

NIGERIA

# 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 Nigeria, JISRA collaborates with national partners including Development Initiative for West Africa (DIWA), Dialogue, Reconciliation and Peace (DREP), Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Justice Peace and Reconciliation Movement (JPRM), RURCON, Scripture Union of West Africa (SUWA), Women Interfaith Council (WIC), and Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), and are supported by Mensen met een Missie, Search for Common Ground, and Tearfund. 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

In Nigeria, JISRA's relevance is marked by its success in fostering interfaith collaboration, enhancing religious tolerance, and promoting unity. Despite challenges in regions with heightened insecurity, the program's adaptability and strategic refinement are crucial. The governance structure, though facing representation concerns, demonstrates commendable strengths and willingness of partners to engage.

The Participatory Grant-Making initiative, introduced in 2022, shows potential in empowering local communities, particularly youth and women-led groups. JISRA's active engagement in international advocacy and the Universal Periodic Review process reflects a growing recognition of its contributions to advancing freedom of religion and belief. Nationally, lobby and advocacy efforts have yielded tangible outcomes, enhanced interfaith collaboration, and deepened the influence of CSOs and religious actors in promoting social cohesion and reconciliation.

## Peaceful and just societies where all enjoy FoRB

### **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

# Key Findings

In Nigeria, JISRA's collaboration with government entities, including the Kaduna Peacebuilding Commission and National Human Rights Commission, reflects alignment with national policies. The transformative partnership with the Dutch Embassy shapes program design, echoing the Dutch Multi-Annual Country Strategy. The consortium's governance structure fosters transparency and effective communication, facilitating successful collaborations despite challenges. Learning initiatives, including webinars and research partnerships, demonstrate JISRA's commitment to enriching knowledge.

Overall, the program's coherence in internal collaborations, government and embassy partnerships, consortium governance, and continuous learning positions it as a significant contributor to peace and fundamental rights in Nigeria and beyond. Looking forward, addressing operational challenges, refining coordination, and adapting to dynamic contexts will be critical for sustaining JISRA's impact and relevance in promoting peace and fundamental rights in Nigeria.





# Intra-Religious Pathway

The intra-religious pathway within the JISRA intervention aims to foster positive attitudes and behaviours within religious communities, promoting gender equality, inclusivity, and challenging harmful norms. The findings revealed positive changes, with a notable increase in positive attitudes towards women and reduced acceptance of violence. However, challenges persist, particularly regarding women's leadership roles, influenced by traditional and religious beliefs. Positive changes were observed in the inclusion of youth and acceptance of atheists, indicating progress in addressing harmful norms. Religious actors played a crucial role in promoting tolerance, and community actions against harmful practices, including GBV, demonstrated the intervention's impact. The study emphasises the need for comprehensive efforts, including gender transformative approaches, to address persistent negative attitudes and promote more inclusive religious communities.

Religious actors, as part of the JISRA program, actively address harmful practices by incorporating lessons on countering harmful norms, religious intolerance, gender equity, and inclusivity. The training provided by JISRA acts as an eye-opener for communities, leading to increased awareness and proactive measures to stop harmful practices, such as genital mutilation and early marriages.



*“The diversity of religious in our community communicates through dialogues, respecting one another and learning how to stay with people. The people of our community now communicate peace above and unity, given example with Prophet Muhammed who stay with the pagans and the Jews without any problem, they are non-Muslim but related well with them, our will is no to be different”. Religious Leader, Kaduna, Male, 59 years*

One notable positive finding is the significant decrease in the acceptance of violence to defend religious beliefs, from 14% to 6.4%. This attitudinal shift suggests a changing perspective towards violence, indicating a move towards a more peaceful and tolerant society. Traditional leaders echo the sentiment that no religion promotes violence, emphasizing the importance of respecting diverse religious beliefs and resolving conflicts through non-violent means.





# Inter-Religious Pathway

The inter-religious pathway within the JISRA intervention in Nigeria has demonstrated significant successes in promoting peaceful coexistence and collaboration among different faith groups. Collaboration by community members across religious divides saw a substantial increase from 58.4% at baseline to 80.7% at MTR, indicating a marked improvement in inter-religious cooperation.

JISRA's efforts have effectively reduced tensions and conflicts between Christians and Muslims, fostering understanding and mutual respect through interfaith dialogues, workshops, and training programs. Positive attitudes towards different religious denominations and religions increased significantly from 73.6% to 97%, reflecting a growing awareness and understanding of diverse faiths. While there was a minor decline in community members actively involved in addressing grievances across religious divides, qualitative evidence suggests that JISRA interventions have resolved conflicts beyond religion-based issues, such as farmer-herder conflicts.

Despite gender and age gaps in involvement, the overall positive impact of JISRA in fostering meaningful engagement and tolerance among religious leaders and community members is evident. Key potential for further scope lies in addressing the slight decline in community engagement, particularly among women, and exploring strategies to sustain and deepen the positive changes achieved thus far. Continued efforts in promoting interfaith collaboration, fostering understanding, and addressing grievances can contribute to building a more harmonious and inclusive society in Nigeria.

# Inter-Religious Pathway

The JISRA program plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges stemming from the country's diverse religious landscape, primarily dominated by Christianity and Islam. The nation grapples with persistent security challenges, social divisions, and heightened hostilities, often influenced by religious factors.

The JISRA program in Nigeria stands as a powerful force for promoting interfaith collaboration and unity. Collaborative efforts have tangible impacts, such as community sanitation projects involving individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. These initiatives not only foster unity but also contribute to addressing issues like reduced crime rates and violence, showcasing the program's relevance in a context where intercommunity tensions often have religious roots.

The program's impact is further evident in the promotion of harmony and peaceful living within heterogeneous communities. Traditional leaders emphasize how JISRA initiatives bring together diverse faiths, deepening the understanding and knowledge of intra and inter-religious tolerance. The program equips communities to resolve conflicts peacefully, aligning with its focus on empowering religious leaders and community members for promoting tolerance, conflict resolution, and peace.





# Extra-Religious Pathway

The extra-religious pathway of the JISRA intervention in Nigeria focuses on influencing national and state laws, policies, and security practices that may adversely affect minorities, particularly in the context of the lack of separation between religion and state. The pathway emphasises representation and participation of religious actors and CSOs in policy-making processes, accountability mechanisms, and the development of context-sensitive FoRB policies.

Key findings reveal positive shifts, including an increase in community members being invited by both religious actors and CSOs to express their needs, reflecting improved community consultation. However, there's a significant decrease in the perceived representation of religious actors in voicing community needs, underscoring a potential area for attention. The Lobby and Advocacy efforts showcase impactful engagements with policymakers, religious leaders, and community stakeholders, influencing district-level policies on FoRB. Notably, advocacy initiatives have led to positive outcomes, such as increased women's inclusion in traditional council meetings. While the data related to the accountability of CSOs and religious actors presents a nuanced picture, the overall findings suggest a need for continued efforts in strengthening community engagement, representation, and advocacy to drive meaningful policy changes and ensure FoRB for all.





# Extra-Religious Pathway

At national and sub-national levels, lobby and advocacy efforts, spearheaded by the Nigeria JISRA Consortium, focus on engaging policymakers, reviewing laws, producing policy briefs, and media engagements. JISRA actively collaborates with government stakeholders, including the Kaduna Peacebuilding Commission and Plateau state National Human Rights Commission, emphasizing joint efforts in peacebuilding and freedom of religion and belief (FoRB). Future plans, especially concerning the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in Abuja, highlight the enduring nature of these partnerships. Collaborative efforts include strategic visits to government bodies, Peacebuilding Commission, and joint advocacy training. Webinars cover various topics, including interfaith approaches to countering extremism, FoRB, and the intersection of FoRB and women's rights.

Examples of lobby and advocacy efforts in communities include engaging with Miyetti Allah to advocate against night grazing and forceful/underaged marriage, resulting in proposed project expansion. Advocacy groups address issues like child education, farmer-herder conflicts, indecent dressing, and women abuse, demonstrating JISRA's commitment to addressing social issues and promoting positive change. Collaboration with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) showcases profound and lasting positive impacts on the communities served. The program engages government officials from diverse departments and ministries, providing training sessions to experts through a Training of Trainers (TOTs) approach. These experts, in turn, disseminate knowledge within their communities, creating a sustainable impact.



# Cross-Cutting Pathway

The cross-cutting pathway in the JISRA program for Nigeria underscores the significance of women, youth, and CSOs in advancing FoRB. With a focus on enhancing representation and empowering these groups, the pathway addresses issues of gender-sensitive project management, advocacy skills, and inclusivity. Key successes within the cross-cutting pathway include notable strides in female and youth representation in decision-making structures, showcasing a positive trend towards inclusivity. The implementation of Participatory Grant Making (PGM) holds promise for empowering communities, especially women and youth, through resource allocation control. Additionally, the integration of gender equality and women's rights in conflict resolution processes is evident, fostering a more equitable environment.

*“I think there is a higher number of women and youths in the JISRA governance structures, and even more women are employed by various organisations because gender mainstreaming has been a major criterion in all activities and decision-making structures. Gender equity and inclusion trainings were conducted which was backed up with scriptural texts and boosted leadership structures because as result there is more women participation in decision making structures for instance in Kajuru LGA, an individual who is not from the Adara tribe was never given any leadership position regardless of qualification and expertise but now there are positions occupied by non- indigenes.” KII, Staff, Nigeria*

In the governance structures, JISRA actively promotes the inclusion of women, constituting 58% of the Community Steering Committee (CSC). Although youth representation is not currently integrated, the program acknowledges opportunities for seeking their input when needed to avoid an unwieldy decision-making process. Positive changes observed among women reflect increased confidence and an ability to challenge social and religious norms, indicating a transformation in self-attitudes and empowerment.



# Cross-Cutting Pathway

Beyond individual empowerment, there is evidence of collective initiatives by women, fostering socialization, financial empowerment, and collaborative efforts in income-generating activities. Despite the high prevalence of positive attitudes towards women, resistance to their inclusion as religious leaders persists in certain religious structures, rooted in traditional and religious beliefs. The persistence of negative attitudes towards women, as reported by women themselves, raises important questions about internalized societal and religious norms that perpetuate traditional gender hierarchies.

*“Young people both male and female participate actively in community activities, and this have brought so many positive changes and impact.” Traditional Leader, Gindin Akwati, Plateau, Male, 52*

Young people under 35 showed a high level of consultation in decision-making processes, with 78.9% indicating their inclusion. Young men (82.4%) were more frequently consulted than young women (75%).

The JISRA programme launched its Participatory Grant-Making (PGM) initiative in 2022, with actual implementation beginning this year, as highlighted in both primary data and the latest annual report. The initiative integrates women and youth into economic activities and decision-making processes, bringing about significant effects in advocacy actions, representation, and targeted planning of activities. The initiative underscores a dedicated commitment to local empowerment, focusing specifically on youth and women-led groups within communities. These groups actively identify and address inter-religious challenges, providing participants with a newfound sense of empowerment, influence, and the ability to nurture interfaith relationships. Despite modest financial allocations, the initiative significantly empowers youth and women-led groups, catalyzing a shift from violence to constructive solutions, fostering interfaith relationships, and instilling participants with influence and community-driven change.



# Recommendations

## **Address Operational Challenges within the Consortium:**

It is essential to actively address challenges related to inflation and internal conflicts within the consortium. The MTR recommends that JISRA has to develop adaptive strategies to ensure the smooth execution of activities, promoting transparency and alignment among consortium members.

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

JISRA has demonstrated its strength in building capacity and raising awareness among religious actors especially the religious leaders through dialogues, enabling them to champion inter-faith collaborations and relationships. This impact is evident across all LGAs, manifesting in improved behaviours towards others and a more open and tolerant coexistence.

## **Promote Role Models:**

It is recommended to highlight and celebrate successful examples of both women and young individuals who have played significant roles in resolving conflicts. This can serve as inspiration and encouragement for others to actively participate in similar endeavours.

## **Invest in Research and Learning:**

Continue investing in research and learning initiatives, building on successful partnerships with academic institutions, to enrich the program's knowledge base and inform targeted interventions.

## **Review of the JISRA governance structure:**

The governance structures of JISRA have played a pivotal role in fostering improved partner engagement, decision-making, and collaboration, which have been integral to the program's success. Currently, youth are not included in the governance structures but are consulted to obtain their input. Whereas the reasons given for their exclusion seem plausible, there are instances where consultations might not be feasible especially when decisions must be made promptly. Intensifying efforts to ensure youth representation within governance structures is vital for a comprehensive decision-making process. Including diverse perspectives, especially from the youth, enhances the program's relevance and resonance with the broader community. Therefore, strategies to navigate the selection process of youth representatives have to be crafted and implemented.

### **Enhance Gender-Inclusivity and Youth Engagement within Programs:**

There is a need to develop and implement initiatives and interventions that actively encourage and facilitate the active participation of women and youth in addressing grievances or conflicts. This could include targeted initiatives, workshops, or awareness campaigns to empower women and increase their involvement in conflict resolution processes. Whilst this may be considered for all geographical areas, strong emphasis should be in Barkin ladil, Kaduna and Jemma.

**Evaluate and Scale PGM Initiative:** The Participatory Grant-Making (PGM) initiative holds promise in empowering local communities, especially women and youth-led groups. A comprehensive evaluation of its impact and lessons learned should inform potential scaling and refinement to maximise its effectiveness in addressing inter-religious challenges.

### **Continuous Advocacy and Collaboration:**

JISRA's active engagement in international advocacy has proven effective. The program should continue leveraging global platforms to influence policies that advance freedom of religion and belief. Strengthening collaborations with UN agencies and other international organisations will amplify the impact of these advocacy efforts.

**Enhance Adaptability:** Given the dynamic nature of socio-political and religious landscapes in Nigeria, JISRA should continuously assess and adapt its strategies to effectively address emerging challenges to freedom of religion and belief. Regular reviews and updates to program initiatives will ensure relevance and responsiveness to evolving contexts.

**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. Nevertheless, as the program moves into the next phase of implementation, it is crucial to emphasise the significance of this aspect, which has not been as active. It is recommended that a renewed focus be placed on advocacy and lobbying efforts.

### **Address Gender and Age Disparities:**

Recognise and address gender and age gaps in collaborative efforts across religious divides. While overall collaboration increased, there are disparities, with men and adults showing higher rates of collaboration. Tailor interventions to bridge these gaps and ensure inclusivity.



**Empower Religious Leaders as Change Agents:** Strengthen initiatives to equip local religious leaders as change agents capable of addressing radicalization tendencies and collaborating across different religious communities. Prioritise training for religious actors, particularly women and youth, to ensure a positive impact on freedom of religion and belief (FoRB).

**Enhance Collaboration Across Religious Divides:** Strengthen efforts to foster collaboration among religious actors within their communities and beyond. Focus on initiatives that promote unity and teamwork among community members of diverse religious backgrounds, as demonstrated by the significant increase in collaboration from baseline to the midterm review.

**Promote Inclusive Security Responses:** Address the lack of clear findings related to security actors' responses. Enhance research and engagement to understand and influence security actors in adopting inclusive, people-centred, and prevention-oriented approaches to counter religious extremism and profiling.

**Enhance Accountability Mechanisms:** Focus on strengthening the accountability role of religious actors and civil society organisations (CSOs). Advocate for evidence-based advocacy that compels duty-bearers to prioritise FoRB, promoting a human security approach. Develop mechanisms to assess the impact of CSOs in creating spaces for dialogue and influencing decision-making processes.

