

Empowerment Through Cohesion

JISRA - May 2022



Search held a 5-day training for conflict transformation for JISRA consortium members, as a continuation of the Common Ground Approach. The event was held to introduce the project implementers in Iraq to the resources, skills, and knowledge needed to apply conflict transformation within the scope of the JISRA project. It was led by the trainer Emma Fong, who has years of experience in the field of conflict resolution in Africa and has even helped with the development of some of the Search's materials and resources. The workshop involved JISRA consortium members from different backgrounds, adding a diverse frame to the project, where the participants can experience the materials firsthand and receive feedback. With the utilization of Search's expertise literature, and the trainer's experience and input, the workshop was designed to be inclusive and considerate of the area's sensitivity. The opportunity proved to be valuable as the participants were able to directly engage with a professional trainer in the field of conflict and to have a prominent participant was Khaleda, a 22-year-old female Yazidi from Sinjar; she is an aspiring student in her final year of nursing college. Her community, like many of the religious minority communities, lives in a closed environment, as she states,

"We were living in a closed community with little access with outside people"

This isolation is generated as a result of the differences between the different religious inhabitants in that area, which makes them less tolerant of each other and eventually leads to violent conflicts. The most recent notable conflict was the exodus caused by the ISIS occupation of Sinjar. Many of the Yazidis were forced to flee, and of those who could not, the men faced death while the women were enslaved. ISIS took advantage of the existing conflicts and tensions between the different religious groups in Iraq and Syria, exploiting them as a reason to commit horrific crimes, especially against the

Having been through these events, Khaleda realizes the importance of implementing conflict transformation to achieve peace through cohesion as

"I feel like it (JISRA) will bring social cohesion among the religions and start a dialogue of reconciliation"

Workshops and training such as conflict transformation are key to enabling durable social cohesion and creating a space for different religions to gather together and freely express themselves.

In addition, Search is determined to include youth and women in the process as well, making it one of its main objectives to mainstream gender and women's rights values as an integral part of the overall progress for a long-lasting resolution in the area. JISRA activities are designed to ensure that women and youth are heard and given a platform to engage in decision-making. This comes as gender plays a huge

"Freedom of religion and self-expression is not easy to discuss within our society, since in most religions, it is prohibited to convert to another religion and it is even more complex and dangerous for women; honor also

Iraq is a challenging environment when it comes to women's rights; discrimination against women remains, and their freedom is restricted by the religious and cultural norms around them. Despite the difficulties as stated by Khaleda, "The challenge, in my opinion, is when we speak about women's rights directly; they ridicule it and compare it to men and act as if there are no issues". Accordingly, this is a long-term aim of the project, namely, to include all the stakeholders and address the needs of the

JISRA's Consortium members in Iraq are effortlessly in pursuit of designing and adapting project implementations to secure inclusivity at all the levels of the projects, which results in a long-lasting peace and cohesion within the targeted areas, and to extend beyond that. Khaleda is a wonderful example of the potential lying within these communities, and how willing people become when they are given opportunities and empowerment. This is a driving factor for the project to be more persistent to achieve