

Center for Environmental Education and Development

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions of tribal communities

Location of CC: No 34 Donga Street Jalingo Taraba State Nigeria

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Key Areas of Focus: Environmental and Sustainable Development Interfaith and Peace Building

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Summary:

Center for Environmental Education and Development (CEED) works in Taraba State North-Eastern Nigeria. The Center for Environmental Education and Development (CEED) consistent with its mandate launched a *“Model Community Environmental Sanitation Initiative Project”*. This model initiative seeks to promote environmental dignity and sanitation in communities by providing them with the opportunity to safe guard and nurture their environment. It gives communities capacity to back themselves with best practices on environmental sanitation. The project also seeks to create inclusive on-the-ground solutions to critical issues facing communities today on tackling the environmental and natural resource preservation.

CC Profile Questionnaire:

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

Taraba State is made up adherents of Christianity, Islam and Traditional Africa Religious Worshippers. In each Community or Tribe, you will see or notice the traditional African Religious worship.

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

Building interfaith work in our CC is necessary because there is a lot of violence in Taraba State communities’, especially Southern part of Taraba State Nigeria, 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 our CC will commit its energy on working on building knowledge, intercultural peace education, and groups in which the elderly transfer customs to the young. In schools, we work to preserve the traditional languages, tree planting, and promoting religious harmony and peace. At the same time, we respect the principles and beliefs of all religions. We are also promoting skills to improve women's domestic economy and family farming for food security.

Our current work includes distributing of Vitamin A' and Albendazole in the six Local Government Area of Taraba State Nigeria in most at-risk populations who are in need – specifically pregnant women, new mothers, and children under five – to gain access to lifesaving and life changing vitamins and minerals. This commodity was made available by Vitamin Angeles USA. This work is not a funded project. VA provides commodity supply and delivers to receiving NGOs. They also provide technical training for NGO's staff and personnel engage in the work with them.

We are also building resistance to land grab in Sahelian, Nigeria and influencing policy for land rights (Taraba State).The project is being funded by the Global Justice Now UK and The Friends of the Earth Nigeria (FOEN/ERA) with technical assistance from GRAIN. This is an activity that is currently going-on to assist family farmers in Gassol community to gain confidence as a people to protect their farm land from being taken over by Multi-National Corporations.

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

We create bridges between the three (3) following groups: Christianity, and with different religions Islam: Africa Traditional Religions and tribal communities in Taraba State.

Our work has elements of Interfaith in that the CC membership is made of people from diverse religious background each expressing their faith but have come together to promote common good of the society and human system.

5. Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that generally do not engage or cooperate with each other.

The strategy our CC uses to bring people together takes place through sharing in ceremonies of members, festivals and meetings. We plan certain activities and attend those we are invited to, and discuss challenges facing every religion in the community where we work. We send broader invitations to special events, including members of the public. Through our communication channels, we offer an inclusive model that avoids discrimination among diverse religions.

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

The *work* of our CC as an environmental NGO is that it is serving the purpose of bringing major environmental issues to public attention. We serve to focus attention on the social and environmental externalities and other sustainable development issues of the community where we live. Our work also lays justification to the credibility of CCs to deliver on their mandate. In the same direction we serve the purpose of informing citizens of new initiatives and development priorities that inform development.

We have made significant achievements in our work already in Taraba State, Nigeria with other interfaith institutions to respect and value the beliefs of other people, including Indigenous peoples. We will continue to work to support local, national, and international treaties our country shares- especially ones that call for the respect of the beliefs and rights of people, including indigenous people. Our CC will continue in its efforts to reduce local religious and community motivated 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 at the country as a whole; we need a voice in government in order to do that. We see the partnership with other faith based institutions and people from other as providing much needed support for our endeavors.

On a smaller scale though, our coming together as CC linked to URI interfaith work and the environment makes our CC unique and different from other NGOs practices in Taraba State.

Our work in distributing of Vitamin A' and Albendazole in the six Local Government Area of Taraba State Nigeria reaches the most at-risk populations who are in need – specifically pregnant women, new mothers, and children under five – and gives them access to lifesaving and life changing vitamins and minerals. This commodity was made available by Vitamin Angeles USA. It made a difference in the life of beneficiaries.

We also work on “Building resistance to land grab in Sahelian Nigeria,” influencing policy for land rights. Taraba State is one project which has helped farmer’s community in Gassol to define their relationship with stakeholders on the one hand and the government on the other.

8. How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflict? NOTE: This question is relevant only in areas with violence/open conflict. Otherwise Skip.

Currently our efforts as CC only seek to promote 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 acceptances of all religions in Taraba State among people of all faith even those 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 Gassol Community to demand for their Land Rights and have had their land returned to them now. We gathered Muslims, Christians and nomads from three different ethnic groups. We also carried out work among different communities to promote their health with Vitamin C and Albendazole supported by Vitamin Angeles USA.

11. Do you communicate or work with other CCs in the network? If yes, please describe a few examples. If no, please explain why you have been unable to link up with other CCs.

Our CC has not established a sort of communication with other CCs yet in Nigeria. However, with as Environmental CC, we have established broad links with several CCs now in the URI ERCCs.

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

It must be stated here that our CC is supporting the mission of URI by forming interfaith and intercultural networks that seek to foster peace in our communities and some-times making references to other organizations interested in the URI work. We have a commitment to engage people in interreligious dialogue, and unite our local efforts to help achieve URI's purpose.

13. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? Are there any challenges?

Cooperation between our members of our CC is harmonious and each of us respect the opinion of each other because we share the same goals and purposes in URI's PPP.

14. How is belonging to URI helping your CC to achieve its goals?

Creating visibility for us and linking us with other CCs to achieve our mandate. We are building an enduring Inter-Faith Coalition to promote common bond and unity among men and women of religious faiths in Taraba State. This was started in 2014 when CEED Nigeria became the CC in the URI family. It's been built every moment with strategic consultations and conversations among the members across the state.

15. What value or benefit do you feel your CC is providing to the URI network?

Our CC is supporting the mission of URI by extending the work of URI around the world to other networks that seek to foster peace in communities where they work. We have a commitment to engage people in interreligious dialogue, and unite our local efforts to help achieve URI's purpose.

16. 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 and gain more understanding of different faiths and traditions. Our main tool is education in schools and communities for sowing, healing, building new platform for achieving non violence and peace, 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. URI can support our CC through the following specific ways

- Training of CC members to fulfill their organizational mandate through resource mobilization, funding and networking with other CCs and other organization linked to the URI
- Helping the CC grow its membership profile through involvement in its shared opportunities around various institutions and programmes around the world