

From Program Participant to Executive Director: Bitrus Rose to Lead GRA



- Location: Northeast Region (Borno, Adamawa, & Yobe States), Nigeria
- Programmatic Pillars: Youth, Peace & Security (UNSCR 2250) | Conflict, Security & Justice (CSJ)
- Key Initiative: EU-Funded Consortium Project ("Nigerian youth, community peacebuilding, and resilience to crises and fragility")

I. EU Consortium Project: From the Beginning

Growing up in conflict-affected Northeast Nigeria, Friday Bitrus saw firsthand how crises and fragility stripped young people of their agency. In many communities across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, youth were routinely excluded from decision-making, viewed with suspicion, or left without constructive outlets to shape their own futures.

Like thousands of young people in the region, Friday felt the frustration of having the desire to drive positive change but lacking the structured platform, skills, and institutional access to make his voice heard.

"For a long time, young people in the Northeast were treated either as victims of the conflict or as security risks to be managed," Friday recalls. "We had the passion to rebuild our communities, but we lacked the formal networks, leadership training, and seat at the decision-making table to turn that energy into lasting peace."

II. The Turning Point: Entering the EU-Funded Youth Initiative

The trajectory of Friday's life shifted dramatically when he enrolled as a young participant in the European Union (EU)-funded project, *"Nigerian youth, community peacebuilding, and resilience to crises and fragility,"* implemented by Grassroots Researchers Association (GRA) alongside the Youth Initiative Against Terrorism (YIAT) and the Mukwege Foundation (MF).

Designed to build local youth resilience and strengthen leadership in conflict transformation, the project provided Friday with an intensive, multi-layered development pathway:

- **Capacity Building & Leadership:** Rigorous training modules in organizational development, human rights advocacy, transitional justice, and civic mediation.
- **Youth Cluster & Network Engagement:** Active participation in regional youth clusters, connecting with 270 young leaders across the BAY states to coordinate peacebuilding actions.
- **Policy & Advocacy Platforms:** Direct representation in state, regional, and national policy dialogues advancing the Youth, Peace, and Security (UNSCR 2250) and Women, Peace, and Security (UNSCR 2250/1325) agendas.

III. From Participant to Organizational Leader

Friday did not merely complete the program—he used the skills, security protocols, and mentorship gained through the initiative to step into active leadership within GRA. Demonstrating an exceptional commitment to data-driven, community-owned peacebuilding, he rose through the organizational ranks from field enumeration and program management to eventually being appointed as **Executive Director of GRA**.

His personal journey stands as a living proof of concept for local empowerment and the localization agenda in humanitarian and peacebuilding operations.

"When I first enrolled in this project as a young participant, GRA and the EU gave me the tools, platform, and confidence to believe that my voice could shape peace in my community," Friday reflects. *"Growing from a project participant to now leading this organization as Executive Director shows what happens when you invest deeply in young people. Youth are not just the future—we are powerful agents of change in the present."*

IV. Leading the Vision Forward

Today, as Executive Director, Friday oversees GRA's strategic growth across 8 target states in Northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt, steering multi-sectoral interventions that reach hundreds of thousands of vulnerable individuals annually.

His lived experience as a former project participant shapes how GRA designs its programs—ensuring every intervention prioritizes true community ownership, youth inclusion, and localized leadership.

- **Institutional Governance:** Steering GRA's 2025–2030 Strategic Framework and driving evidence-based research across Northern Nigeria.
- **Championing Localization:** Advocating globally and nationally for direct support to local organizations and youth-led networks as frontline responders.

"My goal is to ensure that every young person who walks through GRA's programs finds the same open door I did. When you give local youth genuine trust, rigorous capacity building, and leadership opportunities, they will not only build peace in their villages—they will lead the institutions that transform the nation."