



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Inter-Religious and Intercultural Dialogue Programme (INTERDIP-Uganda)

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, SDA, Sikhs, Bahai, and Muslim

Location of CC: Kisubi-Entebbe Road

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Approved: June 2007

Key Areas of Focus: Peace Building, Women Empowerment, Conflict Resolution and School Programs

Date: 7 August, 2014

Summary:

Inter-Religious and Intercultural Dialogue Programme (INTERDIP-UGANDA) was founded by Sr. Mary Gorrett Kisaakye in 1994. The CC is located in Uganda. INTERDIP is committed to promoting peace through inter-religious dialogue, peace-building activities, and the creation of peaceful and culturally harmonious co-existence. INTERDIP regularly carries out workshops in conflict resolution, and is also politically active by regularly contributing to legislation with the Ugandan parliament. The CC has participated in interfaith peace prayers during the International Day of peace at Nakivubo Stadium organized by the URI office, and different peace marches that promote Christian and Muslim relations.



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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?

Uganda is currently facing pockets of cultural tensions between indigenous tribes in different regions of the country. The most outstanding cultural issues are in the Rwenzori region between the Bakonzo, the dominant ethnic tribe, and the Amba peoples. The ethnic tensions have mixed perceptions, where for some it's ethnically inspired and for others, it's political. INTERDIP is particularly interested in conducting a study into the problem to be in position to make the most relevant intervention in the area.

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

Sr. Mary observes that whenever there are religious or cultural differences, conflicts are inevitable! Thus, Interfaith/Intercultural Bridge building is necessary to connect people through dialogue in order to clarify or demystify certain held prejudices. Historically, in Uganda, most conflicts arise from cultural differences; thus INTERDIP hopes to bridge the barriers against cultural and religious harmony.

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

Inter-Religious and Intercultural Dialogue

INTERDIP has planned to do a number of activities for this year. We are embarking on the formation of Inter-Religious and Intercultural Dialogue through the use of art and music. The formation of such dialogue is driven on the backdrop that new people are always brought on board to introduce them to the inter-religious and intercultural mission.

Training of Trainers (TOT)

The targeted schools are yet to benefit from a Training of Trainers (TOT) to instill seeds of peace among the young people. The TOT shall specifically target the teachers and student leaders who shall be equipped with peace building knowledge and skills as well as strategies to engage others on peace building efforts in schools and the communities where they live.

Organize the Interfaith Business for Peace

INTERDIP shall organize an Interfaith Business for Peace to target the business community to appreciate peace building efforts in contributing to development. This is a group that is normally overlooked by the development practitioners, yet they are very influential in sustaining economic development in the country. However, without them appreciating peace, the Sister notes, their businesses cannot flourish.



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Organize the International Day of Peace

INTERDIP shall take time to reflect on the challenges of peace building and best practices around the globe through a symposium on the International Day of Peace. The symposium is a response to the heightening religious and cultural tensions within the country and the region.

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

The bridges being built are among the Muslim, Christians, Sikhs, SDA, Buddhists, Hindus, and the Baha'i faiths. We are also targeting the Asian community, due to the multiple challenges they face in a foreign land and others include the African cultures and the native Ugandan society.

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.

Interplay of strategies is used for reinforcement of each other. These include; addressing a common issue that affects all, for instance the common religious values, such as fasting, prayer, and love for one another.

INTERDIP also finds the use of existing structures very helpful in bringing people who would otherwise have been hard to target. We target the faith secretariats, division centers at all levels and within schools; primary and tertiary. This also offers our programmes more sustainability, since we are mainstreamed within the existing structures.

The networking aspect has been very pivotal in coordinating work with organizations or institutions with similar objectives. The networks offer our CC synergy creation and reduction in duplication of work and exploiting of shared resources.

INTERDIP also uses a uniquely interwoven strategy of dialogue which is classified into four forms namely: The Dialogue of Life, Dialogue of Action, The Dialogue sharing Religious Experiences, and the Dialogue of Theological exchange. The Dialogue of Life deals with life issues; taking action to social problems is a concern of the Dialogue of Action, with the dialogue of religious experiences enabling the interfaith members to share their values and norms; and lastly the Dialogue of Theological Exchange which brings together theologians to deliberate on matters of connecting their audiences.

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

We use three major strategies to address social issues in our target communities. They include, the Formation of the Inter-Religious Dialogue, School dialogues (also known as



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Seeds of Peace), and the Inter-religious Women's Dialogue. The others are the Religious freedom meetings and the care or arms giving sessions.

With such strategies, we address religious and cultural differences among the interfaith centers, youth in schools and universities, women, the foreign communities and other associated groups. The underlying issues affecting these groups have to do with different problems people face on a daily basis. The programs therefore come to address the religious and cultural intolerance and extremism which is known to have a tendency of fueling religious and cultural based conflicts.

The women, in particular in the foreign communities are faced with socio-economic problems which subject them to domestic and public abuse. We try to penetrate the hard barriers among the men-women relationships and families at large to mend relations for peaceful co-existence and harmonious living.

The programs in the schools, universities, primary and secondary schools, are geared towards promoting an early life mentoring experience for the young generation to desist from engaging in violent conflict. The young people are specifically targeted because they are soft spots in the country, who when reached early can be influenced to live peaceful relations among their fellow peers and the general public.

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

The work of INTERDIP CC is visible within the lives of the individuals and groups targeted. The feedback we receive from the people indicates that, through bridge building, INTERDIP is able to break the walls and join the hearts. This is possible with the regular meetings and sharing events, where individuals of different religions and cultures are able to interact, interconnect and work and achieve a lot together.

The interactions have enabled people to acquire new ideas on peace building such as initiating dialogue through discussing common topics or subjects and later progress into firm relations. For instance, at the community level, people of different religions or cultures are seen participating fully in fundraising activities.

As individual members, Sr. Gorret notes that, she has personally been opened to so many doors she wouldn't have visited if constrained to her Catholic setting. *I am now able to meet so many different people around the world and get new ideas and insights in peace building, she adds.*

On the international scale, our contributions during a Millennium World Peace Summit in New York gave birth to the proposal for women to have an international forum which is purely interfaith. And from such deliberations, emerged the resolution to initiate the



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International Day of Peace, which is now an official day celebrated every 21st of September, with the first ever event marked in 2003.

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?

We have made tremendous impact regarding the inter-religious agenda in Uganda. The founder Sr. Gorret spearheaded the formation of the Inter-Religious Council (IRC) in Uganda. The IRC in Uganda, through grants, has been behind the nationwide HIV and AIDS risk reduction and response programmes wherein thousands and thousands of people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS have received treatment and care. Besides, it's the IRC that has been a lead advocate for bridging inter-religious differences, where the different religions are now able to come together on the same table to discuss peace building initiatives in the country. *It was my efforts that have seen such a vibrant initiative! I remember I did most of the founding paper work and interesting different interfaith leaders, who were quite indifferent about such an arrangement. But now I sit back and am proud of how far we have come, Sr. Gorret.*

Through INTERDIP, people have come to appreciate the power of initiating interfaith dialogue in affording people of different spiritual and cultural backgrounds an opportunity to discuss and listen to each other. This goes hand in hand with mediation dialogues in which people appreciate the value of listening to each other, other than resolving to the use of force in resolving conflict.

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?

Sister Gorret is happy to share an experience in her work. During the founding period, I had to conduct a set of research studies to establish the different religions in the country and another one to assess the relationships between people of different religions, in particular, the Muslims and Catholics. As a Catholic nun, I got so many faces looking at me in admiration of what I had started. They could not understand where I got the courage to do what I do. It was because of that daring spirit that helped us (INTERDIP) to connect and bridge gaps between people of different religions and connecting them on something they felt was a dividing factor.

This experience affirms the power of the interfaith work due to its universal nature, cross-cutting among all people everywhere in the world.



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

INTERDIP takes advantage of the inter-religious dialogues to encourage people to refrain from violence. We pass on messages of reconciliation, respect for one another, and resist in engaging in provocative behavior or action that could easily incite religious based violence. During our dialogues, the religious principles of love, respect, peace and being made in the same image of God among others, are emphasized to promote unity and harmony.

Additionally, through the interfaith dialogues, people are able to know and appreciate that it is possible to live with others in harmony and to appreciate the existing differences in values. Such interventions have had a direct impact on members who automatically become peace builders the moment they get engaged in bridge building activities.

12. Within your CC, you have members from different faiths/cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation between these members? What are the challenges?

INTERDIP has lost a number of members who have long gone to be engaged in other deliberations, thus creating capacity gaps.

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

Being members of URI has helped our INTERDIP members to appreciate a unique aspect of incorporating people of different faiths who are joined together through cooperation circles, especially having more than three religions, adds Sr.Gorrett and Makumbi Francis. This highlights the important value of non-discrimination within URI and treating every individual's religion as equal and valuable.

The different forums organized by URI have had enormous insights into our work, in particular, the sessions on preventing religiously motivated violence and violent extremism. And because of that, the Inter-Religious Council (IRC) was able to develop very clear principles that help members to always reflect on the Golden Rule. It is also the membership to URI that has enabled us to come across and understand the universal symbols of the different faiths in the world and associated values. The symbols are always a reminder of the religious diversity and the importance of upholding the common religious values that apply to every living human being.

INTERDIP does not forget to recognize URI together with the Vatican-Rome under the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious and Intercultural Dialogue and the Global Peace Initiative of Women, as our very first partners.



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

We plan to consolidate our work in schools and universities by forming peace clubs. However, URI's support is needed to help in the establishment of the peace clubs. The CC is also open to hosting peace building volunteers from URI to be linked to the peace clubs in schools.