

UGANDA

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 Uganda, JISRA has six partners working in diverse contexts of religious initiatives: CoU TEDDO, UJCC, MCJL, TERELEPAR, ARLPI, and WUFBON, who are supported by Mensen met een Missie 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

Historically, religion has had an influence on different aspects of life including on social norms and practices, culture, and politics, resulting in mistrust, stigmatisation and enmity among the various religious groups and denominations in Uganda. The program's awareness campaigns, and conflict resolution efforts have significantly raised awareness about social issues and facilitated reconciliation between different religious communities.

The MTR explored the complementarity, harmonisation, and coordination of JISRA with similar interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of social exclusion, religious intolerance, conflict, and radicalisation. JISRA Uganda exhibits a robust framework of collaboration and coordination among JISRA partners, local government entities, security agencies, and religious leaders, as evidenced by the establishment of MOUs with local governments, continuous communication with the Community Development Office and security arms.

Furthermore, JISRA has actively engaged with the Dutch Embassy and this collaborative involvement is expected to make substantial contributions to the pillars of peace, security, stability, migration, international legal order, human rights, and host country policy as identified by the Embassy.



Key Findings

The Participatory Grant-Making (PGM) initiative was also found to be relevant in that it promotes stakeholder involvement, especially women and youth, in decision making processes.

Additionally, JISRA has also engaged in national, regional, and international lobby and advocacy initiatives that have shown promising results in improving implementation and adoption of laws and policies around FoRB.

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

JISRA aims to achieve positive transformation within religious communities; religious actors and communities introspect on their beliefs, interpretations of religious texts, and daily norms and practices. This introspection includes the integration of religious, cultural, and social traditions, with local interpretations.

The extent of the transformation towards inclusive and tolerant attitudes and behaviour towards marginalised groups (women, youth, and atheist) was explored. When it comes to positive attitudes towards women, results depicted a positive shift of +11.9 percentage points from baseline to the MTR. However, there was a discrepancy between attitudes and behaviour which suggests a potential lag in translating attitudes into concrete actions.

Despite the high levels of positive attitudes towards women, inclusion of women as religious leaders is still being resisted by some religious actors. Similarly, findings suggest growing positive attitudes towards the youth within the communities to the extent of having some appointed as religious leaders.



“Before JISRA, it was difficult to find SALAF and SHIA Muslims seated together at one table but since JISRA, Muslims have come together with non- Muslims too to talk about the ideas of development in health, education, and cultural beliefs. People are aware.” Religious Leader, KII, Male, Bugiri City, Uganda

The level of social acceptance of atheists in different communities was assessed and findings indicate a positive shift of +17.3 percentage points from baseline to MTR. JISRA Uganda is committed to overcoming the divisive concept of "othering" and has made significant progress in fostering unity and understanding among diverse communities.

ISRA works with religious leaders to mediate conflicts within families and communities, emphasising gender equality and equity through community sensitization. JISRA facilitated a platform for religious leaders and community members to engage in open dialogue, identifying and discussing harmful practices prevalent in their communities.



Inter-Religious Pathway

JISRA focuses on peaceful coexistence and collaboration between faith groups. Religious actors are encouraged to support interfaith action within and beyond their communities, working together to promote faith-based diversity. JISRA has been working to reduce violence in the community by encouraging people to associate with different religions rather than resorting to violence. For instance, TERELEPAR has been visiting families from different religions and preaching about unity. The MTR found that there was a substantial increase in collaboration by community members across religious divide. Religious leaders have played a crucial role in resolving conflicts which political leaders were unable to resolve.

Additionally, community members' positive attitudes towards different religious denominations and religions increased significantly between baseline and MTR; there is an increase in awareness and understanding of different religions as more people are becoming aware of different religions and their beliefs. JISRA has fostered a more inclusive approach to social events such as burial ceremonies where religious actors from different denominations are allowed to participate. This shift reflects a growing recognition of the value of interfaith cooperation and respect for different religions.

“Inter-religious council, Muslim religious council, Acholi religious council. JISRA also requires permission from the councils to conduct their work and JISRA has ensured to work with all these groups and interconnect them. JISRA involved a lot of religious and cultural leaders to resolve issues in Kasese. People had been disoriented and lost hope following the killings. JISRA played an important role there.” Religious Leader, KII, Female, Kampala, Uganda

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. Under the improvements and implementation of laws and policies, the intention was to facilitate a change in policies, regulations, standards, and procedures to influence the approach utilised by security actors, and the associated responses by the security actors to those changes. For example, MCJL collaborated with other CSOs to steer the advocacy for the Muslim personal law bill or the Qadhi courts bill. This bill seeks to address the administration of Muslim marriage, divorce, inheritance and guardianship issues specially to address women's property rights.

Community members were asked if they had ever been invited by religious actors or CSOs to express their needs and concerns. Invitations from religious actors were found to be more frequent than invitations from CSOs. Despite the shrinking civic space and government suppression of civil society groups, NGOs, and CSOs continue to utilise various media platforms, including print, electronic, and social media, to advocate for civic participation in governance and the promotion of human rights.



Cross-Cutting Pathway

JISRA seeks to increase representation of women and youth in decision-making spaces and strengthen capacities of CSOs in lobby and advocacy, along with FoRB. The MTR showed that women face various challenges to take up leadership positions, but some women are taking the first step. Young people are actively engaged in driving positive change, by participating in religious, socio-political and economic activities; however their inclusion in decision-making processes in religious setting is still limited.

JISRA's participatory grant-making initiative aims to support women and youth to take up more inter-religious initiatives. Five youth groups comprising Christians and Muslims selected from BUgiri receive grants for community dialogues and awareness-raising on FoRB.

“One of the female religious leaders got inspired because of the JISRA work and later she became a catechist in the Catholic church, later after her, on record now we have I think four to five other women who have been encouraged and they have also become catechists in the Catholic Church. So, that is how this work is also promoting women in terms of leadership in their different churches and mosques”
Internal Stakeholder, Group KII, Male, Kampala, Uganda



Recommendations

Comprehensive Community Engagement Strategies:

JISRA should adopt comprehensive community engagement strategies to initiate attitudinal and behavioural shifts. The program should further enhance the capacity of religious leaders to address the barriers cultural norms and practices.

Targeting cultural leaders:

JISRA has demonstrated its strength in building capacity and raising awareness among religious leaders. However, to further promote FoRB initiatives, there is need to expand engagement to identify and include cultural leaders in its initiatives to promote FoRB.

Enhance lobby and advocacy efforts at all levels:

As the program moves into the next phase of implementation, it is crucial to emphasise the significance of this aspect. Therefore, a renewed focus should be placed on advocacy and lobbying efforts.

Review of the JISRA governance structure:

Challenges persist, notably concerning the commitment of certain members and the need for more equitable representation of local partners in these governance structures. To address these issues and further enhance the program's effectiveness, we recommend a thorough review of the current governance structures.

Improve communication within the consortium:

Although coordination within the consortium was found to be strong, communication needs to be improved. The MTR recommends the strengthening of the capacity of all organisations so that they can effectively utilise online communication platforms. JISRA Uganda is also urged to have physical meetings for in-country partners.

Evaluation of the PGM initiative:

Due to the limited time under which the programme has been implemented, the impact of the initiative is yet to be concretely determined. It is therefore essential to pay particular attention to the evaluation of this aspect during the endline evaluation of the program.

