



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Centre for Partnership and Civic Engagement Trust (CEPACET)

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Christianity, Islam, Bahai

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

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Key Areas of Focus: Civil education and economic empowerment

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Summary

Centre for Partnership and Civic Engagement Trust (CEPACET) is located in Nairobi, Kenya. The CC primarily works with Muslims and Christians by engaging community groups in long-term projects that focus on education and agriculture. CEPACET CC has launched microfinance programs for women in Western Kenya in addition to midwifery trainings in Homabay. CEPACET's strategy has helped to bring people from different backgrounds to work together as a way of promoting cooperation despite their ethnic or religious differences.



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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?

At the national level and in the specific areas where we implement our activities there exists cultural, political and religious diversity. This is both an asset and a disadvantage. People can work together better based on diverse ideas but, when compromise is not struck, it often leads to conflict, making our work difficult. On a broader sense, inter-ethnic relations in Kenya are highly fluid and tend to influence other dynamics such as development and of course our core work. Ethnic division is rampant and often it becomes difficult to implement our activities amongst different ethnic and religious groups as some reject inter-ethnic and religious mixing. Such challenges are however part of every task and we strive to work even harder.

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

It is needed for various groups to co-exist and in the context of our work, to ensure that our activities will benefit all. Muslims and Christians in places such as Kutui Ndogo, where we once implemented an agriculture project, were/are suspicious of each other and this trend is made worse by current political dynamics. In order to serve all groups, gaps between them have to be built.

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

We have long-term, ongoing projects in education and agriculture that we are implementing in Homabay, Nyamira and Kitui counties. Starting July this year we will launch a new microfinance project for women in western Kenya as well as one on midwifery training in Homabay.

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

So far we mainly work with various Christian denominations and Muslims but our doors are open to all. Various ethnic groups are also engaging with us such as Luo, Kisii, Kikuyu and Kamba.

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 strongest method is to exploit talents that various groups possess such that at the end of the day, they will need each other to succeed. This method is quite effective because those who are used to secluding and stereotyping others are left with no choice but to accept the rest as equals. An example is in Kibera where we once implemented an economic empowerment project amongst Luo and Kikuyu ethnic groups – two groups that are known for not liking each other. In Kibera, Kikuyus are generally stereotyped as having good sales skills while Luos are seen as being better tailors and so we decided to have the Luos make the dresses while Kikuyus sold them. The project was amazingly successful and



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three more sewing machines were bought from the profits generated to add to the two that they initially had. Today, they receive orders to make school uniforms and suits in bulk and this translates to bigger profits for them.

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

We hope to further enhance co-existence amongst different faith and cultural groups through cohesion and working together. This can however not be achieved as long as there is poverty and so our main goal is to ensure there is economic independence through wealth creation, which is one of our co-values. In any business or social activity, no-one is an island and so people need each other in one way or the other; just like a farmer needs a buyer for his farm produce. This spirit has proved effective to us and we are carrying it forward.

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

Cooperation is improved through inter-dependence and engagement in common economic activities such as in Kisii and Homabay where our work had led to increased inter-ethnic marriages.

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

Apart from the 2007/8 election violence, the conflict in Kenya is currently non-violent and our work is dedicated to promoting sustainable peace as opposed to simply the absence of violence. We believe that violent conflicts are rooted in poverty and lack of appreciation for others and so our work aims to fight the two vices together.

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?*

Some indicators are increased inter-ethnic marriages, increased tolerance which is observed through growing acceptance of others – such as in working together, or when teachers from different cultural and religious backgrounds are accepted to teach in a remote homogenous school, engagement in joint economic activities and the general spirit of brotherhood. All these changes have also proved to us that ignorance is a big part of the problem, and progress can be made through shared experience.

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?*

Yes! In one of our school projects, we had an incident where a Christian Religion Education (CRE) teacher converted to Islam and so teaching Christianity became a challenge for her. She therefore requested a swap where she could teach another unit besides CRE. This posed a problem for us because we were operating under a limited budget and so we could not afford to hire a new teacher for the subject. After long consultations, a compromise was reached that she could exchange her teaching unit with one of her colleagues. We thought the



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issue was well solved but soon after, she fronted a new demand, asking for time to attend prayers every Friday for two hours. Although this was a little beyond the limit to ask for, considering our financially constrained school project, we still managed to accommodate her request. The surprise however came at the end when in return to the granted privilege, she worked twice as hard in her work and this is playing a huge role in the success of our school project. The lesson that we drew from that experience is that religious devotion is sacred and cannot be fully understood and judged from the outsider and so it is important to respect an individual's commitment to their religion.

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

Our strategy of bringing people from different backgrounds to work together is a way of promoting cooperation between them and this is in line with URI's mission. These activities have even led to increased inter-marriages, which to us, is a strong cultural symbol of peace.

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 have a mix of people from different backgrounds who are well-educated and we do not favor our own whether in recruitment or in implementing projects. Our relationship is professional and is based on being role models for our beneficiaries. A few conflicts could arise here and there, and we try to address them in constructive ways. Engaging more cultures and religious traditions is definitely a good idea and we are working towards that. Our principle of accommodation has been practiced on several occasions, including when we allowed Friday prayer time for the above-mentioned Muslim CRE teacher without complaints from other staff. The main challenge however is when our beneficiaries reject the idea of accommodating and working with others, but this typically fades away as they get used to our strategy.

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

Being part of URI makes us feel we are not alone as there is a lot to be replicated in terms of URI work of promoting co-existence.

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

URI can support us by engaging more with us to ensure we get more visibility for our work through its communication tools. We also appreciate networking with URI's contacts and receiving invitations to events and training opportunities.