

## October–December 2024 Edition

We are pleased to share the latest issue of **IFIT Connection**: the internal newsletter created for the global community of **330+ experts** and advisers belonging to IFIT’s staff, governance bodies, three thematic practice groups, three global initiatives, eleven country brain trusts and one regional programme.

### Institutional updates

IFIT recently received important new grants from Carnegie Corporation of New York, UK FCDO and Humanity United.

Based on organisational efforts to raise funds ahead of schedule, the majority of IFIT’s 2025 budget is now under contract.

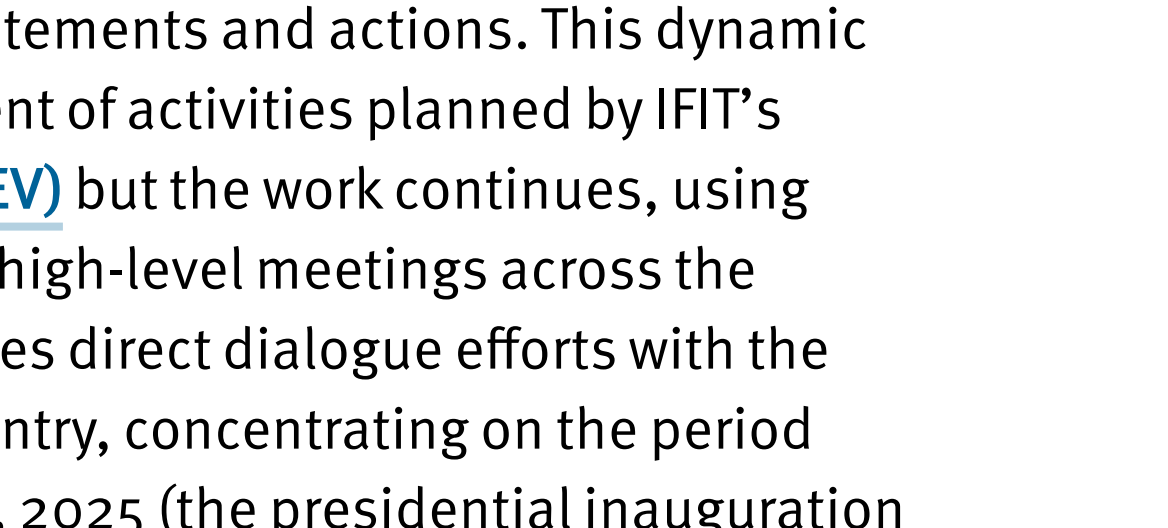
IFIT is honoured to welcome two new members to its International Advisory Council: **Hilary Pennington** (Executive Vice President of the Ford Foundation) and **Samuel Kobia** (Chair of Kenya’s National Cohesion and Integration Commission).

Based on seven years of leadership in the organisation, **Martha Maya** has been promoted to the role of IFIT Global Deputy Director.

As part of IFIT’s decision to move toward greater visibility, there have been posts on a wide range of topics including **transitional justice and violent extremism**; **horizontal inequalities**; our brain trusts in **Colombia** and in **Nigeria’s Middle Belt**; and **negotiating with criminal groups**.

### Country brain trusts

In Colombia, IFIT’s **National Brain Trust (FCH)** held its annual strategic retreat in Cali and developed a 2025 work plan based on scenario planning exercises through the lens of the future 2026 elections. Scores of important meetings also took place in conjunction with IFIT’s Bogotá staff as regards the work of the post-conflict tribunal (JEP), the implementation of key parts of the 2016 peace deal, and legal challenges related to the government’s “total peace” policy. Meanwhile, IFIT’s **Territorial Brain Trust (FTCH)** organised a strategic agenda in Tumaco, near the Ecuadorian border, centred on the region’s economic transformation and the transition away from illicit crops, resulting in key policy recommendations to local actors. Looking ahead, the FTCH will remain focused on new ways of implementing its **horizontal peacebuilding** framework.



Following recent and important group meetings, IFIT’s **Zimbabwe Resource Group (ZRG)** is implementing its activities with a slightly reconfigured membership; an updated vision for its two-track process of national dialogue and political settlement; plans for the establishment of a broad civic platform to orient the dialogue component of its work; and an exploratory strategy of engagement with the country’s divided opposition. In the weeks ahead, the group will also publish its ground-breaking report on the experiences of community-level dialogue in Zimbabwe and their lessons for future national dialogue. Partnerships with local CBOs and CSOs have gained in importance through this work.

Since the July elections in Venezuela and the combined non-publication of the results by the national electoral authority and the evidentially unsupported declaration of a Maduro victory, the country is experiencing a full authoritarian drift. Political parties and the general public have retreated and are acting with great caution in their statements and actions. This dynamic has impacted the development of activities planned by IFIT’s **Venezuelan Expert Group (GEV)** but the work continues, using primarily smaller formats for high-level meetings across the divides. The work also includes direct dialogue efforts with the support of a neutral third country, concentrating on the period between now and January 10, 2025 (the presidential inauguration date).

IFIT’s **Middle Belt Brain Trust (MBBT)** has been especially busy over the last period and has grouped members into task teams to lead on project implementation. It is continuing its facilitation role in resolving the Bassa-Egbura conflict by securing partial agreements as means to resolving the larger conflict. As the group addresses the conflict from multiple dimensions and levels, a diverse set of stakeholders and approaches is being engaged, while keeping an eye on the emerging risks and opportunities. Separately, as one of the outcomes of the group’s outreach trip to meet the Governor of Plateau State, a conflict sensitivity retreat for the Governor’s cabinet is being planned to help them institutionalise new approaches.

The **Mexico Peacebuilding Support Group (GAPMX)** recently conducted a local immersion exercise in the state of Chihuahua, in collaboration with a collective of civil society organisations focused on forced displacement due to the high levels of violence affecting some Indigenous communities in the region. This work will be built upon in the weeks ahead and has been supported by members of the FTCH. In conjunction with a recent visit of IFIT’s executive director to Mexico City, a set of internal and external meetings and **media engagements** took place, including around a set of recommendations that GAPMX is developing for the new Sheinbaum government.

Members of IFIT’s **Support Group for Democratic Transition in Sudan (SGDTS)** recently convened to explore key themes that could contribute to addressing the conflict in Sudan. Polarisation was identified as a central issue exacerbating the current crisis. In response, IFIT and the SGDTS will be conducting an AI-backed survey to gain critical insights into the nature and extent of polarisation in the country. The findings will inform the development of a targeted depolarisation work plan and help identify trends relevant to stakeholders involved in Sudan’s future.

Given the continuous and worrisome politicisation of early recovery assistance in Syria, IFIT’s **Syria Resource Group (SRG)** is stepping up its outreach and engagement efforts with the international donor community. This outreach process will build upon the recommendations and original ideas the group has developed over the years, to ensure principled aid delivery to Syria that empowers Syrians to take ownership of their own local recovery and future. In addition, early planning is underway for the group’s next strategy retreat.

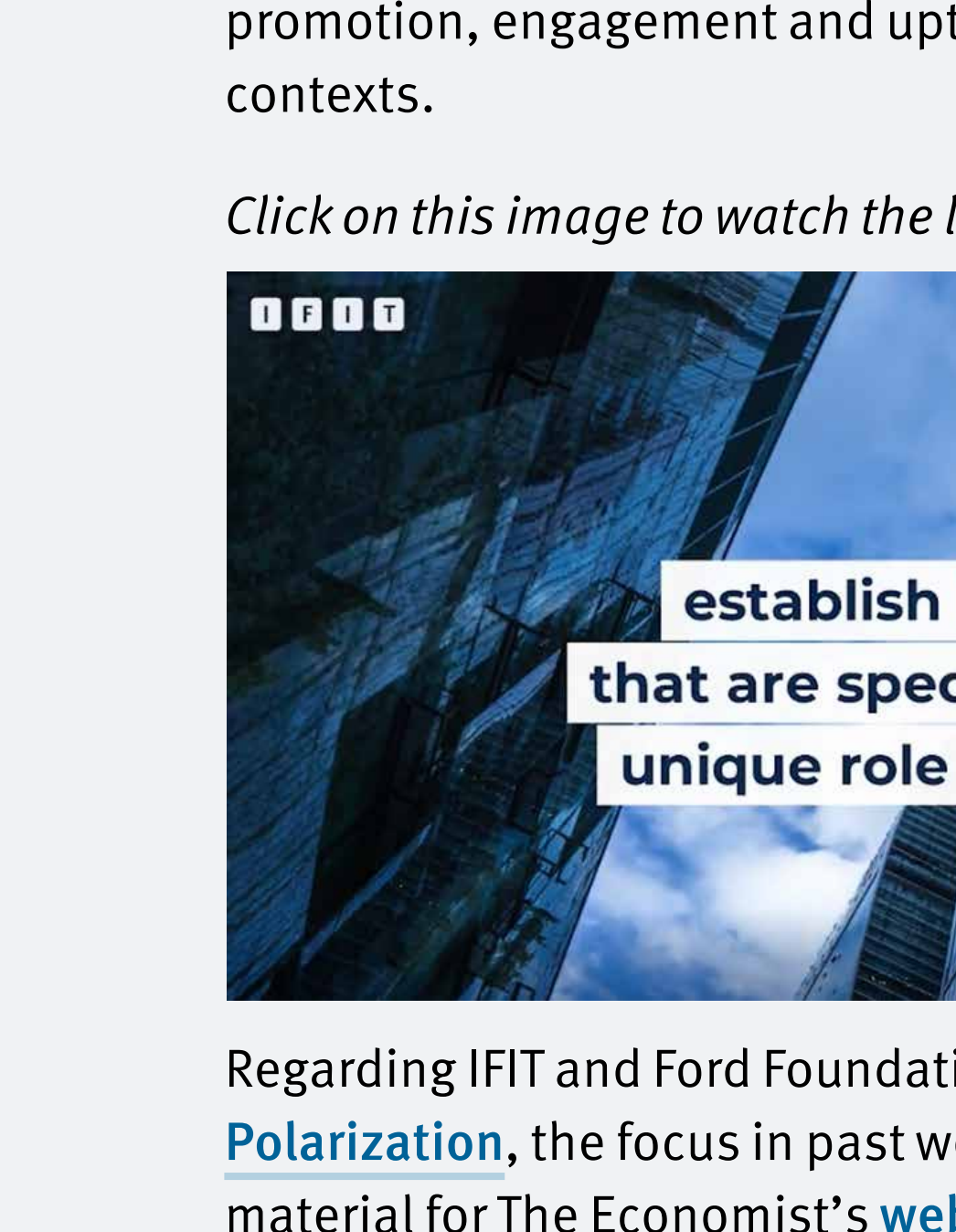
Members of the **Sri Lanka Reforms Brain Trust (SLRBT)** have been engaged in the first phase of a policy coherence mapping exercise, which aims to enhance understanding of the country’s policy landscape and address fragmentation and contradictions. The mapping is designed to assist the reform process by promoting a systems redesign approach, guiding the selection of policy interventions and encouraging convergence between various recommendations. Once Sri Lanka’s parliamentary elections in November have concluded, the group will meet on next steps.

As part of its new line of work to develop a “Green Entrepreneurial Index” (as part of a larger vision of economic transition), IFIT’s **Uzbekistan Expert Group (UZEG)** is developing and testing a pilot version to assess its coherence and feasibility and identify areas of improvement. To this end, it has organised a consultation process with influential stakeholders to inform the preparatory phase. The group will convene in October for an in-person retreat in Tashkent to discuss the findings of the consultation process and agree on next steps.

IFIT’s **Libyan Expertise Forum for Peace and Development (LEFPD)** is deepening its collaboration with local and international stakeholders, advancing efforts to promote peace and stability in Libya. The group’s vision involves creating a series of agreements, starting with a Local Governance Charter, aimed at building trust and fostering cooperation among key actors. The LEFPD has also completed a non-paper on *Decentralisation as a Tool for Conflict Reduction in Libya*, which has been circulated to key stakeholders.

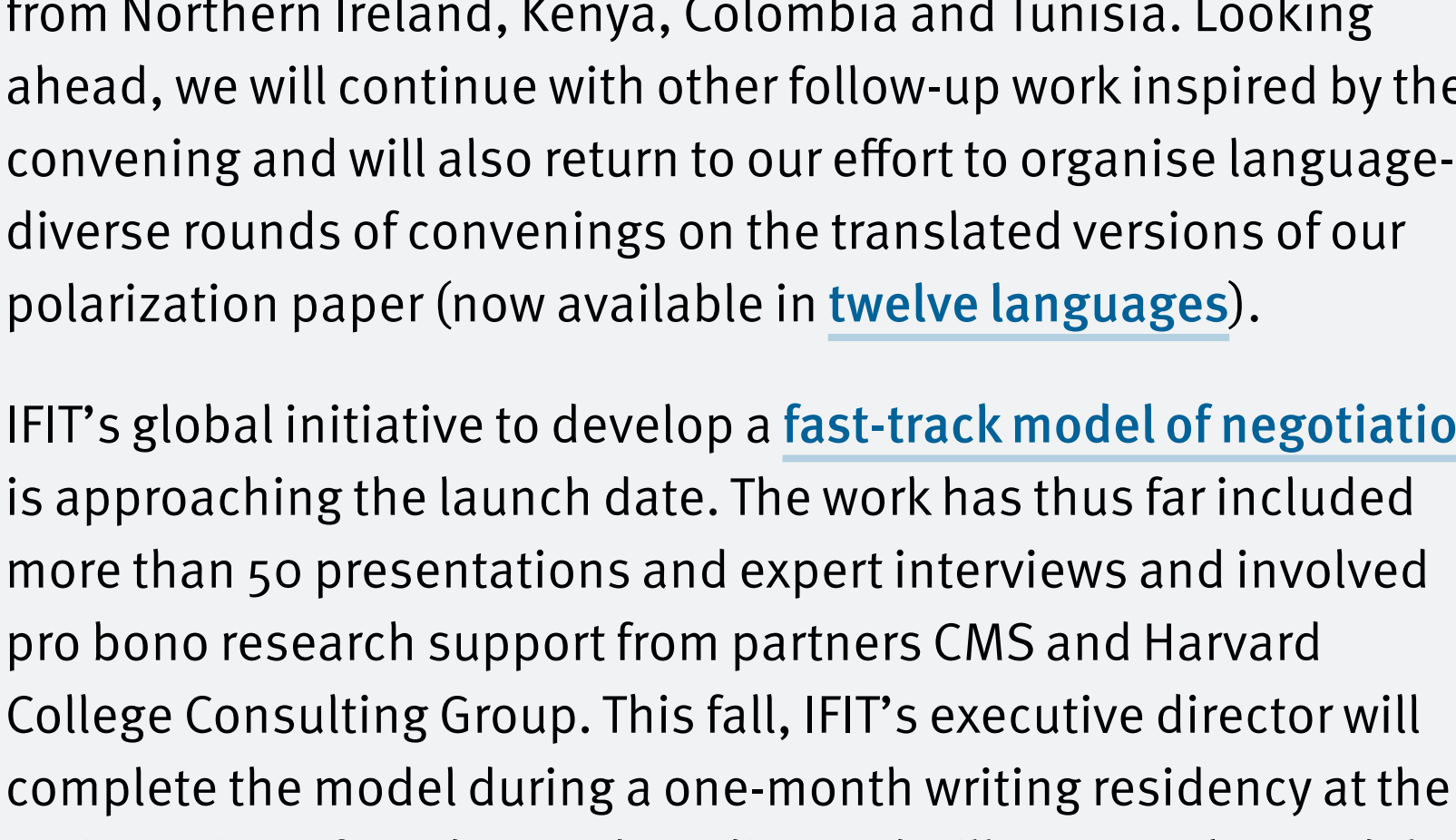
### Global initiatives

Earlier this summer, IFIT’s **Peace Treaty Initiative** concluded its three-year global consultation process: a huge undertaking involving UN member states; multilateral organisations; negotiators, mediators and ex-combatants; and leading universities, law firms, think tanks and NGOs from around the world. With the final Draft Articles of the proposed *Convention for the Support, Acceleration and Protection of Conflict Prevention and Resolution* now in hand, the initiative has entered a new phase focused exclusively on diplomatic engagement. There are already several states in a friendly competition to serve as the permanent ‘home’ of the treaty and the lead country for the uptake process to come.



Following three years of comprehensive research and worldwide consultations carried out against a backdrop of judicial capture and polarisation in many countries, IFIT’s **Initiative on Apex Court Appointments** reached a significant milestone. On September 16, IFIT launched the **Constitution Hill Global Guidelines on Apex Court Appointments** in English, Arabic, French, Spanish and Portuguese. As part of the launch phase, IFIT is presenting the Guidelines in multiple judicial and legal forums, both virtually and in person, as part of a new chapter of work focused on long-term promotion, engagement and uptake both globally and in specific contexts.

Click on this image to watch the launch video:



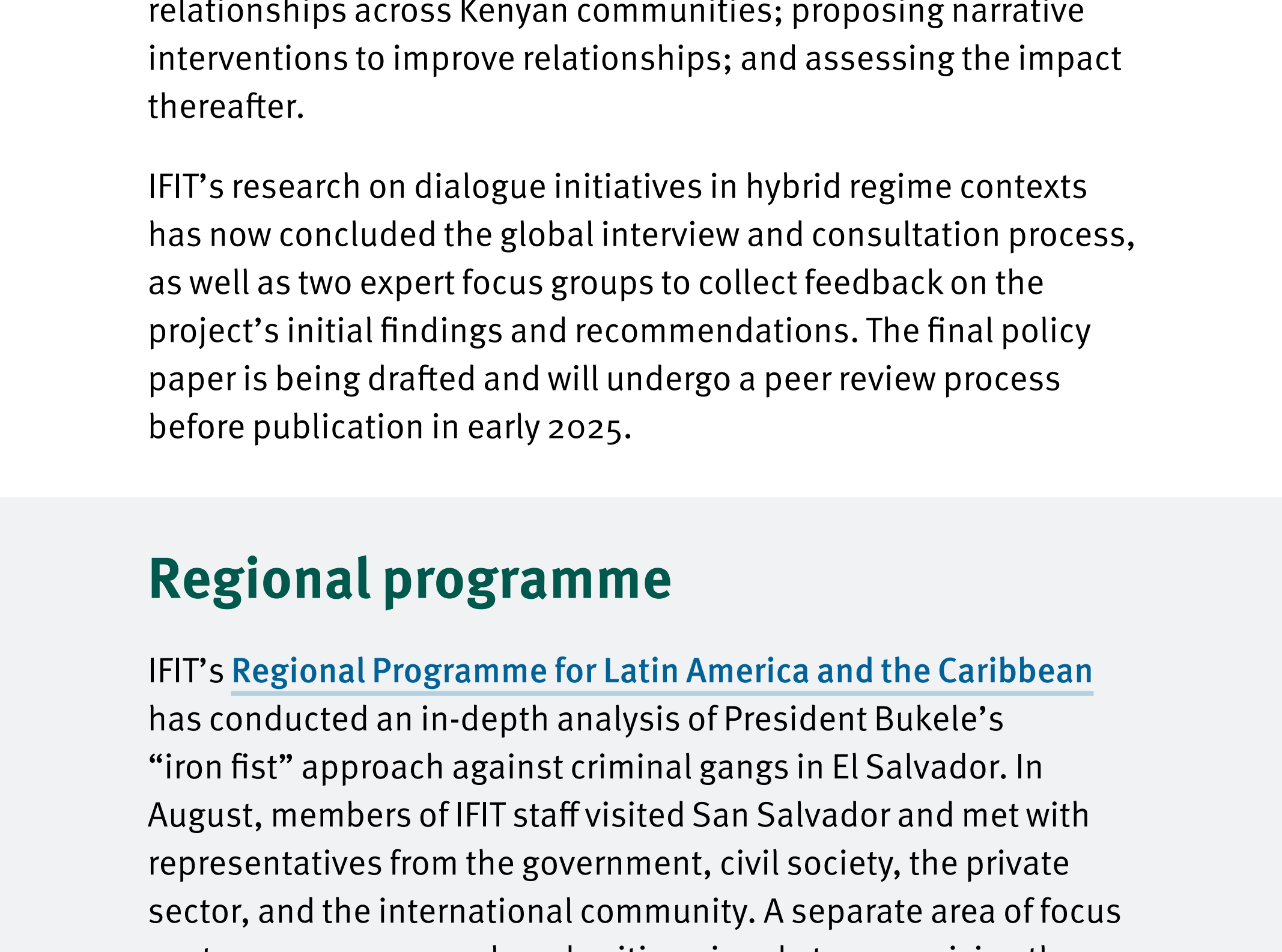
Regarding IFIT and Ford Foundation’s **Global Initiative on Polarization**, the focus in past weeks was on completing the material for The Economist’s **webpage** from our high-level two-day convening in New York City titled “Worlds Apart: Lessons on Polarization from Global Leaders”. The convening gathered 250+ US social, political, media and business leaders and four global peacemakers from IFIT’s network who shared critical lessons from Northern Ireland, Kenya, Colombia and Tunisia. Looking ahead, we will continue with other follow-up work inspired by the convening and will also return to our effort to organise language-diverse rounds of convening on the translated versions of our polarization paper (now available in **twelve languages**).

IFIT’s global initiative to develop a **fast-track model of negotiation** is approaching the launch date. The work has thus far involved more than 50 presentations and expert interviews and included pro bono research support from partners CMS and Harvard College Consulting Group. This fall, IFIT’s executive director will complete the model during a one-month writing residency at the Paris Institute for Advanced Studies and will present the model as this year’s invited Harvard Program on Negotiation Roger Fisher Speaker.

### Thematic work

IFIT’s **Transition Assistance Practice Group (TAPG)** is currently planning on the rolling release of a series of short papers and publications on key themes of its work: leveraging diaspora resources, mobilising private sector investment, and navigating aid delivery in sanctioned and authoritarian environments. The latter is exploring the use of frozen assets as an alternative source of international assistance. Seth Kaplan is taking up the role of TAPG project leader.

IFIT’s **Law and Peace Practice Group (LPPG)** recently convened to begin reflecting on new “peace vs. justice” realities and challenges as part of the early planning process for an in-depth in-person strategy retreat in the first half of 2025, which will mark the group’s 10th anniversary. In the meantime, members of the group have continued to assist the Peace Treaty Initiative through various diplomatic engagements, as well as supporting several IFIT country brain trusts, including at a high-level conference in Bogotá on Colombia’s transitional justice challenges.



Following a group consultation process, IFIT’s **Inclusive Narratives Practice Group (INPG)** has launched three member-led seed projects: one on capturing lessons from IFIT narrative change work in Latin America; one on narrative strategies for conflict-related trauma; and one on narrative factors influencing ethnic relationships and national unity in Kenya. The latter will be carried out with the country’s Directorate of National Cohesion and Values and include mapping of the diverse narratives shaping ethnic relationships across Kenyan communities; proposing narrative interventions to improve relationships; and assessing the impact thereafter.

IFIT’s research on dialogue initiatives in hybrid regime contexts has now concluded the global interview and consultation process, as well as two expert focus groups to collect feedback on the project’s initial findings and recommendations. The final policy paper is being drafted and will undergo a peer review process before publication in early 2025.

### Regional programme

IFIT’s **Regional Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean** has conducted an in-depth analysis of President Bukele’s “iron fist” approach against criminal gangs in El Salvador. In August, members of IFIT staff visited San Salvador and met with representatives from the government, civil society, the private sector, and the international community. A separate area of focus centres on new research and writing aimed at reconceiving the “transitions” paradigm in the region. In the coming weeks, the focus will shift to the Regional Advisory Council’s annual strategy meeting, which will take place in Mexico this year and which follows a very successful independent evaluation of the regional programme as a whole.

For more detailed information please contact **Olivia Helvadjian**.