



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Angalidom Interreligious Peaceology International (Angalidom)

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Muslims, Bahais, Traditional African religions and various Christian denominations

Location of CC: Vihiga, Kenya

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Key Areas of Focus: Peace education and caring for orphaned children

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Summary

Angalidom is a founding URI CCs based in rural western Kenya. It has been spreading its “peaceology” doctrine to members of various faith and cultural traditions through books, dialogues, and community programs. Their philosophy is motivated by their belief that these ideas can solve day-today challenges encountered by people in the area. Its members come together to discuss their challenges and in the process, learn to deal with them constructively.



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

Our operations started in Vihiga county and expanded to appoint representatives in Transnzoia, Kakamega, Vihiga, Homabay, Nakuru, Nairobi, Mombasa and Narok counties. Each of these counties, although comprised of at least one dominant ethnic group, have all been affected by migration leading them to embrace peaceful co-existence. In Vihiga, where our main activities are centered, most people are Christians from the Luhya ethnic group and live side by side with those from other ethnic groups and religions (such as Muslims and Bahai's), which can be seen both as a challenge and an opportunity.

Some of the problems we face here include domestic violence, family breakups, theft, robbery, killings, mob-justice, and bad ethnicity and political polarization. These issues led us to intervene using our "Peaceology" doctrine — whereby we organize house meetings at least once a month in our members' homes to discuss these issues and meditate solutions together. Our teachings are mainly focused on peace and go deeper than religious teachings to deeply elaborate how peace should work based on the fundamental principle:

Hate leads to War
Love leads to peace

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

People who live within the comfort of their homogenous circles tend to exercise exclusivity; positive interfaith and intercultural interaction helps them break that trend. The solution therefore is for them to develop interest in each other and to appreciate other ways of doing things. This can slowly build harmony in their communities. Faced with numerous problems of intolerance we realized that we needed to lead by example and put our religious affiliations aside if we were to solve our problems constructively. We therefore decided to accept one another as brothers and sisters - a message we keep spreading to everyone in our region to-date.

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

Most of our activities are ongoing - namely: peace education, training of trainers, and support for orphans and vulnerable children. We used to support about fifty orphaned children but due to financial constraints, we are now supporting only ten through our small scale farming and cultivating nipplier grass.



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

Muslims, Baha'i and various Christian denominations.

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.*

We do this by selling our Peaceology idea, which is very clear on what it takes to achieve peace. We believe peace comes first, before personal convictions and individual religious beliefs and so humanity, equality, and brotherhood should take precedence. Based on the problems we face in our society such as theft, rape and ethnic animosity, most of our fellow villagers have come to believe that our ideas offer solutions to such vices. They voluntarily come to work with us based on what they have heard out there. On our part, we have learned that people are yearning and desperately looking for love and acceptance, and are in desperate need to mend fences, making them potential peacemakers over warmongers. We are glad to accompany them through this journey.

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

Our main goal is to establish a peace institute so we can expand our peace training and engage more people. We also want to have a library where anyone wishing to read about our "peaceology" doctrine can have the opportunity to do so. We are sure that if we achieve this, there will be a deeper understanding of peace that will translate to tolerance. Our member, Musinde, also plans to finish her book on dangers of climate change that will educate the masses on the issue.

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

We improve cooperation between people of various religious groups by bringing them together and discussing how to cooperate for peace as opposed to animosity based on the challenges they face. Since we are one of the founding URI CCs, this idea was instilled in us by Bishop Swing and how he was inspired to form URI; his story inspired us to do the same.



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

We haven't experienced prolonged conflicts in western Kenya save for the 2007/8 post election violence - but even so, there are other parts of the country that were worse affected than western Kenya. As we are part of a country that has often experienced ethnic conflicts, our intervention is preventive. We focus on addressing root-causes of such problems before they erupt; and this has yielded fruits.

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?*

The fact that some of our members prior to engaging with us had open prejudices against their counterparts, but are now in good terms with each other is a sign that things have changed. Holding prayers together and organizing annual celebrations such as the Day of Culture every 26th day of December, where each religious group gets to share with others about their beliefs and practices, is also a positive sign. The greatest indication however is the cooperation and love that we enjoy amongst ourselves, and the devotion towards serving others during good and bad times (such as funerals and weddings of our members or their families). During such occasions, we offer collective support regardless of our differences. This kind of display of collaboration is a good example for others who have not yet understood the meaning of cooperation but want to replicate what we do.

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?*

We believe that Angalidom peaceology is a great story, we were inspired by the formation of a 'United Religions' started far far away from us in the USA and yet today, we are still working together to promote interfaith harmony. Angalidom is spreading to other counties in Kenya and this is something to celebrate about and do more.

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

We are an interfaith organization that was inspired in 1995 when we read about Bishop Swing's idea of bringing different faith communities together for a common course: the United Religions. This was the basis of our formation. We integrate various faith communities in Vihiga (and now in other counties) to spread our peaceology doctrine that goes beyond just shallow understanding of religious teachings to include the real building



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blocks of peace and what is necessary to maintain it. By embracing this, we put aside all our biases and see one another as humans fighting a common enemy - conflict and war.

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?

Relationship amongst our members is very good since we are all “converted” and strongly believe in what we preach. Petty instances of brushing shoulders are however part of being human and it happens particularly when we have new members who do not yet have a deeper understanding of what the idea of peaceology really is. With time however, they understand and improve. When a misunderstanding happens, we solve it by initiating dialogue through our neutral committee members so as to cool the problem down and make sure that all aggrieved parties are satisfied. Despite this, it is admittedly a big challenge to teach complex ideas of peace to people who have been adversaries for long a long time. Although we eventually manage to convince them, it is not an easy task.

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

As already stated, we were inspired to start our organization after reading Bishop Swing’s idea of a United Religions. This was an opportunity to invest in peaceology and write books about peace that we are now proud of. Somehow this idea aroused a talent that we unknowingly had and whose fruits are evident today.

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

Opportunities are what we desperately need to reach our goals and publish more books on peace to benefit the next generation. We also wish that URI offices in Kenya could engage us regularly on their activities and even train us on interfaith work. It is only by working together as one URI family and by sharing ideas that we will produce better results in what we are doing. As a founding member, we think Angalidom needs to be more engaged than just attending annual celebrations.