



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

International Centre for Study and Development

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Dalits

Location of CC: Valakom, Kerala, India

Key Areas of Focus: De-addiction Centre, Family Counseling Centre, Help line, Education, Women empowerment, Integrated Rehabilitation Centre

Summary:

International Centre for Study and Development located in Valakom, Kerala, India, is a successful volunteer-run social service organization that began in 1982. The members of this UNESCO-affiliated organization include 39 full-time staff members who offer drug treatment and rehabilitation, a home for the aged, family counseling, and continuing education. Each year the CC organizes events to celebrate the World AIDS Day Campaign, Children's Day, Human Rights Day, and Republic Day. In addition to service programs, they have a khadhi (Indian cloth) production centre that employs impoverished women.

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

Our CC is working in a rural area in Valakom where the majority of the population is employed as farmers and cashew workers. There are two schools and one hospital in the vicinity. The office is located on a hill and several sections including a khadhi unit (cloth weaving industry) are working here. We have a managing board consisting of members from four religions, and they steer the various projects organized by this CC. At present Mariamma Mathew (wife of late K.C Mathew) is the president. Our organization is registered under the government of India and we run several projects supported by both the governments of India and Kerala State. We have more than one hundred members, most of them, women.

Projects from our CC include a de-addiction hospital in Valakom, a family counseling centre in Kottarakara, an integrated rehabilitation centre at Valakom, and a reliable help line service for community members in need. Thousands of people that have been impacted by the activity of this centre over the years; including women, children, students, youth, rubber tappers, khadhi workers, laborers, health workers, and counselors.

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

Interfaith bridge building is needed in this area because the notion of oneness is to be developed among the people of diverse cultures. The tendency in India today is to manipulate religions for conflict. We believe proper orientation should be provided to the



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people to be conscious of the dangers, and tides of turbulence. People should be educated so that they do not fall prey in the hands of politicians and seasoned manipulators.

3. Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out this year?

- 1) Family Counseling (Several families participate daily in the family counseling centre for solutions for their family issues. Services of counselors and advocates are provided at this centre).
- 2) Pre-marital and post-marital counseling.
- 3) Running a de-addiction hospital and rehabilitation centre.
- 4) 10th K.C Mathew memorial lecture.
- 5) Orientation programs for women children and youth.
6. Helpline (Services of three trained counselors are made available 24 hours).
7. International Day of Peace (IDP) celebrations.
8. Participation in URI Zonal and National activities.

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

We are building bridges between four communities: Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Dalits (Aborigines).

5. Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.

1. Organizing training programs.
2. Celebration of festivals together.
3. Counseling programs.
4. Government supported community projects.
5. Women's empowerment programs.

6. Given the current context you described, what does your CC hope to achieve (goals)?

1. A region free of alcohol and drugs.
2. A region where alcoholics and drug addicts are rehabilitated.
3. A place where all communities live in peace.
4. An area where women feel more empowered to make earn their own living.
5. A community where all children go to school (This CC supervised about 50 nerserys in different tribal areas of Kerala).



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7. How do you see your CC's work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?

Through the various programs described above, we find improvement in cooperation between various communities. The problems faced by most of the people in our region are the same, all farmers regardless of faith or religious background suffer great losses due to climate change. We bring together people and help them find solutions to their challenges. We also bring together alcohol and drug addicts, so that they can derive solace from one another.

8. How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflict? (NOTE: This question is relevant only in areas with violence/open conflict.)

We don't face significant religious conflicts in our area, but we are aware that problems can arise at any time. We believe in training youth to think beyond the boundaries of religions.

9. 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?

1. People from different parts of the state come to us for help in dealing with families struggling with addiction.
2. Hundreds of families with problems visit our counseling centre asking for help.
3. All sections of the society turn up whenever we organize training programs as we have gained confidence and respect in the community.

10. Please share specific short story about your CC's work that might teach a lesson about interfaith or inspire other CCs.

Ramesh (40) is a painter who became addicted to alcohol even when he was very young. He used all the money that he earned every day for drinks. There had been occasions when he spent more than two thousand rupees per day to drink with his friends. He borrowed money from all sources and became bankrupt. Ramesh's drinking habits brought many problems in his family as his wife and children suffered due to poverty.

It was at this stage that our volunteers brought him to our hospital where he was given excellent treatment. Ramesh is doing fine now and has become the convener of the Alcoholics Anonymous group. Ramesh gives his testimony whenever we have important meetings and he has become a valuable member of our CC. His life is a telling example of how we can rehabilitate people after addiction.



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11. How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission of URI?

We try to achieve the mission of URI by cultivating daily interfaith cooperation among different communities. Environment is also a top priority for us.

12. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? What are the challenges?

We have members from four different communities and there are a lot of cultural differences among them. The Dalits are still discriminated against, and they struggle to gain equality with others. Our biggest challenge is to do away with the caste and class differences.

13. How is being part of URI helping your CC to achieve its goals?

Since becoming a CC, we have participated in all training programs and the peacebuilding initiative of the URI South India Region. Through these programs we have gained much confidence. We were really honored to receive a prize from the URI Global Support Office as a mark of their appreciation of our activities. All our members have extended full support to the regional programs and projects, whereby we also learn to live up to the mission of URI.

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

URI can help us by providing training for our personnel. It would be great to be matched with similar CCs in any part of the world.