



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Alianza por la Espiritualidad Maya Q' eqchi', Mopán e Itzaj-APEM

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Indigenous cosmovision representing diverse peoples: Maya Q' eqchi', Mopán e Itzaj, Christian Catholic and Christian Evangelic.

Location of CC: Guatemala

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Key Areas of Focus: Intercultural and bilingual education in learning centers, work with women to improve domestic economy.

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Summary:

CC Alianza por la Espiritualidad Maya Q' eqchi', Mopán e Itzaj-APEM is located in San Benito, Peten, Guatemala. This Cooperation Circle serves as a bridge between Mayan communities in Peten, Guatemala, and the nonindigenous world. Members share the wisdom of their cultures through ceremonies, demonstrating the use of plants in medicine, music, decision-making processes, scheduling, education, and the conservation and protection of natural resources through customary law. Alianza por la Espiritualidad Maya Q' eqchi', Mopán e Itzaj work impacts women in Peten by providing training and skills in the agriculture and crafts industries.



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1. What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?

We are working on intercultural bilingual education by identifying and socializing basic elements of the indigenous cosmovision with the basics of other religions in the region. We also work with women to help them improve their economic standing. We develop strategies to eradicate violence and large inequalities where we live.

2. Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?

Building interfaith bridges is necessary because there is a lot of violence in Guatemala's daily life, and it stems from prejudice. Thus far, there has not been a way to join forces with other communities to learn ways we can build mutual respect, reduce prejudice, and offset differences among people.

3. Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out this year?

This year we worked on a Mayan Ceremony, bilingual intercultural education, and groups in which the elderly transfer customs to the young. In schools, we work to preserve the traditional languages, traditional dress and religious practices of Mayan Spirituality. At the same time, we respect the principles and beliefs of the Catholic and Evangelical religions. We are also promoting skills in fabric making, and cooking utensils to improve women's domestic economy.

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

We create bridges between the three (3) following groups: Maya Q' eqchi', Mopán e Itzaj, and with different religions: Mayan Spirituality, Catholics, and Evangelicals.

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 CC shares in rituals, ceremonies, festivals and meetings. We participate in the activities planned by each village and discuss challenges facing every religion. We make broad-based invitations to special events for all members to be used for public communication channels, and offer an inclusive model that avoids discrimination among diverse religions.



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6. Given the current context you described, what does your CC hope to achieve (goals)?

We have made significant agreements with Catholics and Evangelicals to respect and value the beliefs of Indigenous peoples. We continue to work to support national and international treaties that call for the respect of the beliefs and educational rights of indigenous people. These efforts reduce local religious conflicts.

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

Our work improves relationships among people of different religions within our communities. At the moment, we have no impact on the country as a whole; we need a voice in government in order to do that. We see the partnership of indigenous people from other countries as providing much needed support for our endeavors.

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

In the past we focused on avoiding violence. Currently our efforts only seek unity, respect for human beings within their particular religion and equal respect for the spiritual welfare of the Supreme Being.

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

We have seen more acceptance of Catholics and Evangelicals of indigenous beliefs.

10. Please share a specific short story about your CC's work that might teach a lesson about interfaith or inspire other CCs.

An important story of our work is how we are able to gather people from different faiths in schools. We gathered Catholics, Evangelicals and Indigenous of Maya Cosmovision from three different ethnic groups. We taught about the diverse traditions and the cultural practices of the different groups present.



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

Our CC is supporting the mission of URI by forming interfaith and intercultural networks that seek to foster peace in our communities. We have a commitment to engage people in interreligious dialogue, and unite our local efforts to help achieve URI's purpose.

12. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? What are the challenges?

Cooperation between our members is harmonious and respectful because we share the same goals and purposes in URI's PPP.

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

URI provides hope that our voices will unite the world. It is essential that we begin to teach children and young people to respect different ways of peace and spiritual welfare. Elders who are our religious leaders are in the process of understanding and deepening their respect for others, thanks to the contribution of local teachers teaching multiculturalism in our communities.

14. Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?

URI can help us by giving us more tools to overcome ignorance and gain more understanding of different faiths and traditions. Our main tool is education in schools, Mayan ceremonies for sowing, healing, building new homes, asking for peace, meetings, and open discussions to eliminate the differences between religions. We believe that the more we provide educational tools, the more we will grow as an interfaith and intercultural network.