

KENYA

# MID TERM REVIEW

## Executive Summary



# Introduction

JISRA (Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action) is an international interfaith consortium consisting of Mensen met een Missie, Faith to Action Network, Tearfund (UK and Netherlands) and Search For Common Ground. The Arabic word “jisar” means bridge, symbolising what JISRA aims to do: build bridges between divided communities. The JISRA programme (2021 – 2025) is being implemented in seven countries: Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda. JISRA started as part of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' political agenda to strengthen civil society under the Power of Voices policy framework. The program aims to promote peaceful and just societies where all people can enjoy Freedom of Religion and Belief.

In Kenya, JISRA has seven partners working in diverse contexts of religious initiatives: Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC), Chemichemi ya Ukweli (CYU), Interreligious Council of Kenya (IRCK), Kenya Community Support Centre (KECOSCE), Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance (KMYA), Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI), and Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), who are supported by Mensen met een Missie, Search for Common Ground, and Faith to Action Network. Together these partners address discrimination and extremism in religious communities, strengthen the bridge between religious communities, and engage international, national and local authorities on issues of freedom of religion and belief (FoRB).

Mid-way through the programme, Vashi Impact Group conducted a mid-term review of the programme to study the effectiveness, coherence, and relevance of JISRA to the advancement of FoRB, and generate learnings and recommendations to improve the programme. VIG utilised a mixed-methods evaluation approach using primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative methods, including focus group discussions, key informant interviews, programmatic document reviews, and surveys.



# Key Findings

The JISRA program emerged as a transformative force in conflict-affected counties of Kenya, effectively alleviating religious and political tensions and fostering tolerance and cooperation. Narratives from individuals highlight notable shifts in perspectives, attributing newfound acceptance and understanding to the program's initiatives. Operating in Kenya's intricate social and political landscape, JISRA navigates challenges posed by religious and political challenges, contributing to transformative changes in societal attitudes and fostering inclusivity.

The governance structure, despite facing operational challenges, demonstrates commendable strengths, ensuring active stakeholder engagement and adaptability. The introduction of the Participatory Grant-Making (PGM) initiative marks a significant stride towards localisation empowerment, addressing interfaith challenges and catalysing transformative shifts. International advocacy efforts position JISRA as a key player in advancing religious freedom globally. The program's multifaceted approach to lobbying and advocacy, both nationally and sub-nationally, underscores its commitment to inclusivity and the elevation of local perspectives. Overall, the JISRA program stands as a catalyst for positive change, contributing significantly to the reduction of conflicts, emergence of a harmonious society, and fostering inclusivity and tolerance in Kenya's diverse landscape.

The JISRA program adopts a comprehensive strategy to advance FoRB. Through strategic engagement with diverse civil society organisations (CSOs), government ministries and independent federal institutions, Dutch Embassy and religious actors, the program fosters interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Noteworthy achievements include the transformation of mistrust and lack of social cohesion through civil discourse, emphasising JISRA's dedication to unity, understanding, and the promotion of trust and collaborations across religious and ethnic backgrounds.

# Key Findings

The program thus demonstrates the effectiveness of its collaborative efforts with government stakeholders at both national and local levels, aligning its mission with broader national priorities. Alignment with the Dutch Embassy's Multi-Annual Country Strategy and proactive engagement with civil society organisations and religious actors underscore JISRA's well-informed approach to societal challenges. Despite facing challenges in communication and budget-related concerns within the Consortium, the program's governance structure exhibits resilience and adaptability, promoting effective coordination among consortium members

## Peaceful and just societies where all enjoy Freedom of Religion and Belief

### **Intra-Religious Pathway**

(within religious communities)

More open and tolerant religious norms and practices within communities.  
Extremist tendencies diminished

### **Inter-Religious Pathway**

(between religious communities)

Religious actors work together across religious divides  
Religious communities jointly address common and mutual grievances

### **Extra-Religious Pathway**

(Policy Influencing)

(Inter)National FoRB policies are increasingly religion- and context-sensitive  
Rigorous security practices reduced

### **Cross-Cutting Pathway**

(Women & Youth)

Increased representation of women and youth in decision-making  
Increased capacity of CSOs



# Intra-Religious Pathway

The Midterm Review explored the extent of the transformative journey taken in fostering inclusive and tolerant attitudes towards certain marginalised groups- mainly youth, women, and atheists. When it comes to positive attitudes and behaviour towards women, there has been a positive quantitative increase from baseline (69.7%) to MTR (76.1%). Although the changes are encouraging, qualitative data show that women are often perceived as inferior, with restrictions on their involvement in decision-making and religious leadership roles. This is largely due to entrenched gender norms that are held by the communities.

Regarding youth, overall community members generally hold more positive attitudes towards the youth than they exhibit in their behaviours. These results also suggest that there is room for improvement in building positive attitudes towards the youth and equally translating them into concrete actions that support the well-being of young people. The findings also indicate that religious leaders were addressing harmful practices such as gender-based violence (GBV) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).



***“Yes. Some Religious leaders are currently in the frontline on fight against FGM, they are involved in counter SGBV campaigns and are members of the court users committee. They are members of County Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism” FGD, Muslim female youth, Garissa***



Primary data shows that the program has been instrumental in advocating for reforms in policies by encouraging dialogues with communities instead of violence. Initially, police-community relationships were poor. Due to the significant contribution of the program, community members are even volunteering information on radicalisation or any other pertinent information to them.

JISRA's active engagement with religious leaders has fostered dialogue and mutual understanding, contributing to the resolution of conflicts. The collaborative efforts between religious leaders and organisations like the Coast Interfaith Council for Clerics (CICC) illustrate the influence of JISRA in creating spaces for joint initiatives that promote cohesion and address issues that cause societal tension and conflict.

Religious leaders possess unique influence in resolving deeply ingrained societal issues such as early marriages, wife inheritance, and violent extremism. The program recognizes that these issues are often tied to community norms and practices, necessitating an approach that empowers local leaders.

Secondary data shows that divergent doctrines within faiths and different ways of interpreting religious texts have often caused tensions, hostilities, and threats of clashes between mainstream Christian denominations and the minority denominations. According to both primary and secondary data, the program has contributed by promoting dialogue to end the hostilities.

There has been a significant decrease in the percentage of community members who believed that using violence to defend religious beliefs is acceptable. This percentage dropped from 23.5% at baseline to 13.9% at MTR.





# Inter-Religious Pathway

The focus of this pathway is on the peaceful co-existence of different faith groups and collaborations between these different religious groups. Findings show that community members' positive attitudes towards different religious denominations and religions increased significantly from 81.8% and 79.3% at baseline to 90.7% and 92.8% at MTR respectively. Results suggest that there is an increase in awareness, understanding and tolerance of different religions. When it comes to conflicts, JISRA has made some significant strides in trying to reduce conflict occurrence among different religions and denominations.

*“Tension has greatly reduced through networking between law enforcement offices, county government and community through consultative meetings supported by JISRA (youth from Tiwi had clashes with ones from Ukunda such that they could not visit each other’s area, but this was solved through combined efforts of local leaders, women trained by JISRA and other partners there is peace and harmony now” FGD, women, Kwale*





# Extra-Religious Pathway

The main thrust of this pathway is to influence national and state laws, policies and security practices that are harmful for minorities. The MTR notes that efforts conducted under the program has influenced the adoption of policies e.g., an ACT of Parliament was adopted to provide for the recognition, protection and safeguarding of intersex persons' human rights in Kenya. The MTR assessed whether community members had been invited by CSOs and religious actors to express their needs and concerns. Findings show that community members have been engaged by both CSOs and religious actors.

Furthermore, inquiries about the community members perceived perception on representations in religious communities (reflecting accountability of CSOs and religious actors), revealed a substantial decrease for both groups.

Internationally, the program fosters engagement with policymakers at the EU and UN, advocating for freedom of religion and belief in the participating countries including Kenya. Significantly, the program takes an active role in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, actively contributing to the development of shadow reports and collaborating with governments to advance recommendations pertaining to freedom of religion and belief within the contexts of these countries.





# Extra-Religious Pathway

JISRA's support for community-led initiatives against GBV, early marriage, and FGM harmonizes with the work of the Gender Violence Recovery Centre (GVRC). The GVRC directly aids GBV survivors and champions women's rights, contributing significantly to the fight against these harmful practices in Kenya.

In Kenya, religious leaders are fervently advocating for women's inclusion in traditional council meetings, resulting in the establishment of leadership structures for women and their active participation in campaigns against harmful traditional practices.

In terms of the implementation of laws and policies, Kenya has demonstrated its commitment to fostering peace, security, and human rights. The enactment and implementation of laws such as The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, The Children Act, 2022, and the National Action Plan on Countering Violent Extremism underscore the nation's dedication to addressing gender-based violence, child protection, and violent extremism. The adoption and improvement of laws and policies highlight Kenya's adaptability and proactive stance in addressing critical issues. The Kwale County Gender and Sexual Violence Prevention Act and the strengthening of ideological pillars in County Action Plans on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism signify local efforts in combating gender-based violence and security challenges.





# Cross-Cutting Pathway

The cross-cutting pathway is in recognition of the importance of women and youth in promoting FoRB and the capacity building efforts of CSOs to effectively deliver on the other three pathways. A significant proportion of women (78.4%) indicated that they had been included in decision making processes.

However, qualitative findings highlight complex dynamics regarding women's involvement in decision-making processes. Sometimes women are not heard in decision-making processes which suggests a potential gender bias which is rooted in cultural or religious beliefs that are patriarchal in nature.

On the other hand, findings revealed a high level of youth consultations, with 78.9% of respondents indicating their inclusion in decision making process. This consultation was more prevalent among young men (82.4%) compared to young women (75%). Qualitative findings suggest that there are opportunities to further enhance their participation and representation.

*(PGM) “Partners have interventions that seek to increase women and youth participation in religious, local and national spaces. These include activities such as empowerment programmes to women and the youth, awareness raising on the importance of women and youth inclusion in peace making processes and inclusion of women in religious spaces. The participatory grant-making process also ensured this is entrenched at local spaces. Youth and Women inclusion/empowerment activities have also been very effective including the participatory grant making.”*

*KII Kenya, Country Coordinator*



# Cross-Cutting Pathway

MTR findings show that despite the high levels of positive attitudes towards women, the inclusion of women as religious leaders is still being resisted by some religious actors. The findings echo what was established at baseline that “women cannot be religious leaders” especially in Muslim religion. These sentiments are still held back by traditional and religious beliefs. Some religious leaders use their interpretation of religious texts to justify patriarchy and limiting women to domestic roles.

In Kenya, a strong movement is emerging as women join forces to tackle common challenges, vehemently opposing gender-based violence (GBV), early marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM). These collective efforts exemplify the resilience and determination of Kenyan women.

Results also suggest that there is room for improvement in building positive attitudes towards the youth and equally translating them into concrete actions that support the well-being and development of young people. Community members mentioned that young people play a crucial role as key decision-makers in the community due to their energy and education. Community leaders leverage their dynamism and knowledge to educate community members about issues affecting the community. In general, the active participation of young people in community decision-making is a positive and forward-thinking approach.





# Recommendations

## **Deliberate inclusion of non-mainstream religions:**

The MTR noted that efforts have been made to bring in the non-mainstream religions e.g., ATR. However, there is still room to improve collaboration with such groups as they also have a role to play in promoting FoRB.

## **Strengthening collaboration with Dutch grantees of the Power of Voices:**

The Dutch Embassy in Kenya acknowledged the effectiveness of interfaith collaboration facilitated by organisations like JISRA. It is imperative for the program to identify and take advantage of areas of collaboration that exist within the Embassy's country strategy and the Power of Voices intervention.

## **Address administrative issues within the consortium:**

The LPs raised some concerns relating to communication and collaboration within the Consortium. Discussions to clarify communication channels and modalities should be held. Similar discussions should be held to discuss coordination challenges and come up with solutions.

## **Cross generational dialogue:**

Interventions should facilitate dialogue between different age groups disaggregated by gender to understand the factors influencing positive attitudes and behaviours towards women. Within these dialogues there is need to encourage mutual understanding and collaboration to bridge any gaps between generations.

## **Enhance capacity building for religious actors:**

JISRA has demonstrated its strength in building capacity and raising awareness among religious actors especially the religious leaders. Considering the volatile context that still exists in some counties, it is imperative to continue enhancing the capacity of religious actors and enable them to become champions on FoRB in their communities.

## **Enhance lobby and advocacy efforts at all levels:**

JISRA's lobby, advocacy, and interventions have demonstrated their effectiveness in championing the needs of community members at the local level. It is recommended that a renewed focus be placed on advocacy and lobbying efforts in the second half of the program.

## **Conducting of the endline:**

The MTR has noted the importance of minimising variances between externally conducted studies (baseline, midline and endline) to facilitate comparisons. The MTR recommends that, as much as possible, the endline be conducted in the same locations as the midline.

## **Evaluate and communicate impact of PGM initiative:**

As the PGM is pivotal component of the program, a comprehensive evaluation is necessary at endline. The results should be communicated with stakeholders, fostering transparency, and demonstrating the program's effectiveness.