

THE ISJA TOOL

AN INTERSECTIONALIZED ACTION FOCUSED INTERACTIVE STUDY FOR PERSONAL & COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

The Intersectional See Judge Act (ISJA) is a religious Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) issues analysis tool¹. The tool will facilitate Makeway SRHR advocates to use religious texts to initiate a community centred analysis of SRHR issues, their impact, and actions that need to be taken to address any barriers identified, so that no one is left behind in accessing their SRHR

The Makeway program emphasizes creating a safe and inclusive environment, a principle reflected in the ISJA tool. It is crucial to administer the tool in a physical space that ensures participants' safety, neutrality, and cultural appropriateness, preferably in their natural environment. Facilitators must cater to participants with special needs, ensuring accessibility for those using walking aids or wheelchairs, and providing translators for the deaf and aids for the visually impaired.

Furthermore, inclusivity is intentionally prioritized, ensuring diverse representation in terms of gender, age, religion, and ethnic or cultural background. Facilitators should use language that is appropriate and familiar to the group. Participants are encouraged to collectively set ground rules at the start of the activity to foster ownership of the process. Creating an environment that acknowledges past experiences and devises strategies for moving forward is essential. Additionally, ample time should be allocated for dialogue to allow thorough discussion and analysis. This framework ensures a comprehensive and respectful approach to the ISJA activities, adaptable to various contexts and plans.

¹ The ISJA tool is founded on the Christian tradition, with example texts derived from the Bible. The approach of the tool may however be adopted in other religious traditions for use in SRHR advocacy. In such instances, during the community study, a religious text may be selected from the sacred book or texts of that particular religion. A comparative study, in which religious texts from different traditions are read simultaneously, may also be done. The guiding principle is to allow facilitators and participants to contribute to the community study from their religious knowledge, convictions, and experiences.

Using a religious text and a chosen SRHR topic as starting points, an ISJA Community Study is designed. The ISJA Community Study comprises of structured questions which facilitate identification and naming of issues (*See*), analysis of their impact from the perspective of those affected (*Judge*) and planning of actions for intervention led by those affected (*Act*) in order to realize the intended change.

This tool is adapted from the Contextual Bible Study² (CBS) model by the Ujamaa Centre at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal in South Africa. In the Make Way (MW) programme, the ISJA tool is being used to facilitate identification and analysis of traditional and emerging SRHR issues from a religious perspective with the aim of breaking religious, and cultural barriers at personal, social, and systemic levels so that no one is left behind in accessing their SRHR.

All people are welcome to be participants in an ISJA community study. That way, space is created for those affected to speak for themselves and lead the process of identifying and planning suitable intervention actions towards facilitating their access to SRHR. The recognition that all people in their diversity have the right to embrace, express, and celebrate their dignity, including sexual well-being, guides the ISJA Community Study.

Directed by the principles of the African Women's Hermeneutical Framework (AWHF), and enablers of intersectionality, the community study questions are designed to make visible multiple factors and experiences which overlap and combine to shape an individual's identity. Ways that these identities and experiences determine privilege and/or discrimination at different times are analysed as applicable. The community reads and analyses the selected religious text to interpret and explain the issues that were identified. Attention is particularly given to religious and cultural barriers that may impede access to SRHR for all people. The study is concluded by the formulation of an action plan to bring to the attention of duty bearers the different intervention actions that need to be taken to address the religious, cultural (and any other barriers) identified so that no one is left behind in accessing their SRHR.

² Contextual Bible Study (CBS) is the process of reading the Bible in and with the community towards action for personal and social transformation.

ISJA Steps

The study follows 6 Cs (Community, Context, Criticality, Conscientization, Change, Celebration) which are guided by a See-Judge-Act (SJA) framework. The SJA framework intertwines the entire process in a non-linear manner. At various times, there may be new issues to ‘see’, new ways to ‘judge’ the issues that have been seen and analysed, and new ways to ‘act’ by exploring needed actions for intervention. It is a cycle.

See	<p>Social analysis of the participants’ context to identify SRHR issues.</p> <p>This process entails a social analysis of the community’s context which aims to ‘see’ the SRHR issues of concern in the community. One SRHR topic is the picked for consideration at a time.</p> <p>A religious text that correlates with the chosen SRHR topic is then identified. The selected religious text ought to co-relate with the chosen SRHR topic to facilitate analysis of the topic from a religious perspective. The analysis particularly aims to identify religious and cultural barriers that impede access to SRHR for all.BN BBV</p> <p>In the first instance, the facilitator may identify the topic. Later, when the participants are involved, and community conversations are ongoing, new topics may be selected by participants for analysis in a different ISJA Community Study.</p>
Judge	<p>Analysis of the impact of the identified SRHR issue.</p> <p>This is a careful process of ‘judging’ by thinking through the identified SRHR issue and how individuals and the community are affected. The community (participants) lead this process by pointing out how they are impacted. Parallels are then drawn from the religious text that was chosen. Attention is particularly given to the ways religion and culture intersect and form barriers to accessing SRHR at personal, community, and systemic levels, and the impact this has.</p>
Act	<p>Now what? Action Planning.</p> <p>This is an intentional process of ‘acting’ by outlining actions that need to be taken so that the identified religious, cultural, (and other) barriers can be addressed at personal, community, and systemic levels so that the aim of facilitating access to SRHR for all can be achieved.</p>

The ISJA framework overarches 6 Cs which are commitments to the approach. These 6 Cs are:

i. Community

The religious text is read in and with community and not individually. Unlike traditional approaches which predominantly rely on an ‘expert’ to give interpretation, the religious text is read with ordinary readers who are not necessarily trained in using critical tools for interpreting religious texts. Community is equally key because the study aims to create transformed communities that extend love, compassion, and affirmation to all people without reservations.

ii. Context

The realities of the context of the people in the community are raised and analysed in communal conversations. This could be done in various ways. For instance, a contemporary story depicting the topic could be read (so that it is juxtaposed alongside the story in the religious text of focus in a particular study); participants could listen to a song, watch a video, or engage with any other resources that will get them to start unpacking the topic as depicted in their contexts (communities). The overall aim is to get started with the community’s social concerns clearly stipulated.

Focus is then shifted on the religious text. The context of the religious text is analysed and subtle issues that could be similar or dissimilar to what is in the contemporary context are raised. This phase provides for a dialogue between the SRHR concerns in the contemporary context and the context of the religious text.

iii. Criticality

In this step, the focus is on *asking critical questions*. Questions raised here are intended to interrogate the religious text, the self, and the community. The ways in which the religious text is read, interpreted, and applied is thus cross-examined. It is common for religious communities to approach religious sources of knowledge with trust (hermeneutics of trust). But this step allows for questioning religious sources of knowledge (hermeneutics of

suspicion). This is the possibility to explore how religious sources of knowledge can be used to foster oppression and injustices. Once this is done, focus is directed on exploring the liberation potential of the religious text, through the dual reading of the chosen contextual topic and religious text.

iv. Conscientization

This step focuses on *raising awareness*. The tendency of using religious texts (and other religious sources of knowledge) to normalize oppression and injustices is exposed. Awareness is further raised on the possibility of focusing on and implementing liberative aspects of the religious text. The focus thus is on *transforming* how we read the religious text, being conscious about the message(s) in the religious text, and how we respond to these.

v. Change

In this step, focus is on *developing an action plan* that will lead to change. An exploration is done on what needs to be done differently, and on the resources (capacities) available in the community to facilitate the desired change.

vi. Celebrate

This step entails celebrating the community for naming what is ailing them by pointing out challenges that impede access to SRHR from a religious angle. The community's commitment to explore strategies to address these challenges so that all people in their diversity can access their SRHR, is equally celebrated.

How to Apply the ISJA Tool

This tool may be used by anyone who wants to utilize religious texts as a resource for community dialogue and advocacy on intersectional SRHR.

- ♦ It is a community study in which everyone is welcome to participate in the analysis of a chosen SRHR topic with the aim of identifying religious and cultural barriers to accessing SRHR; and subsequently developing an action plan that will facilitate all people in their diversity to access their SRHR.
- ♦ In the community study, all voices are listened to, valued, and considered towards developing an action plan that will address the issues raised.

- ♦ The diversity of participants provides space for varying and diverse SRHR needs and concerns to be voiced so that the action plan leaves no one behind.
- ♦ The ISJA tool is versatile and flexible. It can be designed diversely according to a SRHR topic of interest and the religious text chosen for the community study. Since religious texts emanate from contexts which were characterised by realities that are similar to those in the contemporary context either directly or indirectly, the context of the text informs the choice. It can therefore facilitate action-oriented discussions on numerous SRHR topics through dialogue between the context of the religious text and the context of the community.
- ♦ This tool allows for the possibility of action-oriented community studies to be done over two or more sittings depending on contextual circumstances. An ISJA Community Study therefore need not be completed in one sitting. Typically, a complete ISJA community study takes six hours, but the length of time taken may be more depending on actual circumstances.
- ♦ This tool invites people to a time of celebration as progress is made towards realising the desired change – that all people in their diversity can access their SRHR.

Creating and Conducting an ISJA Community Study

The steps of creating and conducting an ISJA community study delineated ought to be directed by the enablers of intersectionality as outlined in the [*Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit*](#) of the UN-Women and the UN Partnership on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNPRPD). [*Principles of the African Women's Hermeneutical Framework*](#) (AWHF) which promote the realisation of intersectionality also inform the process of ISJA community studies.

An ISJA community study is designed with a set of structured questions that guide the discussions. At the start, a facilitator selects the topic of the community study, and a corresponding religious text. The facilitator then outlines the objective of the study. After that, the facilitator formulates questions to guide the ISJA Community Study. The facilitator regularly and consistently consults and applies the principles of the AWHF and the enablers of intersectionality to promote the realisation of intersectionality.

The questions are formulated in a manner that facilitates a progression of analysis *behind the text* (the context of the religious text), *within the text* (the sacred text as it is written), and *in*

front of the text (dialogue with the contemporary context). This progression may be linear or overlap depending on the objective(s) of the ISJA community study. The progression may include the following:

- ✓ Who are the characters in the narrative from the religious text and what do we know about them?
- ✓ Who has power and how do they use it? What other power dynamics are portrayed in the narrative and what impact do they have?
- ✓ What are the identities of the different characters in the narrative and in what ways do their identities determine their positions of privilege/power or vulnerability/powerlessness?
- ✓ What are the SRHR issues in the religious text?
- ✓ What are the descriptions of the social, religious, historical, political, and/or cultural context of the religious text?
- ✓ While taking into consideration the descriptions of the context of the religious text, how are the different characters impacted with regard to accessing the SRHR?
- ✓ How do different aspects of the description of the religious context of the text impact the chosen SRHR topic?
- ✓ What intervention actions need to be taken to address the SRHR issues identified?
- ✓ Who will be responsible in ensuring the actions suggested are implemented to the latter?
- ✓ Whose support will be needed?
- ✓ Within what timelines will the actions be implemented and how shall we know that implementation is successful?

It is important to note that ISJA Community Study questions may be structured variously as follows:

- ♦ An ISJA Community Study that focuses on analysing a religious text only.
- ♦ An ISJA Community Study that focuses on analysing a religious text and a contemporary story simultaneously.
- ♦ An ISJA Community Study that focuses on analysing religious texts from different religious traditions. In this instance, the facilitator must enlist co-facilitators from the

different religious traditions whose texts will be analysed. Similarly, participants must be drawn from the different religious traditions whose texts will be analysed so that space is created for everyone to speak from their own religious conviction, knowledge, and experience.

- ♦ An ISJA Community study that focuses on religious texts from different religious traditions and a contemporary story.

Facilitation of the study

A facilitator introduces the ISJA community study to the participants and emphasizes that the ISJA model is an interactive process of sharing knowledge in which everyone is welcome to contribute. This introduction delineates the essentials of the study and its layout. Particular attention is given to the principles of the AWHF and the enablers of intersectionality to promote realisation of an intersectional intervention.

The Role of a Facilitator

- Dividing the participants in groups in a creative way. The study objective can influence the formation of the groups if necessary. But often participants are randomly assigned to groups.
- Enabling participation of all since everyone's voice (contribution to the conversation) is valid and valuable. The facilitator is one of the voices and not the most important voice.
- Enabling sharing of roles by participants at the small group level; these include a team leader, a note taker, timekeeper, reporter, etc.
- Managing conflict in case it arises.
- Providing information to participants when requested. The information should however be conveyed in a manner that taps into the participants' capacities as much as possible. In case a facilitator needs take some time before responding, they can ask for some time to research and consult (as necessary) then report back to the participants.
- Being sensitive to the diverse levels of literacy and capacities so that they enable explanation and repetition whenever necessary.
- Being sensitive to the needs of participants and being ready to respond to any needs. Topics that are discussed in the study could be painful and difficult, thus evoking emotions. Breaks may be used to debrief participants.

- Invest in preparation before the study.
 - ✓ Read through the entire study.
 - Read through the entire religious text.
 - Read through all the questions.
 - ✓ Carry out the necessary research. Firstly, on the religious text to be familiar with the socio-historical, cultural, and religious dimensions of the context of the religious text.
 - ✓ Carry out research on the SRHR topic of choice and prepare a factsheet.
 - ✓ Plan on how to present the study questions, for instance by printing them out, on flip charts, on PowerPoint, etc.
 - ✓ Gather all the materials that will be needed for the study. For instance, foolscap paper, pens, marker pens, cello tape, notecards, etc.

Selection of Participants

All people are welcome to participate in an ISJA communal study. Whenever necessary, certain intentional controls may be used to guide the process of selecting participants. For instance, if a conversation and action-planning between religious leaders and adolescents is intended, the small groups are created in a way that includes representation from the two groups (adolescents and religious leaders). If an intergenerational conversation and action-planning is intended, participants of varying age ranges are considered for inclusion in each of the small groups. Participants may also be grouped according to gender (with utmost sensitivity to gender diversity), among other similar possibilities. Representatives from the health sector, government, education sector, etc; may also be included in the study. The key guiding factor in this selection is the objective (or objectives) of the community study.

The community study may also be done in phases with different participants each time in the initial phase, then the participants may be merged and re-grouped in subsequent phases. Such a strategy may enhance dialogue and holistic participation at different levels, in the search for appropriate action to address issues raised.

The Role of Participants

This action-oriented community and action planning study is the participants' study. It is thus participatory, and each participant gets to share their knowledge and ideas. Participants are 'ordinary readers' who do not necessarily have training in academic tools used in

interpretation of religious texts, but they enrich the process by sharing insights to help unpack and address the SRHR topic that has been chosen and to reflect on how they are impacted individually and as a community. Participants further enrich the contextual lens of analysis by sharing from their own experiences in and with the community. Participants point out resources, take up actions, and lobby for support towards the desired changes.

Practical Guidelines for Implementing an ISJA Community Study

A facilitator guides and supports the process of the community study. Some guidelines that a facilitator may use include the following:

- ♦ ***Act of Worship***

The session may be started by an act of worship – (silence, prayer, or another act of worship as preferred by participants).

- ♦ ***Introduction***

Allow the participants to introduce themselves in a way they are most comfortable with. The facilitator also introduces themselves.

Give an overview of the ISJA approach and its steps.

Introduce the study of the day and outline its objective(s)

- The chosen SRHR topic.
- The chosen religious text. The text may be read with the participants for an initial familiarization. After reading, give a brief introduction of socio-historical, cultural, and religious dynamics of the context of the religious text, as necessary. These details will offer guidance to participants while they do the community study in small groups.

- ♦ ***Issues Analysis (Community Study Section I)***

Assign participants to groups to discuss the first set of questions which focus on analysis of the topic and related issues.

- ♦ ***Presentations of Analysis***

After completing the first study section, participants gather and present their discussions. Time is allowed for reactions and comments from all participants.

Each group may pin their flip charts on a board and voice them aloud so that all people can know what issues have been raised. Once the presentations are over, the facilitator may recap the main issues raised. The facilitator also offers further support by sharing information on the factsheet prepared before the study, if necessary.

Once this is done, the next study section (action planning) is introduced. Participants are once again asked to go back into the small groups for the action planning section.

- ♦ ***Action Planning (Community Study Section II)***

Participants take time to develop an action plan. They identify the change they want to see, the actions needed to achieve the change (individual, communal, systemic), and the timelines within which the actions are to be done. They further identify people/partners whose actions will support achievement of the desired change. These could be actors in religious institutions, health sector, education institutions, government, etc.

- ♦ ***Presentation of Action Plan***

The action plans are presented. The action plans may be harmonised in areas that they are similar; with proposals of each group being included.

- ♦ ***Set Dates for Follow Up***

Participants agree on dates to meet for follow-up. The follow up meetings to track progress could be in-person or virtual.

- ♦ ***Act of Worship***

The community study session may be concluded again by an act of worship.

Let's Celebrate

The ISJA tool enables advocacy through a community-centric approach. This is because the community study exposes layers of oppression which are barriers to accessing all-rounded sexual wellness. Once an action plan is developed and implemented, it is time for *celebration* and *evaluation*.

Towards the end of the process, we celebrate:

- the participation of the community, since influence and partnerships that are built in the process are manifested at different levels and in varied ways.
- the courage to name what is ailing a community by impeding access to SRHR, particularly for minoritized youth
- our commitment to explore strategies to address these challenges ailing the community so that all people in their diversity can access their SRHR.

Constant evaluation is done throughout the implementation of this tool, as the ISJA approach is not a linear process. There are recurrent moments of ‘seeing’, ‘judging’, and/or ‘acting’ and so evaluation is a critical aspect of measuring results. Evaluating also brings to fore any gaps that need to be addressed, as well as offering insights on best practices in interventions.

The ISJA tool is a useful resource in lobby and advocacy from a religious perspective. Whereas focus is often given on individual change in religious circles, this tool facilitates focus beyond the individual. The community is considered as well as oppressive systems and structures which ought to be changed. Focus on an individual, the community, and systems, is its distinctive strength. The tool can therefore be used to influence desired change in a variety of contexts, while considering different SRHR topics.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Example of an ISJA Community Study

Topic: Abnormal Bleeding in Women

Objectives:

- ♦ To introduce the ISJA tool.
- ♦ To demonstrate how to apply the ISJA tool towards enabling intersectional SRHR lobby and advocacy within the religious sector.
- ♦ To identify specific action points (at organizational level) towards implementing ISJA Community Studies.

Text: Mark 5:21-43 (A Bleeding Woman Healed)

21 When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. 22 Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. 23 He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” 24 So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. 25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” 29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. 30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” 31 “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ” 32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.” 35 While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?” 36 Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” 37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. 39 He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” 40 But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, “*Talitha kum!*” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). 42 Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. 43 He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Introduction to the Context of Mark 5:21-43

- ♦ A re-telling of Mark 5:21-43 in the words of the bleeding woman.

ISJA Community Study Questions

Issues Analysis

1. Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about them?
2. (a) List the different identities of the woman with the bleeding problem?
(b) How do the identities of the bleeding woman impact her health?
3. (a) How does religion impact the bleeding woman's health?
(b) How does culture impact the bleeding woman's health?
(c) How do the health systems of her time impact the bleeding woman?
4. (a) Are there women like the bleeding woman in your context today?
(b) What challenges do they face due to their health conditions?
(c) What roles do religion and culture play in relation to women's health in your context?

Action Planning

5. What actions will you now take so that women with "bleeding problems", like the one you have read about in the religious text, and the ones from your contexts who you mentioned, can be facilitated to access the care and treatment that they need?
(a) Individually (immediate, mid-term, long-term)
(b) Communally (immediate, mid-term, long-term)
6. What resources do you have to enable you implement the actions you have suggested in number 5 above?
7. Whose support will you need to be able to implement the actions you have suggested in number 5 above.
8. How will you know that the actions you have suggested are resulting in the desired change?

Appendix 2: Background of the ISJA Tool

The ISJA tool is derived from the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) model, which is an initiative of the Ujamaa Centre, at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal in South Africa. The Ujamaa Centre was started in 1985 to facilitate capacity strengthening on good governance and development in faith-based institutions and the civil society. The primary concern of the Ujamaa centre is to address oppressive structures which trap and keep people oppressed and marginalized.

The CBS model of reading the Bible has been employed variously in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT) to influence intended change. Some successes in this regard include:

- ♦ Reduction of cases of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in places where the method was consistently used to address GBV.
- ♦ Acceptance of ordination of women in some churches that traditionally did not ordain women into priesthood. The CBS method was used to address patriarchy, culture, and selective reading and application of Biblical texts which were used as bases to deny ordination of women.
- ♦ Acceptance and implementation of the concept of *Theology for the People of God* which opened theological training to all people in their diversity as opposed to a select few who were considered socially acceptable.
- ♦ Theological curriculum transformation. Adoption of curricula that focus on religion as a resource for social transformation; so that graduates are equipped to champion social transformation from a religious perspective.

This model was thus adopted and tailored for use in the MW project to facilitate SRHR issues analysis from a religious perspective. An alternative term 'SJA' was adopted to embrace religious diversity. The SJA was then intersectionalised following the enablers of intersectionality mentioned above, hence the term ISJA.