



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

The Youth with a Vision

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Christianity (Protestant, Catholic) and Islam

Location of CC: Nairobi, CBD

Key Areas of Focus: Education for Children and Youth

Summary:

Youth with a Vision, is a youth-led cooperation circle composed of university students who are motivated to give back to the society. They are based in Nairobi, Kenya and tutor young pupils on science subjects for a small fee in various schools. Their interventions have seen pupils perform better in their academics. Although the interfaith component is not yet strongly integrated into their work, they have a strong interest in integrating interfaith and intercultural bridge-building work into all their programs.

1. Can you please help me understand the current religious/cultural/political contexts in the area where your CC is working?

Kenya is a multiethnic and multi-religious country where different ethnic groups have generally lived in harmony with each other against their common challenges. Relationships between people are however shaped by the political temperature. Ethnic and religious divisions exist around election and campaign periods as a result of politicians' incitement of the masses in order to gain votes. In Nairobi where we are based, the effect of political polarization is evident even among children because political actions tend to affect inter-ethnic behavior. This is the cause for the ethnic animosity that we often encounter amongst the pupils that we teach; an issue that covers the entire country.

2. Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed where your CC is working?

Intercultural and interfaith bridge building is necessary due to the status of ethnic division witnessed in Kenya. Politicians are responsible for most of this, especially during election periods. Although religious division is not as common as ethnic division, the recent trends of extremist attacks and counteraccusations have heightened the perception that Muslims were behind it. Even so, this perception was quickly disapproved through awareness creation and information sharing. In our daily engagements with pupils, we witness these trends of ethnic and religious animosity because young people slowly learn them from their families, peers, media etc. It is necessary that bridges be built for people to know each other better and live in peace.



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3. Can you please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is doing this year?

Our activities entail teaching science subjects in primary schools within Nairobi and Kiambu counties for a little pay in return. We work with more than 150 schools with pupils of between 9 and 14 years. This year, we have covered 120 schools so far and our task until the end of the year is to offer tutorials in the remaining 30 schools. These activities are repeated every year.

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

We mostly contact Christians and Muslims because they are the major religious groups in Kenya. In terms of ethnicity, we mainly work with Kikuyu and Luo.

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.

Due to the nature of our work, we have never encountered a situation in which our pupils fail to completely interact with each other. Generally speaking however, in order to boost cooperation, we ensure that there is free mingling within ourselves as tutors so as to set a good example for the pupils. Although we plan to integrate the Golden Rule principle in whatever way we can, we lack an interfaith and intercultural strategy. So far, our strength lies in the fact that we do not segregate our pupils or our members based on their faiths.

6. Given the current contexts, you described, what does your CC hope to achieve?

Ultimately, we hope to overcome our capacity challenges and integrate interfaith and intercultural components into our work. This will enable us to break the political and religious barriers such that humanity becomes the uniting factor. The golden rule is the pathway to this.

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

We do not have a strong interfaith component in our work but our own composition as members is multi-cultural and multi-religious, which is a good example of how people can work together in harmony. This has motivated not only our pupils but also our fellow teachers.

8. How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflicts?

We use our composition as a role model of how people can cooperate in spite of different cultural and religious backgrounds. Violence, like it happened in Kenya in



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2007/8 is dangerous but it is only through working together and understanding each other as a team that peace can be fostered.

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

We know that we are doing a good job through the compliments we receive as well as re-invitations to the same schools that we have taught before. This shows that love and peace is taking center stage. Among our pupils, interests in learning other local languages and cross-cultural friendships indicate that things are changing for the better.

10. *Do you have a specific short story you can share about your work that might inspire other CCs or teach us a lesson about interfaith?*

There was an incident where we had gone to a Muslim majority school to teach a practical science lesson. Since the majority of our members are Christians, we did not know that stepping on a praying mat was offensive to Muslims. Unfortunately one of us stepped on a praying mat and this provoked negative reactions that could have escalated had it not been the intervention of a Muslim teacher who managed to calm down the situation. The lesson we learned was the need to know other people's beliefs beforehand so as to avoid offending them. Besides, if one of us was a Muslim, it is highly likely that the incident could have been avoided. A lesson for us was to have an equal faith and cultural composition in our membership.

11. *How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission or URI? (Interfaith bridge-building)*

We help support the mission of URI by working with all pupils irrespective of their cultural and religious backgrounds. Our wish is to integrate the Golden Rule in whatever way we can in future, in line with the URI mission.

12. *Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths/cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation between these members? What are the challenges?*

Our working relationship is generally good because we are all familiar with one another and work as friends but sometimes, due to strong affiliations to ethnicity and religion, some of our members feel uncomfortable when others speak their various mother tongues or perform their rituals (like praying). Some feel that this creates a sense of exclusion that does not necessarily work towards strengthening our cooperation. Political dynamics also have an effect on how some of our members think and act hence creating division. We wish to be able to treat each other equally but it sometimes proves difficult due to various combinations of factors.



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

When we attend URI meetings, it creates a feeling of oneness, which helps us to cultivate a culture of peace and embracing others. We once attended a workshop on human trafficking organized by the URI Nairobi CC and learned a lot. The launching of the Golden Rule Day was also important because we got the opportunity to understand this idea in depth.

14. How can URI better support your CC in reaching its goals?

We always are grateful to meet and know about the work of other CCs in Kenya because then we get to share ideas that will positively impact our work. If we can be invited to URI organized seminars often, we are sure it will help us understand more about intercultural and interreligious cooperation. This we will use to promote the Golden Rule.