these five themes forms a section of this chapter. The first three themes were formulated around the participant's perceptions and responses to questions on the Nature of Conflict, the Application and Influence of Conflict Transformation Theory, and the general Influence of Theories on their practice. Perceptions and responses to questions on the thinking behind the Formation of the AIMP and on Gaps in Existing Approaches to mediation make up the final two themes.

Table Two KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS EMERGING FROM THE ANALYSIS provides a summary of how these five thematic categories were then further classified into conceptual focus areas, with a range of between seven and three classifications within each level. These conceptual focus areas emerged out of an analysis process that highlighted key words contained within the transcript responses and then sought to describe the main conceptual areas in line with the key words that appeared most frequently. The transcript responses were then re-ordered and are presented here as part of the findings.

The key words that were drawn from the analysis of the raw data and the conceptual classifications that emerged are presented below for ease of reference as Table Two. It is useful to note the immediate connections between several of the theoretical concepts discussed as part of conflict transformation in Chapter Two and the conceptual classifications that have emerged. These connections and the perceptions of the sample participants that informed the concepts emerging out of practice are presented and discussed in the sections that follow.

Within each key thematic category the study draws connections between the classified data from the sample and the articulation of the theoretical framework contained within the review of literature relevant to these themes and concepts. This

is done in accordance with the three objectives of the study: to explore the relevance of conflict transformation theory to mediation practice in response to social conflict, to capture the perceptions of practitioners on the influence of conflict transformation theory and to explore the extent to which the AIMP is perceived to be a conflict transformation intervention.

Table Two KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS EMERGING FROM THE ANALYSIS

Key Thematic Categories	Key words associated with the responses in each category	Conceptual Classifications emerging from the responses
The Nature of Conflict	Complexity, natural resources, power, land, marginalisation, ethnic, economic, political, social mobilization, state power, power relations, global balance of power, history, competing agendas, tensions, violence, layers, levels, ideologies, peace, justice, rights	Conflict versus Violence Interconnected elements Dynamism Systems Levels and layers Types and forms of conflict
Application and Influence of Conflict Transformation Theory	Long-term, multiple layers, multiple levels, analysis, strategising, root causes, systems, structures, transform, negative to positive, deeper analysis, multiple viewpoints, multiple perspectives, relationships, tensions, spaces, preventing violence, developing a vision, sustained dialogue, shifting perceptions, trust and confidence building, unstructured approach, reconciliation, changing mindsets, inclusion, participation, complementarities, collaboration, networking, advocacy	Mediation as embedded in long-term processes Connecting levels of interventions Rebuilding and restoring relationships Violence prevention and community protection as part of peacebuilding Local ownership Networking, complementarity and collaboration Creating spaces
Additional Theoretical Influences	Combinations, Do No Harm, Appreciative Enquiry, Community Dialogue, Nonviolent Communication, Avoidance of Theory, Consensus Building, Ghandi, Church and Faith-Based Traditions, Anthroposophist Philosophy of Steiner, Traditional Approaches, Rights Based Approaches	Inclusive approaches Peacebuilding and development Learning from Practice Dialogue and non-violence Value based approaches Contemporary and Traditional Approaches
Formation of the AIMP	African solutions, linking levels, connecting initiatives, closing gaps, knowledge, sharing experiences, networking, learning, support, teams, capacity building, finding synergies	Building African Mediation Capacity Integration and coordination Synergies and complementarity
Gaps in Existing Approaches	Ability, experience, political appointments, technical skills, administrative capacities, documentation, sharing lessons, local knowledge, traditional approaches, over simplification, mistrust between civil society and government, limited participation of women	Documentation of lessons learned Lack of skills and capacities Utilising local knowledge Mistrust and suspicion

The chapter begins with an outline of some examples of how the AIMP is perceived as a conflict transformation initiative, based on the data generated out of the sample of participants. The chapter then presents an outline of the concept of what constitutes an insider mediator, drawing from the perceptions of the mediators themselves. The mediators' perceptions of the required personal characteristics for effective mediation are also presented.

The various levels at which the participants in the study are actively involved in mediation or support to mediative processes are then outlined to give an overview of the diversity of levels at which contributions are being made. The inclusion of examples from each of these levels of activity is then followed by a summary of the approaches that are being used in practice.

The key thematic categories are then presented and discussed in accordance with the conceptual classifications that emerged from the data analysis process. A brief outline of each concept will also include extracts from the interviews with participants to highlight and articulate the perception and understanding of the sample group. Connections will also be made to the various theoretical understandings connected to each concept.

The presentation of the data in this form enables a useful discussion that contributes to the overall aim of the study, namely to explore the relationship between conflict transformation theory and the establishment of the AIMP.

4.2 The AIMP as a Conflict Transformation Initiative

For the purposes of this study it is useful to note that the language used in the description of the AIMP and its intentions contains several of the key conceptual categories associated with conflict transformation theory that were developed as part of the data analysis process outlined in this research. In particular the notion that mediation capacities should be embedded in longer-term mediative processes that seek to address the systemic and structural causes of conflict, the importance of connecting levels of intervention, and the value of networking, complementarity and collaboration all appear to be central to the approach of the AIMP (2013).

In the report of the proceedings of the AIMP consultative conference the language of conflict transformation is used repeatedly (AIMP 2013). Many of the conceptual areas associated with conflict transformation as an approach and as a practice are evident

in the Analysis section of the AIMP report (2013:4) and in the strategies and action plan that are outlined (AIMP 2013:9).

As a collaborative initiative the AIMP appears to be intent on facilitating an approach to cooperative inclusive partnership building that is consistent with conflict transformation thinking. In this sense the AIMP appears also to be driven by an attempt to find greater complementarity between the multiple efforts that are being undertaken at different levels. This intention to connect levels of interventions in a more coordinated response to the multi-layered forms of conflict is also consistent with the conceptual underpinnings of conflict transformation thinking. In addition the networking and reflective learning approach of the AIMP that creates a web of connections between practitioners, policy makers and institutions could also be argued to be informed by a conflict transformation approach.

The specific mention within the Vision statement of the AIMP of the importance of building local ownership of mediation outcomes also resonates strongly with the perception of the sample group that this element forms part of what is understood as a key part of what constitutes effective mediation practice and of a conflict transformation approach to mediation.

The concepts contained within the theoretical frameworks with which conflict transformation is associated appear to be consistently applied in the practice and approach of the AIMP. However in its approach the AIMP also appears to draw its direction from several other theoretical influences. A strong sense of reflective learning is also seen as essential, and possibly more important than theory, in informing effective ways of responding to and engaging with the shifting dynamics of conflict.

The following section of this treatise will outline the perceptions of the sample in more detail as it presents some of the additional data that emerged from the study. These perceptions are informed and shaped by the experiences, institutional affiliations, roles and characteristics of the participants in the study.

4.3 The Role of Insider Mediators

The insider mediators that form part of this study perceive themselves to be respected members of their communities who derive their legitimacy from their position. They include professionals like former teachers, development workers and policy makers, as well as elders and community leaders who are approached by

conflicting parties because of their high standing and the expectation that they will be able to listen and act in an impartial and respectful manner.

The contribution of insider mediators to dialogue processes needs to be understood both at the micro-level, where they often play a role in resolving the interpersonal disputes between people and defusing tensions between groups of people, as well as at the macro-level where they play a role in contributing to dialogue processes that form part of a wider peacebuilding and democratisation agenda.

The strength of their approach lies in the focus insider mediators provide to the relational aspects of engaging with conflicting parties. These are long term processes rooted in the attitudinal changes required to bring about transformational change. The importance of building trust and confidence between and within parties is another important element of the role insider-mediators appear to have been able to play.

Insider mediators often find themselves caught up in the dynamics of a conflict because they are being affected by the rising levels of tension and are compelled through their own set of personal values to act. This was certainly the case in Burundi and Kenya, where the magnitude of the violence, and the levels of emotion attached to the stark polarization of society led to the direct involvement of insiders. Where opportunities to mediate arose, the insider mediators used their innate and experience based skills to engage.

Religious and traditional authorities like the Council of Churches in Kenya, the Inter-religious Forum in Mozambique and the Bashingantahe in Burundi are often compelled to demonstrate leadership in the face of adversity, and act in a mediative capacity out of a moral obligation or to avoid being accused of shirking their responsibilities to society.

In other cases, like that of South Africa and Nigeria, a coordinating body extends an invitation to identified insider mediators. For many insider mediators being invited to participate in a formal body is taken as a duty that their personal life missions then compel them to respond to. These formal bodies become particularly prominent during election periods but are also set up to respond to other forms of conflict including for example taxi violence, disputes over land and other natural resources and conflicts associated with groups such as Boko Haram.

The insider mediators that form part of this study appear to combine innate abilities, learned experiences and technically advanced facilitation and relationship building skills. They have also cultivated an approach to mediation practice that draws from both traditional and contemporary forms of mediation.

The characteristics of insider mediators that are presented in the following section emerged out of an analysis of the data produced through the interview processes. These characteristics are presented below as part of an outline of the perceptions of the sample group into the role they have been playing in support of mediation processes.

4.3.1 Characteristics and Capacities of Insider Mediators

Through the discussions and observations that formed part of the interview process, the following set of characteristics and capacities within the groups of insider mediators involved in the research were identified. Some of these would appear to be innate abilities, peculiar to issues of personality and temperament, while others are learned through formal channels or by direct experience over many years of practice.

- Insider mediators are able to operate at a level that recognises their own emotional response to the conflict but they are able to channel this emotion towards problem solving
- They recognise the dynamics between their own identity issues, including kinship, ethnicity and gender identities, and the identity issues of the context within which they are operating
- Insider mediators have an empowered sense of self in which they are comfortable and confident with their own role and the value of their contribution to the process
- They are able to work in groups and in pairs and often need to in order to counterbalance the potential of individual stereotyping to break trust
- Insider mediators are able to stand above their contexts, both their individual contexts based on who they are, and the conflict context of the society in which they are operating
- Effective insider mediators are rooted in their proven consistency, their historical background and their experience

- They have often had some formal training in mediation or communication skills but have used this training to gather experience and confidence that informs how this formal training translates into practice
- They are excellent listeners and are able to hear not only what is being said, but also the different things that are meant, they are intuitive in their ability to hear
- They try to be open, transparent and participatory in engaging with people and groups
- They are quick to learn and are able to synthesise complex information into simple forms that can be easily communicated
- They are able to analyse the dynamics of conflict and to quickly grasp the rules of a system intended to manage conflict and interpret these rules in a manner appropriate to the context to which they are being applied
- They are able to hear the consensus in a variety of opinions and perspectives
- They are usually good at building relationships and establishing interpersonal trust
- They have a track record of commitment to their work, their communities and the relationships they have established with people
- Most of the effective insider mediators are little known despite the value of the contributions they have already made. They are able to manage ego and appear to have little interest in the media or in extolling their own contributions
- They are motivated by a more selfless, though perhaps at a deeper level self-interested, desire for peace and an end to violence
- They often have direct experience of violence, of overcoming adversity and prejudice linked to their identities, and of coming out of situations of great risk
- They are able to draw on the strengths available to them through their own cultural, religious and communal identities within the context in which they find themselves
- They seldom make a great deal of money out of the work they do, and often work as volunteers when they are practicing as insider mediators, particularly at community level

This outline assists in providing insight into the experiential lens through which the perceptions of the sample group are derived. These characteristics and capacities and the role that the insider mediators play have shaped the responses to the

interview questions and provide the background to the perceptions on the connections between theory and practice that inform the section that follows.

4.4 Perceptions on Theory and Practice

This section of the treatise presents the key thematic categories that provided the framework for the semi-structured interviews that were carried out with the sample participants. Within each of the five thematic categories a number of concepts were identified that emerged out of an analysis of the interview transcripts. These concepts are presented within the category out of which they emerged and are briefly outlined and described. These descriptions are informed by the data generated during the research process but do not attribute specific concepts to particular participants in the study, and where quotations are used they are not attributed to a named individual. Each participant has been assigned a number, and this number will serve as a reference. This is in line with the agreements between the researcher and the participants that formed part of the research consent form that was signed prior to conducting the interviews out of which the data was generated.

Within each category connections are made between the perceptions of the sample group and the relevant theoretical frameworks that have been presented in Chapter Two. This effort to highlight the connections between theory and the perceptions of practicing mediators contributes to the objectives of the study that seek to explore the relevance of conflict transformation theory to mediation practice in response to social conflict in Africa and to capture the perceptions insider mediators have of the influence of conflict transformation theory on their approach to mediation.

4.4.1 The Nature of Social Conflict

Perceptions and responses to the question on, the nature of social conflict in the context within which they are active as a mediator, forms the basis for this section. The classifications of responses were developed out of an analysis of the key words associated with all of the responses within this category.

4.4.1.1 Conflict versus Violence

The distinction between conflict and violence was articulated by a number of participants in the study in their response to questions regarding the nature of the social conflict in their contexts. In general conflict is seen as a set of dynamics that can be worked with while violence is seen as a destructive force.

If we are able to respond timeously to conflict, and get people talking early on about the problems, then we can stop the violence before it begins (Participant Three).

This included comments that spoke about preventing conflict from becoming violent, using forms of mediated dialogue, and through the description of the nature of social conflict as being made up of various tensions and areas of dispute that were distinct from the outbreaks of violence that also formed part of the context.

It also increased awareness among communities that conflict is always there but all efforts should be made to address them lest it becomes violent which can be very difficult to manage (Participant Four).

Violence was described as resulting from forms of social mobilisation that sought to use the underlying conflicts in society as an opportunity to polarise attitudes.

It is about shifting the discussions away from an alignment with political interests and an 'us versus them', stopping people from making war talk along party lines, and then getting everybody to focus together on what can be done to change things, without the violence (Participant Nine).

The separation of the destructive force of violence from the complex tensions associated with conflict lies at the heart of the concept of transforming conflict. This distinction underlies the reasons why the term conflict transformation is sometimes preferred to terms such as conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

Several participants also made a distinction between physical violence and structural violence in pointing to where transformation was most needed.

Long-term approaches need to also consider elements of structural and systemic violence as well as physical violence. These structures and systems all need to be transformed. (Participant One)

You can't only accuse people of being violent without also looking at the ways in which the society is violent towards them. When the basic rights of people are being denied this is also a form of violence (Participant Four).

This distinction is consistent with the conceptual underpinnings of the understanding of violence presented by Galtung (2000:3) one of the key theorists behind the notion of conflict transformation. Galtung is mentioned several times by participants as an influential thinker whose approach formed part of their own perceptions.

Galtung is also relevant, especially the categorization of violence (Participant Two).

We use an adapted version of the violence triangle of Galtung as a tool to help people see the connections between attitudes, behaviours and the

underlying systems and structures that form part of the context (Participant Nine).

Galtung is helpful in our dialogue workshops, in seeing how complex violence really is (Participant Eight).

4.4.1.2 Interconnected elements

The interconnections between the various elements of conflict that practitioners are faced with were articulated by a number of respondents in the study. Participants in the research study would typically list a number of different conflict types and sources of conflict and then describe these as being connected or part of an overarching conflict system.

They are fighting over scarce resources, which in many cases the government doesn't have regulation over so there's a constant power struggle and no clear laws, and the police are often useless or biased. In some communities ethnic groups have control over specific resources and they are aligned to political parties, the whole system is really a mess (Participant Five).

Participants' responses to the question soliciting their views on the nature of social conflict in the context in which they were active included examples of tribal conflict, land disputes, disputes over access to and control over natural resources and political and ideological differences, followed by statements that demonstrated how these examples all formed part of the struggles between conflicting parties for control of wealth and access to power.

At the end of the day the power struggle for dominance, to get access and resources, remains the most powerful driving force of conflict. Until society is more balanced I can't see how this is going to change (Participant Five).

This recognition of the interconnections between the various ways in which conflicts manifest themselves and the deeper underlying tensions in society is another key element that emerges out of the literature review of what constitutes conflict transformation theory.

4.4.1.3 Dynamism

The perception amongst practitioners involved in the study that conflicts are constantly shifting in form and that the outcomes of a particular intervention are non-linear and difficult to predict was also apparent in the responses to the question on the nature of social conflict. Several participants used language that referred specifically to the dynamics of conflict rather than the forms or types of conflict and

many talked about the way in which conflicts were constantly changing and adapting over time and in response to changes in the context.

Conflict is like a fire really, it keeps changing all the time, and so it's more of a dynamic energy really, rather than something predictable that can be contained or that will change the way you want it to (Participant Two).

In our communities you can never predict what is going to happen next, one day it's a problem over land, the next the chiefs are at loggerheads with the youth, then it's a local councilor in conflict with the Imam, its always changing (Participant Eight).

The notion of conflict as dynamic and the implications this has for what constitutes an effective response to conflict is also an important part of the theoretical understanding of conflict transformation. This theoretical understanding resonates with the perceptions the research study participants have of the nature of the conflicts affecting the contexts in which they are active.

4.4.1.4 Systems

Recognising the impact of the underlying systems and structures on the dynamics of conflict is another element of conflict transformation theory that emerged out of the theoretical aspect of this study. While these elements are often invisible, or at least not immediately apparent, they appear to be prominent in the articulated perceptions of practitioners on the nature of social conflict.

Its about trying to build structures and systems that can help to prevent or minimise the sources of tension that have previously led to outbreaks of escalated conflict and violence (Participant One).

Looking at the systems that create the pressure that led to the violence and changing them (Participant Six).

Many of the respondents made reference to the pressures and tensions that were created by the economic and political systems within which social conflicts emerged and most respondents talked about the need to reform or transform the systemic elements of the conflicts affecting them.

For me the global balance of power affects and impacts on mediation processes and while this may hold for a while still in the long term these processes will shift and there will be opportunities for transformation (Participant One).

The real problem we face is that politicians control the resources and there is just so much poverty, so until this changes and there is a more equal distribution of resources there are always going to be conflicts coming up again and again (Participant Five).

This connection between the effect of systems and structures on the dynamics of conflict and the manifest forms of conflict that require the intervention of mediators is another key part of the conceptual elements of the violence triangle of Galtung (2000:3). That practitioners place emphasis on these systems and structures suggests an understanding of social conflict that is consistent with conflict transformation.

4.4.1.5 Levels and layers

The multi-level peacebuilding pyramid presented by Lederach (1997) is used to describe a conflict transformation approach to peacebuilding that works at multiple levels. This understanding of conflict and peacebuilding was often referred to by the research participants who perceive efforts at community level as being affected by the dynamics of conflict at different levels of society.

Most of the issues identified were around unequal power relations, poor dispensation of justice, marginalisation of women and youth by a male dominated patriarchal society. Efforts to influence and get involved at this level were complemented by community peace sessions that were later named dialogue sessions (Participant Eight).

Similarly the effect of decisions taken at higher levels and the impact of policies on communities was described as a key element of the reason why high level peace agreements required the support of mediators working at multiple levels in society.

Consultation and participation need to go beyond dialogue, and a workshop. It needs to also include analysis of for example at district level who you could identify who would bring people into a process, so that they can identify people who can play this role as part of the process of localising mediation processes (Participant Six).

Several participants spoke about localising mediation processes.

Mediation is about shifting the vision of the community to a long-term vision, involving them in the wider change processes that begin to take place and mediating the local conflicts that arise along the way (Participant Seven).

We use a people-to-people peace approach that focuses on a homegrown peace mediation mechanism (Participant Nine).

The theoretical understanding of the connections between these levels and the importance of multi-level responses to conflict in practice appear to reinforce the consistency between conflict transformation theory and the perceptions of practitioners involved in the study.

4.4.1.6 Types and forms of conflict

A wide range of labels was used to describe the types and forms of conflict affecting the contexts in which practitioners involved in the study are active. While none of the practitioners referred specifically to the notion of protracted social conflict or to intractability, concepts that are associated with the theoretical outlines presented in Chapter Two, it was clear that participants did not perceive the conflicts affecting them to be of one particular form or type.

A mix of value based, resource related, power, relational, inter-personal, systemic, structural, economic, political and identity connected descriptions were used to articulate the types and forms of conflict apparent in their contexts.

Tangible objective issues in the dispute are about resources, land, access, but the parties use the issues as an entry point for social mobilisation along ethnic or political lines. People begin to align themselves with political interests and the conflict becomes a lot more complex, especially when political conflict is seen as central, and connected to access to state power structures (Participant Two).

There did not appear to be a single theoretical understanding of conflict that aptly describes the lived experience of practitioners active in conflict contexts. Perceptions on the nature of conflict appear to be as varied as the multitude of theoretical views on the nature of conflict. This suggests that theories that seek to describe the dynamics of conflict, without defining or pinning down the nature of conflict, would be more likely to provide insights that would be helpful to practitioners such as those involved in this study.

4.4.2 Application and Influence of Conflict Transformation Theory

This key thematic category emerged out of an analysis of two of the questions that formed part of the data instrument. These questions asked the participants to share their understanding of conflict transformation as an approach to mediation practice and their perceptions of the extent to which this approach informs the techniques and methods of their practice. Several recurring key words were identified that were then classified into the seven conceptual areas that follow. Each conceptual classification includes an outline of the relevant perceptions of the research participants that locates these perceptions within an understanding of conflict transformation theory.

Several of these conceptual classifications can be clearly associated with conflict transformation thinking at a theoretical level. Others appear to be perceived as

consistent with conflict transformation thinking even though they have not been clearly outlined in the review of conflict transformation theory that formed part of this study. This presents an interesting area for further investigation that may be able to derive insights into theory that are emerging out of the perceptions on effective practice articulated by the study participants.

4.4.2.1 Mediation as embedded in long-term processes

According to the perceptions of the participants in the study a conflict transformation approach to mediation appears to challenge traditional understandings of mediation as being time-bound outcome based interventions.

In line with the articulated perceptions of the research participants, mediation is rather understood as a way of building bridges between conflicting parties through the use of facilitated dialogue processes that are often long-term and more process focused.

Its about getting people to link their values to the systems and world views that are affecting them, trying to get beyond just forcing people to accept a particular code of conduct and including an understanding of why this is important (Participant One).

Mediation as a tool should not just be an intervention in itself at the level of governments but should be embedded in a long-term process starting at local level and focused on relationship building at every level (Participant Six).

This notion of embedding mediation capacities within long-term change processes, in an effort to ensure the ability to respond to the new forms of conflict that emerge as part of the changes that take place and to the emergence of tensions that have previously been latent was articulated by a number of respondents.

In all these cases we did not mediate the conflict at national level as such, we set up local structures and facilitated the processes necessary for dialogue to take place for transformative change (Participant Four).

A lot of behind-the-scenes work was happening at different levels of society to bring conflicting communities together, setting up local committees and dialogue forums that could get people talking about their differences in a more sustainable way. This was necessary to give credence to the processes that were happening at the national level, and for the power sharing deal to hold and deepen (Participant Seven).

This aspect of perceived conflict transformation theory, in relation to mediation practice, appears to have a major influence on the approach of the research participants involved in this study.

4.4.2.2 Connecting levels of interventions

The importance of connecting efforts to transform conflict at community level with related efforts at district, provincial, national and even regional levels was highlighted by research study participants as an important element of a conflict transformation approach to mediation practice. Finding the connections between senior level mediation efforts to forge agreements between the leadership of conflicting parties at national level and the efforts of mediation practitioners working at lower levels were perceived to be central to what constitutes a conflict transformation approach to mediation.

Transforming conflict through dialogue and mediation requires us to bridge the gaps between what is happening at community level and what is being agreed around the table. Unless we can better connect these levels peace agreements will remain fragile and will not be properly implemented (Participant Six).

From our experience insider mediation needs to happen at every level, national and grassroots, for sustainable peace to prevail (Participant Seven).

In their efforts to bridge the gaps and connect the levels at which interventions are taking place, several of the research respondents perceived their approach as being informed by conflict transformation thinking. This perception that connections between levels of interventions are part of conflict transformation theory is supported by a review of the relevant literature.

4.4.2.3 Rebuilding and restoring relationships

There was a strong association between the focus on relationship building that forms part of the mediation practice of the practitioners involved in the study and their perceptions of what constitutes a conflict transformation approach to mediation. A number of respondents referred to the process of restoring the broken connections between conflicting groups as being a central component of their approach to mediation.

Redefining relationships and the vision of the communities that have been ruptured by the conflict is the main purpose of our interventions (Participant Two).

The relationship between the chiefs and the women and youth was broken. After the establishment of the village dialogue sessions participation was more balanced and the chiefs heard the voices of youth and women and the relationship got stronger (Participant Three).

We attempt to restore something (often times relationships) that have been severed, it moves the situation from personal disconnection to establishing contact with each other (Participant Seven).

The perception that relationship building is central to an effective mediation approach and that this is part of a conflict transformation approach resonates with the contributions of Lederach (1997). Participants in the study referred specifically to restoring the broken web of connections between groups in society, borrowing directly from the conceptual contributions of conflict transformation theorists.

The relational focus, and in particular the building of trust and confidence between conflicting parties which formed part of the articulation of this understanding of the importance of relationship building, is often one of the tensions that emerges between different approaches to mediation.

Internal mediation has the potential to build relationships of trust with conflict parties that enhances confidence in the mediation process (Participant Four).

Relationship building inevitably takes time and is sometimes neglected in the pressures to arrive at an outcome or a mediated agreement. Conflict transformation approaches to mediation suggest that this is expedient and ultimately counterproductive, a view that is shared in the articulated perceptions of the participants.

4.4.2.4 Violence prevention and community protection as part of peacebuilding

According to the perceptions of the research study participants, the prevention of violence and efforts aimed at protecting communities against violence are connected to peacebuilding efforts through the lenses provided by a conflict transformation approach. While this was partly articulated as being about linking short-term responses to violence to longer-term peacebuilding efforts it was also associated with the distinction that conflict transformation thinking makes between conflict and violence.

Conflict transformation theory was understood by some of the research participants to be suggesting that mediation efforts aimed at preventing violence could be understood as forming part of a deeper peacebuilding agenda.

It is important to have mediation efforts that stop violence, every life matters, but these efforts can be part of peace, part of making it possible to talk about the deeper underlying reasons for why the violence was there in the first place (Participant Nine).

Community protection strategies, in which communities develop strategies to counter the destructive effect of violence, were understood as part of an interconnected set of interventions consistent with conflict transformation thinking.

A lot of the time we are working with community groups who want to protect themselves against violence from the outside, but we take this need and use it to set up systems that also help people to see how to get beyond the violence, and look at strategies for longer term change processes that are also needed (Participant Three).

While this set of connections does not appear to be explicitly made in the study of conflict transformation theory that formed part of this research study there would appear to be some consistency of logic here worth a deeper investigation in a research study with a wider scope than is possible within the limitation of this treatise.

4.4.2.5 Local ownership

The importance of local ownership of mediation processes and of the agreements that are reached was consistently articulated as both an important element of effective mediation practice and as an element of practice that was informed by conflict transformation theory. This perception is supported by a theoretical understanding, consistent with conflict transformation theory, that bottom up approaches to peacebuilding and the ownership and buy-in of those affected by conflict are essential to the effectiveness of agreements that are reached.

Bringing people on board with the thinking underneath the process and building ownership and buy-in around the solutions (Participant Seven).

Community people preferred the mediation efforts of these village development committees with support from our peace promoters. When the boundary demarcation agreement had to be implemented it was these local committees that talked with people and that helped people into dialogue processes when disputes arose (Participant Eight).

Practitioners who participated in the research study articulated the importance of local ownership as one of the motivating factors behind their efforts to involve local communities in mediation processes, and to promote the efforts of the AIMP in its intentions to connect local level mediation efforts to Track I mediation processes.

The importance of local ownership was presented as both a lesson emerging out of the perceptions of the participating practitioners on what works in practice as well as part of their perceptions of the elements of conflict transformation theory that influence their own approaches.

4.4.2.6 Networking, complementarity and collaboration

The ability to find complementarity between initiatives through networks of practitioners that were forged around sharing information and approaches was another aspect of the perceived understanding of what constitutes a conflict transformation approach to mediation. Several respondents talked about the networks of networks that formed part of their own approach to effective mediation practice, and connected this approach to their understanding of what conflict transformation suggested as being important.

We have set up local networks in each community that are connected to each other, networks of networks, that go beyond the district boundaries, and it is these networks that allow communication and information to flow, and for people to respond rapidly when it is needed. This is part of our conflict transformation approaches (Participant Three).

The research participants also presented their own efforts to forge collaborative partnerships between mediation actors as part of the manner in which conflict transformation theory influenced their own approach.

In conflict transformation we try to get mediators working in different places to work more closely together, collaborating on projects and sharing their experiences and resources (Participant One).

Long-term peacebuilding is about finding the cumulative effect of multiple mediation efforts, and finding ways of working these efforts together in a better way (Participant Four).

Conflict transformation theory does appear to suggest that multiple interventions in multiple directions are an effective response to complex conflict systems, reinforcing the perceived understanding of practitioners that this is an important element of applying conflict transformation theory.

4.4.2.7 Creating spaces

A number of responses to the question regarding the perceived understanding of conflict transformation as an approach to mediation practice spoke about creating spaces in which conflicting parties were able to develop a deeper understanding of each other's views on a particular conflict.

We are really providing social spaces for constructive change processes to take place, spaces where people get to know each other differently, and helping people to see things through each others eyes (Participant Seven).

Participants in the study spoke about shifting mindsets and perceptions by creating opportunities for conflicting parties to meet and share perspectives in spaces that were safe.

The other thing that's nice to do is to set up transformative spaces that can get people to think outside of their party lines and to become more forward looking, shifting the time-lines of thinking and introducing a new kind of time dimension (Participant Five).

And the only way to transform the constant struggle for power is to recognise that conflicts narrow our minds and our perspectives so it can be useful to bring in other perspectives into the space that can broaden our minds. Setting up spaces that can help people to believe that something is possible (Participant Six).

These interventions were presented as mediated spaces that required the facilitation skills of insider mediators who were able to assist conflicting parties to see things through a different set of lenses.

This connection between the spaces that were created and the lenses through which conflict is viewed appears to resonate with aspects of conflict transformation theory associated with Lederach. In this sense there is a strong perception that a deliberate effort to create these safe mediated spaces forms part of the influence of conflict transformation theory on the mediation practice of practitioners involved in the study.

4.4.3 Other Theoretical Influences on Mediation Practice

While many of the research study participants shared a perception that a particular understanding of conflict transformation theory influenced their own approach to mediation this was by no means the only theoretical influence that was articulated.

This section of the study outlines some of the other theoretical approaches that were perceived as having an influence on the practice of the mediators involved in the research.

4.4.3.1 Inclusive approaches

All of the participants in the study spoke about how their approach to mediation was influenced by elements of several theoretical approaches and by lessons that had been learned through the sharing of experiences of other practitioners. In this sense approaches that were inclusive in the manner in which practice was informed by theory were perceived as being the most useful in enabling an effective approach to mediation.

I forget also the name of the person who talks about inclusive approaches, maybe it was also Lederach, but we use lots of approaches at different times, we learn from others doing this kind of work, trying to include whatever seems to work in practice (Participant Eight).

Rather than relying on one particular theoretical understanding, the perceptions of the participants were that several theories contained elements that made sense to them as they sought to find an effective approach. This perception was based on the diverse and varied experiences of the practitioners involved, with some of the theoretical influences having been derived from formal academic learning and others from workshops and experience sharing forums in which practitioners had picked up theoretical elements that were then applied in their practice.

4.4.3.2 Peacebuilding and development

The Do No Harm approach associated with Mary B. Anderson that was developed as part of a collaborative learning project arises out of the contributions of thousands of practitioners that have been involved in the project (Anderson 1999). Do No Harm set out to influence developmental thinking by pointing out how the introduction of resources into a context affected by conflict can either reinforce or undermine the existing connectors and the dividers in that context. Using a divider connector lens enables practitioners to better understand the potential and actual impact of their interventions on the conflicts in the context (Goddard 2009).

Do No Harm is good, finding the connectors in our communities and identifying the dividers, and then working to strengthen the connections and work out how to overcome the things that are dividing us (Participant Three).

While initially intended as a tool for development practitioners the divider connector lens that it presents was perceived by several of the research participants as a theory that influenced their mediation practice. Reinforcing the connectors between conflicting parties and minimizing the dividers was perceived to be a useful element of effective mediation practice.

Local projects that bring people together to discuss how to implement is useful as a starting point for deeper discussions. How to do the project in a way that does not cause harm and that reinforces the connections between people (Participant Seven).

This was an unexpected outcome of the research process but is not that surprising considering that many of the participating practitioners are involved in mediation contexts that are also faced with major developmental challenges. The blurring of

divisions between peacebuilding and development is consistent with a conflict transformation approach that recognises the need for mediation processes to also address the underlying elements of a conflict system that are often rooted in underdevelopment or unequal development processes.

4.4.3.3 Learning from practice

While many of the research participants could identify and articulate theoretical influences on their practice most of the respondents perceived the major influence on their approach as being derived from lessons that emerged out of the sharing of practical experiences of other practitioners. Some of the responses articulated this as being connected to the praxis cycle approach to learning associated with Freire (1970) but most saw this as simply being about learning from the practice of others.

The cycle of action and reflection and about making to time to learn from each other like Freire says is the most important (Participant Eight).

Two of the participants were adamant that there was little of value to be derived from theory and in line with this perception lessons derived from practice were seen as the most useful source of learning for informing effective mediation.

I try to avoid theories and academic approaches, they all represent one or another world view and are often not helpful, it's better to learn from practice, to learn from our own experiences of what works and what doesn't (Participant One).

The epistemological approach of the AIMP that sees the creation of experiential learning opportunities as central to the intentions of its formation appears to be responding to this perception.

The derivation of insights into effectiveness from reflective practice is however also consistent with the application of conflict transformation approaches and it could be argued that an approach that relies on practice rather than theory is ironically itself informed by a particular theoretical understanding.

4.4.3.4 Dialogue and non-violence

The influence of dialogue based approaches and non-violence were also articulated by several of the respondents as part of the theoretical approaches that have had an influence on their practice. These influences were perceived as having their roots in the work of Ghandi and the Nonviolent Communication approaches associated with Marshall Rosenberg.

The methodology tells leaders that true leadership is grounded in certain values and then tries to build from this to include a self-reflective process that draws partly I guess from the work of Gandhi (Participant Five).

I draw also from peace communications work of Marshall Rosenberg that uses the giraffe thing (Participant Two).

While not inconsistent with the importance of effective communication and the ideas contained within efforts to find the transformative narrative that are part of conflict transformation thinking these are clearly theoretical influences that inform and that are respected by the practitioners involved in the research study.

4.4.3.5 Value based approaches

A number of the participants also perceived their practice as being influenced by faith and church based traditions and theories. These perceptions were articulated as being about values that served as guiding influences in making decisions about how to respond effectively to conflict.

Using the traditions and values of the church and so on, where I was based (Participant Four).

One of the respondents specifically articulated a perception that the Anthroposophist approach of Steiner had had an influence on his approach.

The anthroposophist philosophical base informs a practical application of how to transform organisations and individuals and then blending this type of approach with the approaches to mediation that are more formally taught (Participant Five).

While these influences are clearly not connected specifically to academic theories they express an understanding of the importance of values in approaches to effective mediation practice. This location of values within an approach to effective mediation practice is also consistent with conflict transformation thinking.

4.4.3.6 Contemporary and traditional approaches

The final classification of theoretical influences on practice, as perceived by the research study participants, includes traditional African approaches to mediation as well as the influence of contemporary thinking on building consensus and the 'Getting to Yes' concepts of Fisher and Ury (1981). The influence of Fisher and Ury (1981) was perceived to be important to mediation processes that sought to build consensus amongst conflicting parties, with 2 of the respondents specifically mentioning the conceptual underpinning of the 'Getting to Yes' approach.

We do try to shift the dynamics from a win lose type of approach to a win win where everybody benefits (Participant Two).

Building consensus with conflicting parties is central, getting participants to agree that 'yes' we can and we must all do something together (Participant Eight).

Participants responses to the question regarding other theoretical approaches that had an influence on their practice made mention of the African traditional forms of medi-arbitration such as those used by the Bashingantahe of Burundi, the cultural practice of dialogue as an approach to problem solving and the perception that mediation is an integral part of African contexts.

There are some practices in Africa which may be unique to our situation, and which at times serves as reference points. For instance some of the greatest insider mediation has been done by traditional societies in the northern part of the country (Participant Nine).

4.4.4 Formation of the AIMP

This thematic category arose out of responses to the data instrument question that requested the research participants to share their views on how the formation of the AIMP would add value to their mediation interventions. The key words that were identified within this category were then classified into the 3 sections that follow.

4.4.4.1 Building African mediation capacity

The most consistent response from the participants to the question regarding the added value of the AIMP concerned the building of African mediation capacity. The perceptions of the research participants were that this element of the intentions behind the formation of the AIMP was critically important.

Based on the identified gaps the AIMP will need to roll out a training, mentorship and coaching programme for the team (Participant Six).

Building the capacity of insider mediators at every level, and putting people with the capacity to mediate in place at each of these levels (Participant Nine).

Africans must be able to mediate their own conflicts, and for this we need to identify and promote and build the capacities of insider mediators at every level (Participant Three).

This perception appears to be in keeping with the idea that the complexity and dynamism of African conflicts requires mediative capacity at multiple levels that cannot be adequately met by external mediators. In addition a perceived notion that Africa needs to develop its own ability to respond to the overwhelming needs created

by the cycles of violence and conflict that form part of the African context also appeared to inform this response.

We need African solutions to the conflict problems in Africa, and it is the people of Africa who will have to come up with and implement these solutions (Participant Eight).

The notion of African solutions to African problems, associated with leaders such as former President Thabo Mbeki, appears to have taken hold in the minds of the participants, and this was articulated by many as being part of why this particular added value was perceived to be so important.

4.4.4.2 Integration and coordination

The perception that the gap between Track I, II and III approaches to mediation is undermining mediation efforts at each level appears to be the major influence that informed the articulated perception that a more integrated and better coordinated approach to mediation was one of the key ways in which the formation of the AIMP would add value to existing approaches.

Creating successful networks and linkages with the existing peace infrastructures at the regional and continental level would avoid duplication of efforts and promote efficient use of resources (Participant Four).

A perceived sense of disconnect between mediation efforts in different parts of the continent and an absence of systems thinking that fails to see the connections between conflicts affecting different contexts also appears to inform the perception that integration and coordination would be useful. Practitioners appear to often feel isolated and struggle to see the impact of their efforts, particularly when protracted cycles of conflict result in escalated tensions and forms of violence that undermine or detract from the processes they are involved in.

The trouble is that what we do at community level often gets overtaken by events nationally, or we can't really demonstrate how what we are doing is making a difference (Participant Nine).

If we can pool all of our efforts, and show that we are doing a lot then we will be able to really change things (Participant Four).

The perception of the practitioners involved in this study is that if they are able to better integrate and coordinate their efforts, the sum of the parts will have greater impact. It is their perception that the formation of the AIMP will contribute directly in this regard.

4.4.4.3 Synergies and complementarity

In a related manner finding synergies and complementarities between existing efforts is also perceived as an important added value that the AIMP will deliver on. Practitioners involved in the study perceive the potential of forums created by the AIMP to find ways in which existing interventions can complement and reinforce each other.

The AIMP provides an opportunity for us to share in detail what we are involved in and to find ways of putting these initiatives together, of seeing how they can strengthen each other (Participant Six).

AIMP opportunities for sharing interventions were also perceived as important in that they could assist in identifying ways in which interventions could draw strength from each other in a manner that would enhance their overall impact.

4.4.5 Gaps in Existing Approaches

Responses to this aspect of the data instrument, which specifically asked the interviewees to share their perceptions regarding the gaps in existing approaches to mediation in Africa, were classified into the 4 sections that follow.

The recommendations included in the concluding chapter that follows draw largely from this section of the research study.

4.4.5.1 Documentation of lessons learned

The perception that there was not sufficient documentation of the lessons being learned by practicing mediators formed part of the response of all of the participants involved in the study. Participants were of the view that existing literature on effective mediation approaches was not fully informed by the lessons being learned by practicing mediators.

There is not enough documentation of good or best practices or what I like to call 'Telling Our Stories'. Africa is rich with good knowledge and practice of insider mediation, we need to tell it and create our own theory base (Participant Four).

Research participants also specifically mentioned the lack of available material that articulated lessons derived from effective mediation approaches to African conflicts.

4.4.5.2 Lack of skills and capacities

There was also an articulated perception that existing approaches to mediation lacked sufficient skills and capacities, particularly at Track I level, where mediators are perceived as often being appointed on the basis of their political gravitas rather than their mediation skills.

There are too many cases where the appointed mediator does not really know anything about mediation; they are just political appointees without any real dialogue or facilitation skills (Participant Seven).

The research participants spoke about the need to develop teams of mediators that could combine their skills to provide a more effective overall response to the conflicts with which they were engaged.

A team approach would work best, where each team is made up of people with different skills and areas of knowledge and expertise. If a team is balanced it will always be stronger than just one or two mediators working together (Participant Eight).

Perceptions that insider mediators felt undermined by the dismissal of African traditional approaches to mediation were also expressed. A concerted effort to tap into and share the existing skills and capacities of practicing mediators was seen as an important opportunity to fill a perceived gap in current approaches.

4.4.5.3 Utilising local knowledge

The gap between mediation approaches at national level and the dynamics of conflict at community level formed part of the perception that local knowledge was not being fully utilised to inform current mediation practice.

From my experience the best mediation and dialogue practice is the one that works with the proper understanding of the context of the conflict. Too many mediation efforts just don't take local knowledge into account. Mediation and dialogue processes need to identify traditional practices that worked for similar situations in the past and also recognises how people in the past went about addressing their conflict issues (Participant Four).

Participants in the research study felt that a deeper knowledge of the local context and local insights into the cultures and outlook of the conflicting parties would assist in making mediation interventions more effective.

4.4.5.4 Mistrust and suspicion

There was a strong perception that mistrust and suspicion between the mediation efforts of governance institutions, including bodies such as the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities, and the efforts of civil society initiatives was creating another gap in existing approaches.

As mediators our natural entry has been through civil society. But this is not very helpful. Governments are often wary of civil society. We should seek access and buy-in and build trust directly with the political actors (Participant Five).

By deliberately nurturing a deeper understanding of these initiatives and building confidence in their intentions and a deeper respect for the efforts involved, the participants were of the view that this gap could be closed and that mediation efforts at all of these levels would become more effective.

4.5 Conclusion

The presentation of the research findings demonstrates that the AIMP is clearly intended as a strategic response to the complex nature of conflict in Africa and that this strategic response draws strongly from conflict transformation thinking. However there are also other theoretical approaches and lessons drawn from practice that emerge as influential. This mix of theoretical influences speaks to a pragmatic and flexible approach that will be discussed in more detail in the final concluding chapter that follows.

The roles that are outlined that insiders mediators are playing in a wide variety of contexts and at different levels assists in demonstrating the contribution that these practitioners are making to finding ways of transforming the deep-rooted nature of conflict. The practitioners identify themselves as insider mediators and outline what they perceive to be the characteristics that inform this perception and that make them effective within the contexts in which they are active. These characteristics are useful in helping to understand how practitioners themselves understand the notion of an insider mediator.

The presentation of findings with regards to the participants perspectives of the influence of theory on their perception of the nature of social conflict, the application and influence of conflict transformation theory, other theoretical influences and on how the AIMP will add value to mediation practice and fill the gaps in current approaches suggests that the influence of theory is often in the background.

Most of the research participants do not appear to set out with a theoretical framework that they then seek to implement in practice. Rather bits and pieces of theory are picked up along the way, and theoretical influences are applied in different ways and in different contexts. Theory that allows for flexible and innovative approaches and that can be adapted in response to the changing dynamics of conflict appears to be the most useful. Conflict transformation theory appears to contain several concepts and an overall approach to intervening in conflict situations that resonates strongly with the grounded approach of the participants.

Theoretical approaches have often become incorporated into the practical approaches of the participants, they are no longer seen as theories but are seen as lessons that have emerged from practice and the sharing of experiences as to what is useful and what appears to be effective. This opens up an interesting opportunity for future studies on the connection between theory and practice.

Chapter Five

SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Research Summary

The intention of this treatise was to outline the process and findings of a qualitative research study that explored the relationship between conflict transformation theory and the establishment of the African Insider Mediators Platform. The perceptions of the research participants of themselves, as insider mediators, of the nature of the conflict contexts in which they were working and of their own practice provide perspectives into a different way of understanding mediation at both the level of theory and practice.

By locating the perceptions of practicing mediators within an analysis of the intractable nature of conflict in Africa and the theoretical understandings of conflict transformation and mediation, the study sought to gain deeper insight into the relevance of conflict transformation theory to mediation practice, the influence of theories on practice and the extent to which the formation of the AIMP can be understood to be a conflict transformation intervention.

The research findings suggest that there are several perceived connections between the theoretical underpinnings of conflict transformation approaches and the practice of the insider mediators involved in this study. The discussion of the data suggests that the conceptual perceptions of the insider mediators involved in the study, in their description of elements of mediation practice and the nature of conflict, resonate strongly with the theories associated with conflict transformation thinking.

Several additional theoretical influences appear to have been incorporated into an overall approach to discrete and collaborative mediation efforts that reinforce a strong connection between conflict transformation thinking and the practice of insider mediators. These relational connections between theory and practice focus on the distinction between the dynamic energy of conflict as an inevitable part of society that has transformation potential and violence as a distinct and destructive force that can be prevented, on the interconnected dynamic and systemic nature of conflict and on the multi-layered nature of conflict and responses to conflict.

In the perceptions of the research participants conflict transformation theory appears to influence mediation practice in the way mediation is viewed as part of a long-term process, in the importance placed on connecting levels of mediation interventions and mediative processes and in the understanding of mediation as being driven by the need for rebuilding and restoring relationships.

Violence prevention is also perceived as being connected to the mediation of conflicts and tensions before they escalate and become violent, another element of what is perceived as a conflict transformation approach. Practitioners involved in the study also emphasised the importance of local ownership of mediation processes and the value of networking and finding complementarity and opportunities for collaboration between mediation efforts, and perceived these aspects of practice to be part of efforts to transform conflict.

The presentation of findings also highlights a diverse mix of additional theoretical influences, including conflict sensitive development thinking and the concept of 'Do No Harm', nonviolence and anthroposophy and value based approaches drawn from religious and Gandhian peace backgrounds. Practitioners appear to be mostly influenced by insights and lessons drawn from sharing examples of practice, although many of these insights appear to be themselves derived from theory that has been incorporated and embedded into practices.

Traditional and customary African approaches to mediation and arbitration also appear to have an influence as well as contemporary classical approaches such as 'Getting to Yes' and the notion of building consensus around a win win outcome. The perceptions of the research participants suggest that there is no single theoretical base, but rather an attempt to pull from theory and the sharing of practice any ideas and examples that appear to be helpful in arriving at effective mediation practice.

The perceptions regarding effective mediation practice, that the participating practitioners refer to as an insider mediation approach, appear to be reliant on a trust and confidence building process that uses networks of existing and expanded connections between people to leverage opportunities for mediated dialogue. The insider mediators create spaces in which conflicts can be discussed, analysed and then engaged with collectively. These mediative approaches differ from limited definitions of mediation and speak to a conceptualisation of conflict as a dynamic

system and not an isolated phenomenon, consistent with emerging conflict transformation theory.

In its aim of exploring the relationship between conflict transformation theory and the formation of the AIMP and the intended purpose of deriving insights into the influence of conflict transformation theory on the perceptions of the nature of social conflict and on mediation practice the research process appears to have achieved its objectives. The concluding remarks at the end of this chapter will discuss this in more depth.

5.2 Limitations

As a qualitative study involving a limited and selected sample from within what is already a narrow population, the research findings can in no way be used to suggest that the perceptions that were shared with the researcher are anything more than the perceptions of the research participants directly involved in the study. Nor can it suggest that the insights that form part of the participants' perceptions have been proven to be effective across different contexts or evaluated for their effectiveness in any context. Perceptions regarding theoretical influences are the influences on the participants involved in the study, and are not necessarily the same as the theoretical influences on other practitioners.

The value of the study lies in its presentation of the perceptions of a group of practicing mediators, perceptions informed by a particular context and relevant to that context, and perceptions of how what the mediators are doing is connected to the complex societies and systems that they form part of.

A discussion of these perceptions points to several areas for further research that are beyond the limitations of this study. These would include efforts to contribute to a theory of insider mediation and of conflict transformation that is derived from or more closely aligned to this form of mediation practice.

In the following section a set of recommendations that emerge out of the discussion of the research findings is presented. The recommendations are intended to specifically address some of the shared perceptions of the participants of the gaps in current approaches to mediation. The recommendations seek to add value to the study in that they may be useful in informing the future strategies of the AIMP.

5.3 Recommendations

In an effort to address the perceived gaps in current approaches to mediation the practitioners involved in this study suggest several recommendations that could strengthen existing approaches.

The list of recommendations include the need for the following sets of activities:

- Mentorship programmes, coaching and accompaniment

Mentorship through accompaniment would entail experiential learning activities that pair less experienced mediators with their more experienced colleagues as they engage in mediation processes. Accompaniment will therefore assist in the transfer of learning across generations.

- Training and learning initiatives that tap into experience sharing

This would include establishing regular forums that would use a facilitated process to draw out the lessons from mediation efforts. These forums would also highlight examples of good and poor practice and the unintended consequences of mediation interventions.

- Peer exchange opportunities

Peer exchange across contexts and borders was identified as a key opportunity for extending the existing networks and contacts of insider mediators. Peer exchange also opens up the possibility of more hands-on learning between insider mediators. Such exchange could also be an opportunity for mediators to view the dynamics of a conflict through fresh lenses that could open up new entry points and alternative perspectives that assist in moving a process forward.

- Distilling theory from practice and linking academics, practitioners and policy makers

The lived experience of insider mediators could feed into and inform the development of theory. As mediation theory develops fresh insights could also be applied and tested. Establishing this feedback loop between sectors would be of mutual benefit to practitioners and academics.

- Documenting and disseminating case studies of mediation initiatives

Documenting and disseminating specific examples of mediation practice would extend the learning beyond those insider mediators directly involved in the experience. High quality case studies could also feed into and inform complementary processes aimed at bridging the gaps between mediators at different levels and between scholars, academics, practitioners and policy makers.

- Mapping conflict systems

Insider mediators from adjacent contexts could work together to analyse the interconnections between conflict systems across borders. Teams of mediators with diverse expertise could also work together to develop a systems analysis of complex conflicts involving, for example, economic, social and political aspects.

- Trust and confidence building to augment recognition of insider mediators' contribution

Focused efforts are required to build greater trust and confidence in the contribution of insider mediators from the AUC. Institutions with influence could spearhead this advocacy and work towards the structural inclusion of insiders in official mediation processes and in identifying opportunities for complementarity, synergy and improved coordination.

These recommendations are included as part of the concluding chapter as suggestions that could inform the future strategic direction of the AIMP and other mediation initiatives. In their intention to assist in closing some of the perceived gaps in current approaches that emerged out of the discussion of the research data, they will need to be further discussed and enhanced by the AIMP members and shared with the regional and continental bodies that form part of the APSA.

5.4 Concluding remarks

Through the lenses of perception of the research participants mediation is seen as the long-term accompaniment of change processes and not an isolated time bound or outcome focused event. The role of the insider mediator is perceived to include managing conflict and tensions at multiple levels as well as setting up and

facilitating dialogue processes to analyse, understand and enable transformation processes that are inherently conflictual.

Practitioners that are already part of the context are perceived as mediators of the conflicts that characterise these processes. While this is partly a conflict management role aimed at preventing conflict from escalating and becoming violent it is also perceived to be part of a longer-term mediated process aimed at identifying and transforming the deeper systemic and structural elements of the conflicts in African societies.

These perceptions emerge out of a discussion of the findings generated out of the research process. As such the perceptions suggest that conflict transformation theory is perceived as having some relevance in response to social conflict in Africa and that it influences the practice of the research participants involved in this study. This is a solid contribution towards objectives one and two of the study.

The three objectives of the study were:

Objective One: to explore the relevance of conflict transformation theory to mediation practice in response to social conflict in Africa

Objective Two: to capture the perceptions of practitioners regarding the influence of conflict transformation theory on their mediation practice

Objective Three: to explore the extent to which the establishment of the AIMP can be understood to be a conflict transformation intervention

The horizontal and vertical relationship connections between people that insider mediators rely on appear to be important. Building networks and relationship webs is perceived as an essential part of good practice, consistent with a key element of emerging conflict transformation theories. The AIMP is an initiative that is perceived to contributing in this regard, suggesting that in line with the perceptions of the research participants the AIMP is understood, at least in part, as a conflict transformation initiative. This contributes directly to Objective Three of the study on exploring the extent to which the AIMP could be understood to be a conflict transformation intervention.

Another element of the research also contributes to Objective Three. Perceptions of participants point to the importance of a perspective on conflict mediation that allows for longer-term approaches to mediation. This long-term approach is

consistent with academic theories on conflict transformation. A longer-term perspective appears to enable practitioners to make the connections between short-term mediation efforts and the deeper more far-reaching mediated transformation processes that they form part of. These connections are perceived as useful in harnessing the synergies between mutually reinforcing mediation efforts at multiple levels.

Finally, in as much as some of the findings of the research study are limited in their applicability to mediation practice beyond the participants directly involved in the study, the research study makes a solid contribution towards its aim of exploring the relationship between conflict transformation theory and the establishment of the AIMP and appears to have accomplished what it set out to achieve.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

- What are your views on the nature of social conflict in the context within which you are active as a mediator?
- What is your understanding of conflict transformation as an approach to mediation practice?
- To what extent does this approach inform the techniques and methods of your mediation practice?
- Are there any other theoretical approaches to mediation that inform your practice
- Which theories do you think have the most influence on your approach to mediation practice
- How do you think the AIMP will add value to your interventions?
- What do you think the gaps are in existing approaches to mediation in Africa?

Appendix B: AN EXAMPLE OF THE RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Research Consent Form

In support of participation in the proposed research study as outlined below:

Researchers Details

Richard Smith – Post net Suite # 145, Private Bag X9, Melville, 2109. Tel: +27 11 482 7442

Title of the Research Project

Mediation Practice: Perceptions of Practitioners from the Insider Mediators Platform – Africa

Declaration

Through this declaration I, the undersigned participant, confirm that I have been invited to participate in the above-mentioned research project being undertaken by Richard Smith, an M.Phil Conflict Management and Transformation student in the Faculty of Arts at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

I understand that the researcher is conducting a study into the perceptions of practitioners involved in the field of insider mediation and that I have been invited to voluntarily participate in this study. I further understand that this study is aimed at generating insights and lessons into the impact of conflict transformation theory on mediation practice that will be shared with members of the Insider Mediators Platform in Africa. As a result of my participation in this study I expect the Insider Mediators Platform to benefit from the additional lessons and insights that will be generated and that the outcomes of the study may have benefits for my own mediation practice.

I am confident that my identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications generated as a result of this research. I can confirm that my participation in this study is voluntary and that my decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect my present or future employment. I am further confident that my participation in this research process will in no way affect my involvement in the African Insider Mediators Platform.

This assurance and the outline of the proposed study was explained to me by Richard Smith, the researcher and I fully understand both the explanation given, as well as the content of this signed declaration.

I can confirm that no pressure was exerted on me to consent to participation and I understand that I may withdraw at any stage without penalisation. Finally I am aware that my participation in this study will not result in any additional cost to myself.

I hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above-mentioned project:

Signature of Participant: **Signature of Witness:**

Full name of Participant: **Full name of Witness:**

Participant Contact Details:

Appendix C: DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FROM THE AIMP SECRETARIAT



4 Clamart House, 12 Clamart Road, Richmond, Johannesburg, 2092 011 482 7442 info@asc.org.za

1st September 2011

In support of the proposed research study as outlined below:

Researchers Details

Richard Smith – Post net Suite # 145, Private Bag X9, Melville, 2109. Tel: +27 11 482 7442

Title of the Research Project

Mediation Practice: Perceptions of Practitioners from the African Insider Mediators Platform

Declaration

Through this declaration I, Tiro Dipudi, Operations Manager at the ACTION Support Centre, confirm that I have been approached by Richard Smith, an M.Phil Conflict Management and Transformation student in the Faculty of Arts at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

I understand that the researcher is conducting a study into the perceptions of practitioners involved in the field of insider mediation and that as a supporting organisation for the African Insider Mediators Platform the ACTION Support Centre is being informed of the researchers intentions.

I further understand that this study is aimed at generating insights and lessons into the impact of conflict transformation theory on mediation practice that will be shared with members of the African Insider Mediators Platform. The study has been discussed within the organisation and there is unreserved support for the researcher in his efforts to take this study forward.

Richard Smith, the researcher, explained the outline of the proposed study to me and I fully understand both the explanation given, as well as the content of this signed declaration.

I can confirm that no pressure was exerted on me to support this research study. Finally I am aware that the support of the ACTION Support Centre for this study will not result in any additional cost to the organisation.

I hereby support the involvement of ACTION and the African Insider Mediators Platform in the above-mentioned project:
