

## **BURUNDI WOMEN FOR PEACE CC**

**Faiths /Traditions Represented:** Indigenous, Muslim, and Christian

**Location of CC:** Bujumbura, Burundi

**Key Areas of Focus:** Agriculture and Fight against HIV/ AIDS among Women and Children

### **Summary:**

Burundi Women for Peace CC is based in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi and it convenes people from the indigenous, Christian and Muslim spiritual backgrounds. Coming from a war-torn country, we were established to support women and children in Agriculture and the fight against HIV and AIDS. This specifically includes mobilization of families on the prevention of transmission of HIV and AIDS from mother to child, as well as programs to fight hunger in the communities of Bujumbura and some rural areas. The program actions have helped in increasing awareness about HIV and AIDS transmission and risk reduction in target communities. From our agricultural programs families, are fairly able to get produce, both for subsistence and small scale commercial purposes. In all our work, our adopted approach is the use of religious leaders to convince people about the danger of HIV and AIDS and the celebration of the life of every human being through non-discrimination practices based on religion or cultural background. By default, our CC activities reach out to people of diverse faith and indigenous traditions, so we use our diverse faiths to tackle the common problem of poverty and HIV and AIDS which affects us all.

### CC Profile Questionnaire:

#### **1. What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?**

The majority of the people in this area are Christians, with Catholics being the majority. There is a reasonable number of people who still believe in the traditional beliefs with great respect to the dead ancestors and a few pockets of Muslims. As in the rest of the country, the Bujumbura area has majorly two distinct ethnic groups, the *Hutu* and the *Tutsi*, and the *Twa* who make up a small percentage of the population. The *Hutu* make up the highest majority of the population with the *Twa* as the largest minority. The *Twa* community was in the past very much involved in pottery and didn't care about politics or any other activity. Nowadays, since pottery is mainly used for decoration purposes, the community is organizing for land reform and power sharing.

The *Hutu* and the *Tutsi* have flared up regularly since independence from Belgium in 1962. Therefore many Burundians have fled their country to neighboring countries such as Tanzania, Rwanda, DRC mainly to escape from ethnic persecution in Burundi.

*Kirundi* is widely spoken all over the country while *French* is an administrative language. Following the ethnic problems, a peace agreement has been reached where ethnic quotas are much reflected in the composition of the senate, parliament, army and local governments.

**2. Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?**

Based on the ethnic divide and religious differences of the people of this area, intercultural and interfaith bridge building is highly needed. What ought to be emphasized to our people is the language of national unity and reconciliation, forgetting the ethnic differences thus capitalizing on everybody being a Burundi national.

**3. Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out? Please specify the year in which the activity took/is taking place.**

Our main focus this year is to continue our efforts to fight against HIV and AIDS among women and children. This includes the prevention of transmission of HIV and AIDS from mother to child, and mobilization of families in the fight against the HIV/AIDS. Over the past up to the present day, we have had agricultural programs amongst the target communities to help them with improving their nutritional wellbeing since it's of much importance to people living with this health problem.

From this first ever regional Assembly, we have also appreciated the importance of encouraging interfaith and intercultural dialogue which can be an added value to our work if the people we target are able to tolerate each other. Thus, through our religious leaders, we hope to make this a reality just through very simple things such as eating together, or spending time together just on a common cause of addressing the needs of people (women and children) living and affected by HIV and AIDS.

**4. Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?**

We build bridges mainly among women and children from the Christian background, with Catholics being the most dominant, along with Protestants and a few Muslims. The operational area also has communities who believe in the indigenous traditions with much attachment to the ancestral heritage. The groups hail from the *Hutu* and *Tutsi* background who much of the time are being haunted by a history of intolerance to each other. We also target the *Twa* community which historically was discriminated against.

**5. Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that generally do not engage or cooperate with each other.**

The main approach is to go through religious leaders to convince them of the danger of this disease such that they share messages of health living. Meetings are organized with our members who in turn explain the danger of HIV to local community. The main strategy is to encourage our members to be open-minded on that issue of HIV and AIDS.

Additionally our mobilization of women and children on the fight against HIV and AIDS goes hand in hand with supportive care such as follow-up home visits, counseling, nutritional education and others.

What we appreciate now is the strength that lies in the diversities of our community in terms of religion and culture, and once strategically exploited can enhance better relations and the development of our people. “URI should continue to mentor us in interfaith cooperation and dialogue mechanisms to help us mainstream it in our program activities”. **Bantegeyeko Denise**

**6. Why do the activities your CC is carrying out improve cooperation among people of different traditions in the broader community?**

Everyone is now aware that HIV and AIDS is a danger for the whole society no matter one’s religion or culture. “Therefore, as people continue to value and appreciate the beauty of life and humanity, then relations are gradually interwoven and the more they and us begin to realize that we must then combine our efforts, love each other, and do what we can to stay alive”. **Barutwanayo Sophie**

**7. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC’s members? Have there been any challenges?**

In the past, our CC was facing serious problems of no dialogue, sharing of any kind, the community was divided. The main challenges now are how to fight against poverty, HIV and AIDS which is a real barrier to the development. The current political unrest too poses a threat to the stability of our work, which has forced some of our members into exile. Thus, resting hope into the government talks with the various stakeholders.

**8. What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?**

There is some level of tolerance among people of different religions. They are mixing together on development causes. Whenever parties are organized in the families, members from different origins invite each other e.g. Muslims can invite Christians and vice versa.

**9. What does your CC hope to achieve?**

Our CC hopes to help in eradicating HIV and AIDS through reducing or stopping new infections mostly among children from their mothers. This to us is one way to foster development in our target area.

**10. Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?**

Our biggest needs are financial and technical support to help our members to achieve the goals such as buying fertilizers for the farmers as well as getting psychologists for the trauma healing etc.

We are continually constrained by limited agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and generally struggling financially. Our appeal to URI is for Regional meetings to happen on a regular basis for cross learning and exchange of best practices. URI should organize more meetings to be inspired by other CCs.

**11. As you know, the Purpose of URI is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation to end religiously motivated violence and to create culture of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings. In what ways, do you feel your CC's work helping to achieve this purpose?**

The main focus of our work is to empower our members to develop themselves in order to fight poverty and any other problems caused by HIV and AIDS so as to be healthy. As we all know health is the real wealth indeed. As we undertake these programs, we ensure that the freedom of religion for each member is respected. No religion should supersede the other. We are all equal and deserving as human beings. The members of our CC are really engaged for peace in fighting against violence of any kind. As mentioned above, discrimination based on culture, region, religion, or ethnic difference is no longer tolerated. Our members play a key role in the society as a whole.

**12. What value or benefits does your CC receive from being a member of URI?**

We share experiences with other CCs on the global network moments which give us encouragement and are empowered to work the more. Thus, through faith, we hope to achieve our goals. In the URI network, we are taught how other CCs are dealing with many issues which are for us sources of inspiration. Since URI is a family, it's very simple to ask questions at any time and to anyone.

**13. What value or benefit does your CC currently provide or could potentially provide the URI network?**

The URI network can learn from us specially in solving ethnic problems. Our approach in tackling HIV and AIDS can also inspire some CCs which are facing this very same problem.

**14. Do you communicate or work with other CCs in the URI network? If yes, please share a few examples. If no, please explain why you have been unable/ uninterested to connect with other CCs.**

We are really interested in other CCs works. We have already shared experiences with other CCs during the meetings.

**15. As a CC that works on improving interfaith relations, perhaps you have seen, heard, or experienced something interesting. Please share a very important personal experience or lesson related to interfaith/intercultural relations that changed impacted your beliefs OR a story about something that happened in your community related to interfaith relations.**

In our community, a Christian lady was HIV positive. She kept on accusing her neighbor; a Muslim that she used her witchcraft to poison her thus couldn't go for a checkup. The Muslim instead decided to go through a friend, to convince her neighbor to go to the hospital. When the lady noticed that she was HIV positive, the reconciliation process started between the two ladies and the community in general. The children of the two families who had become enemies reunited. Those started being role models for the entire neighborhood. Now Muslims are no longer targeted as wrongdoers by Christians and vice versa. The two ladies are now the leaders in our community because of their experiences. **Barutwanayo Sophie**