



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Twekolere Women's Development Association CC

Faiths /Traditions Represented: African Traditional, Christians and Muslims

Location of CC: Makerere II - Zone C, Kampala, Uganda

Key Areas of Focus: Entertainment through Music, dance and drama performances on social issues at international, national and local events, Emphasize good traditions, Environmental Awareness, HIV and AIDS prevention, Small scale Farming for members.

SUMMARY:

Twekolere Women's Development CC is located in Makerere II- Zone C in Kampala district, and convenes Christian and Muslim women and men to respond to the prevailing social problems by using theatre as a tool for education. They address important issues affecting their community such as HIV and AIDS prevention, poverty, environment, and education. This performing group embodies their messages in songs, dances and drama; engaging the community through radio, TV, and live stage performances. Their primary activity is using performing arts for "edutainment" and income generation at both local and international platforms. They also operate small income generating initiatives such as tree planting and poultry farming, by employing individuals who are affected by or infected with HIV and AIDS, as a means to earn their livelihood. Twekolere CC has about 50 members with 14 years of staging artistic performances and attracting audiences of all different faiths.

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

Today we live in a world where it is nearly impossible to survive independently without interacting with people of a different faith. In our operating environment, it's difficult to target people of a particular faith or culture. Our performance and livelihood programs are non-discriminatory since the problems we address affect everybody equally. We also observe that the majority of our local politicians come from the opposition party; this limits the community's access to development programs. *For example, we have to walk or drive through bad roads because our politicians think that appealing for government's support would be earning it more votes. So they choose to stay aloof and let us suffer. - Annet Nandujja*



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

In a community like ours with multi-cultural and religious groups, it's highly important to connect people in order to avoid violent situations. We also realize that the nature of the work we do doesn't discriminate on the basis of religion or culture, but rather uses the two factors to unite people. *When we sound the drums, people get attracted to the beat and watch us sing and dance. This is the kind of environment that our community experiences on a weekly basis as we practice for our performances. - Annet Nandujja.*

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

Our year's program is more or less the same; we will continue organizing music and dance performances at local and international events including weddings, religious and cultural ceremonies, government events and other public gatherings. We also have a host of both video and audio recordings in most of the local TV and radio stations in Uganda. The messages in our performances rotate around preservation of culture and tradition, environmental awareness, HIV and AIDS risk reduction and control, youth mentorship, prevention of domestic violence, reproductive health and others. These are supplemented with poultry farming and tree planting activities which we are undertaking to respond to the income needs of the members. Some of our members grapple with HIV and AIDS effects and other social challenges which require practical initiatives. We have also secured a plot of land in Luwero district and planted trees which we hope can eventually turn into a small forest. This will, on top of generating income, contribute towards environmental conservation in the area.

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

The most dominant faiths in our community are Christianity and Islam as well as cultures from central and West Uganda. This is notwithstanding the communities from Rwanda, South Sudan and other ethnicities present, as expected in a city suburb, all drawn together by the sounding of our drums.

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.

The artistic performances are major crowd pullers for us. On every Thursday is our rehearsal ahead of the weekend performances and as our drums are sounded and local dances are made; the immediate community finds our training ground as their local theatre. *We don't charge them a penny but let them experience diversity at play. We also use such a day to make performances that generate a light discussion on what has*



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been performed. For instance, we have some tickling dancing strokes such as one where a mother is breast feeding or a woman using a hand hoe to dig and this is intended to educate people on the importance of breastfeeding a child as well as engaging in agricultural production for survival. Such messages also promote the rich Ugandan culture and natural endowments as an agricultural country with a rich natural environment. - Annet Nandujja and Kiyimba Musisi Hussein

We usually organize community level sharing seminars in which we create free spaces for women to express their problems or experiences. This is an opportunity for women to share and discuss what is happening in their homes. This came as a result of noticing among members that majority of the women crave for having someone to talk to about problems faced at home. Some of them were suffering silently while others ended up dying due to lack of disclosure! Such platforms also help us to identify viable enterprises for women to enhance their livelihoods. As said above, the rehearsing ground serves as a neutral ground which attracts people of all walks of life to come and watch us play or even get to the stage to participate and at the end of the day they come to appreciate cultural and religious diversity.

The recordings that are distributed to our local radio and TV stations also help us to reach out to any area of Uganda where such signals reach. We are able to assess the impact of our music from the different people we run into at functions who sing some of our popular songs or share an experience from the messages in our music.

We have also initiated a cooperation circle for members to make monthly savings that help them to address their domestic needs such as paying school fees, health, food, clothing and others.

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

We are striving to see a society that appreciates its own indigenous cultural traditions through performing arts, such as traditional dance and music. We want our people to be proud of their origin and true identities that distinguish them from other culture. Through our interactions with people of different faiths, we hope to have a society where religious diversity is celebrated instead of being used as a dividing force.

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

Our Troupe has been able to earn a name of good reputation in the society as people recognize us wherever we perform and wish to always identify with us. When they see us perform as people of different faiths and cultures, and managing to stick together for this long; they get more attracted to come watch our performances. At the stage



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performances, members use the same stage, and it's not the culture or religion one comes from that matters but the art one is performing that makes a difference.

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

We do not directly deal with such interventions but we have observed that some families are very rigid about cultural and religious intermarriages to an extent that a girl or boy can be disowned by their parents for choosing a partner from a different faith or culture. So our messages are also tailored to address this intolerance by promoting religious pluralism as it's provided in our national constitution. We always encourage parents to let their children make choices in marriage as adults with consent.

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?*

Our communities are lately unlocking the barriers to cooperation by working together on certain fundraising activities. For example, Muslims fundraise for the construction of churches and the reverse is true with Christians. During the self-help programs, we observe people coming out of their homes to clean or repair the roads and engage in other community work.

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?*

I have a sister who was disowned by our father for choosing a non-Muslim for marriage. Despite her several attempts pleading to be allowed to introduce the husband to our family, our father could not hear of this. She eventually gave up and decided to move on with her life. Many years have passed now but up to the present day, she is not allowed to set foot in our father's home. This kind of treatment has affected her children since they too are not allowed to interact with their relatives. I personally denounce such kind of attitude as being extremist in the current global era, because no person should be denied a choice to a partner! - Annet Nandujja

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

We know that URI cherishes the promotion of enduring daily interfaith cooperation as well as preserving the indigenous traditions and culture. Through our performing arts, we serve as a conduit that connects people to the occasion of celebrating diversity. At Tweekolerere, one is able to get beauty of art through their eyes, ears, spirit, soul and body. Art is able to nourish the soul while at the same time serving as a nostalgic feeling and educating people on the ways of life.



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12. Within your CC, you have members from different faiths/cultural traditions.

How would you describe cooperation between these members? What are the challenges?

Among members, we encourage each other on our faiths. It's very common to find members reminding each other to honour the prayer days or not eating certain religiously forbidden foods in the presence of those who don't eat it, such as pork. Our major challenges are limited funds to reach out to the overwhelming number of people in need of our services. It is also a challenge that URI takes long to visit us in our localities. *We honestly understand the financial situation, but such visits like this one today, makes us feel better, hear from each other and maintain a mutual relationship among others. Whenever you delay to visit us, you are not in position to know what we go through to make ends meet, but such visits matter to us. Annet Nandujja.*

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

We always delight in choosing to collaborate with URI because of the enormous exposure we have obtained across the globe. We came to be awakened to global issues that are distorting social order, and these are things we would not mind about that much. For example, the innumerable attacks of Al-Qaida within the region were not our concern until Uganda was hit by the same faction during the 2010 world cup finals. The URI conventions have made us appreciate our role to countering violent extremism which we do with a cause. This is on top of an exchange visit some of our members made to India from which members got new learnings on how the people of India express their tradition and religious values. *I remember all of us who went there were meat fans, but had to let go of our desire in honour and respect to the Indian culture. - Annet Nandujja. In 2008, we also scooped an award winning competition of \$5,000 which was used to support orphans and vulnerable children with fees and scholastic materials and women affected by HIV and AID to rear poultry. Sylvia Nazziwa*

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

We want to get regular updates and face-to-face interactions with URI staff to bolster our relationship. Let URI continue fundraising for us through selling our brand to its rich global audience.



Top and Below, URI staff get to the stage to enjoy a traditional dance with Twekolere CC members during in one of their rehearsals



**Pictures taken from a mobile phone*