



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Change Mind Change Future (CMCF)

Faiths /Traditions Represented: **Christian Protestant, Christian Catholic, Muslim**

Location of CC: **AFRICA-HORN, Nairobi, CBD**

Primary Contact: **Stephen Machua**

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Key Areas of Focus: **mentorship, charity work, Campaigns for peace and youth entrepreneurship.**

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Summary

Change Mind Change Future CC is a youth-led initiative headquartered in Nairobi and works all around Kenya with different faith and ethnic groups. The CC's membership is currently mostly Christian but the group is actively trying to recruit members from other faiths. Given Kenya's tremendous diversity and recent events of intolerance, Change Mind Change Future believes interfaith understanding is necessary to forge a peaceful future for Kenya. CMCF creates opportunities for understanding in the community in the form of youth forums, sporting events, intellectual debates over social media, and mentorship programs in schools. CMCF has attracted many volunteers and grown rapidly in size, consistently increasing their capacity and impact. They use the Golden Rule as a guiding principle for all their activities, focusing on the importance of unity and respect among all faiths.



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Questions and Answers

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

Our area of operation is the entire country and our office is in the central business district of Nairobi. Kenya is faced with a problem of ethnic fragmentation and so most people do not cooperate for a common course, and when it happens it is mostly within the same ethnic group. It is unfortunate that even young people have the same mindset as the older generation. The demolition of the Sikh statute in Kisumu in the recent past is a sign that religious animosity exists although they are mostly driven by politics.

In spite of challenges however, Kenya is a diverse country with more than 42 co-existing ethnic groups and various religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, African traditional religion etc.

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

Because information is power and through it we will be able to directly learn and get information about other religions so as to shun polarization.

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

We are going to continue engaging in mentorship and advocacy for the African Youth Charter between May and July 2014. We will also engage in creating awareness about the Golden Rule, launch a think-tank on research and conflict and attend some conferences in Johannesburg and Uganda.

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

We are mostly Christians because they are the majority but soon we will engage other faith traditions.

- 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.***

Our website is interactive such that anybody visiting it gets the impression that it is an organization incorporating young people, regardless of their religions affiliation. Although most of our members are Christians, we have no policy of discrimination and so anyone wishing to join us is welcome. Those who end up being members tend to cope well with each other even though admittedly, we have never been faced with such a challenging task of bringing people together, who would otherwise not talk to each other.

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

Our aim is to fully promote the principles of the Golden Rule of “treating others the way you want to be treated” across the country particularly in schools to prevent religiously motivated violence. By incorporating the Golden Rule in our activities, we pass the message that we are all children of the same God. This will help us achieve our main objectives of preventing peer pressure among pupils and students, and encourage the spirit of entrepreneurship and peaceful resolution of disputes among fellow youths.



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

With our mentorship programme integrating pupils and students of different backgrounds particularly in schools, we encourage intermingling and so they get to know each other in the process. The Golden Rule enhances our interfaith peace initiatives through its call for equal treatment of everyone which means, respect for diversity. We believe in ourselves as young people, as being capable of mobilizing people for interfaith dialogue - which is what we are doing.

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

We do this by promoting interreligious activities such as youth forums, sports, social media outreach - by initiating debates on these issues and for contributors to learn from each other. Although it is not always an easy task, we believe that these target groups learn something new at the end of the day. Knowing one another means understanding and it amounts to preventing conflicts – and this is our strategy.

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?

It starts with us: when we cooperate well in our work, this indicates that we embrace peace and want to replicate it to the whole society. We started with only 37 volunteers and so far we have risen to the current 175- this shows that we are on the right track. We have also been able to form 2 youth groups namely: the Young Achievers Network and GUZA Youth Foundation to fight illiteracy and champion for education in Maasai-land. Corporate companies have also come on board to sponsor our activities such as House of Manji biscuits and Comcraft. Every time we have new member or sponsor, it is a sign that we are creating impact.

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?

Brian, who hails from a Kikuyu dominated area of Karatina, was once touched by the increasing discrimination against the minority Somali community in that area. This group used to face various forms of stereotyping yet no-one bothered to understand them and their lifestyle. Brian eventually intervened by bringing together an equal number of Kikuyu Christians and Somali Muslims to play football. Since then, these two ethnic groups have embraced each other as part of a league and their relationship has improved significantly through joint problem solving. Therefore the lesson that we drew from Brian's experience is that sitting back and judging others without taking the initiative to get to hear their perspective is wrong and that interfaith collaboration can be fulfilling if taken seriously.

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

We help to achieve the mission of URI through our involvement in peace related initiatives such as: interfaith youth forums, and social media debates that promote interfaith dialogue, mentorship programmes in schools, and by embracing the Golden Rule principle.



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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?

We are young and still in the learning process but our cooperation and respect for each other ensures that we don't conflict among ourselves. The main challenge that we have encountered however is skepticism from new members who otherwise consider religion to be a sensitive matter and have therefore little idea about interfaith and intercultural cooperation. Some of them want religion to be confined within religious institutions as opposed to engagements such as ours. Older members have their own weakness too, such that we find ourselves making the same mistake of stereotyping - but this is mainly due to our limited capacity.

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

Our URI membership enables us to share resources, to network and enhance our interfaith understanding. For example, Stephen had never stepped into a temple before but through URI, he has been able to do so. We have also come to know many people such as Dr. Dauda, Ambassador Mussie, Hawa, Victor, Liam, Despina and many other resourceful people, and we continue to do so through our membership in the URI family.

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

As mentioned, we are young and need help in enhancing our capacity about peace-building matters. We also would appreciate connection to like-minded youth groups across the globe through exchange programmes.