

Interfaith Youth Partnership (IYPA)

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

Location of CC: **Nansana-Kampala, Uganda**

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Key Areas of Focus: **Addressing the living standards of the youth, Environmental sensitization, Hygiene and Sanitation, Peace Building and Interfaith cooperation.**

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Summary:

IYPA is a youth-focused Community Based Organization (CBO), based in Nansana Town Council, Wakiso District in Uganda. Interfaith Youth Partnership was founded in 2003 by graduate youth who felt it necessary to mobilize fellow youth from their areas of residence and to address the poor standards of living among unemployed youth. The founders, who are all youth, are an interfaith group from the Orthodox, Christian, and Muslim faith communities.



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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?

The current religious context in Nansana Town council is made up of people from different religious backgrounds, the majority of them Christians and Muslims, with a few Sikhs, and Hindus. The community is also composed of indigenous people who believe in the traditional way of life, in nature, herbal and traditional medicine, and other aspects of survival.

Like any other urban setting, the population is passionate about political issues with different political parties; the dominant ones being; National Resistance Movement (NRM), Democratic Party (DP), and Forum for Democratic Change (FDC). The political fever is normally high during general elections, with the next election being held in 2016 and the youth taking particular interest in such events as campaigners.

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

IYPA is focused on five major areas; addressing the living standards of youth, environmental sensitization, hygiene, sanitation, peace-building, and interfaith cooperation.

The majority of the youth in the target communities of Nansana Town Council (part of Wakiso district) are unemployed. According to the 2012 survey by Uganda Bureau of Statistics, the rate of unemployment in Wakiso district stands at 28 per cent among the youth. This area is characterized by a high population growth rate of 4.1 % with 7% fertility rate higher than the national which is 6.7%. The major social problems in this area include HIV and AIDS whose prevalence is 8.9% higher than the national 6.7%, child abuse and neglect, marriage/family breakdowns, early marriage/teenage parenting, domestic violence, low income earning (poverty) or abject poverty in homes, unemployment, poor environment, sanitation and hygiene, and poor nutrition.

There are a big number of peasants mainly depending on small earnings generated informally through hard labor, petty trade, wages, and a few that practice subsistence farming on small plots of land. The population of the young people aged between 18-25 years is about 28%. Many of them are unemployed, or under disguised employment, dropped out of school before completion, non-skilled and therefore cannot engage in any entrepreneurship undertaking.

This kind of social background informs IYPA's strategic intervention in: Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Building, Environmental Conservation, Hygiene and Sanitation, Peace Building and Interfaith Cooperation.



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

The main activities planned for this year rotate around environmental sensitization, hygiene and sanitation exercises, cleaning of water sources, and youth empowerment through entrepreneurial skills building. Other activities planned include visitation to places of worship such as the Baha'i temple, mosques, and churches.

Some activities that have already been implemented are the environmental sensitization activities targeting one high school, Kasengeje High School in Wakiso district. The activity was implemented in collaboration with Pamoja CC, and Body and Soul Development CC, also with support from URI San Francisco office. We embarked on a sensitization exercise for students on tree planting, garbage disposal, and environmental debates. The exercise also engaged the youth on interfaith cooperation to appreciate the different cultures, religious values, and traditions.

The planned hygiene and sanitation exercise along with the cleaning of the water sources are aimed at responding to the health concerns of the communities of Nansana Town Council, who are faced with poor sanitation conditions, unclean water sources, poor garbage disposal, blocked and minimal drainage systems.

Paul Bulamu notes that the activities are hoped to be implemented via a community driven strategy in order to enhance ownership and sustainability of the exercise. Thus, their strategy is planned to front the community leaders including the Local council leaders, religious leaders, youth leaders, and every other person who commands respect from the community to champion the exercise. IYPA's role will specifically be that of supporting mobilization.

Our peace building and interfaith cooperation activities are aimed at targeting youth to bring them to the crusade of conducting youth led peace initiatives in their communities and to refrain from criminal activities.

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

We are building bridges in urban communities like Nansana Town Council where there are people from all walks of life each purporting to be more supreme than the other. When it comes to the youth who are the core target of IYPA, interfaith bridge building helps to address the myths they have on religion and culture. The youth, given their high unemployment status are easily targeted into criminal activities. And because of their adventurous nature and the urge to make instant money, this prompts them not to think on the consequences of their actions, adds Paul Bulamu, a founding member.

With such activities targeting the youth, we hope to rally youth on the cause of peace building and hope to eliminate violent extremist activities. For instance, male youth are commonly fond of engaging in several malpractices during election periods.

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.



Some of our strategies are very practical. We utilize mobilization using the community leaders, and we are able to generate trust of the people to participate in our programs. And during our activities such as community dialogues, IYPA engages members in public speaking, and using non-violent language where everyone is free to participate.

IYPA also engages the youth on skills building initiatives by mobilizing them in their own preferred business enterprises which include: tailoring, printing, as long as the enterprise can thrive on locally available means and is cost effective. There are also plans to target the youth and members of the community through sports like football to pass on peace building messages for harmonious co-existence.

In addition, IYPA engages people through sensitization on common issues which affect everyone, for example sanitation and hygiene, clean water, digging and cleaning of wells, drainage systems and others. The addition of printing of Information, Education and Communication materials (IECs) is also envisaged to create more impact on the community in terms of having repeated exposure on information that is disseminated during special events.

As an interfaith strategy, IYPA's membership is composed of various religious backgrounds; this proves helpful to penetrate hard bridges. One major strategy that IYPA learned from URI is initiating dialogue, which has helped us to handle community based conflict or misunderstandings.

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

We are helping to address common social needs in ensuring clean water sources, drainage systems, and conserving the environment by encouraging people to practice

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good garbage disposal. The hygiene campaign in the area helps to check on the disease outbreaks such as cholera, malaria, Bilhazia, dysentery and others. As people work together on community needs, we are able to cooperate for the good of the area and move beyond religious differences. The people are able to realize that the issues at hand require everybody's effort.

The youth programs in the schools have been able to transform students into environmentally conscious citizens who no longer litter, or waste irresponsibly on the school premises. The students have gone to another level of organizing debates on environment where they get to share information on strategies to conserve the environment. The demand for environmental literature is increasing among the students who wish to acquire more knowledge on keeping a friendly environment.



Students planting trees (left) and learning how to make liquid soap (right)

The work of IYPA has also encouraged the members to work together in their quest to address common needs of the society. The contribution to the development of the area through environmental conservation is the driving force of the members to continue the work without looking at monetary rewards. Their reward is contributing to a clean and safe environment for everybody, where everybody cooperates and participates in its safety.

7. 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 are happy to observe that people's relations are gradually improving. For instance, at some of our events, we observe people of different religious background and cultures able to greet each other and engage in a discussion. And whenever people are mobilized for community activities, they don't think about their religious differences to participate, it's the problem at hand that prompts them to engage; Molly Basimaki notes.



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The cooperation between members is good because their diverse faith is a core strategy used to penetrate the otherwise hard community barriers.

8. 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?

This is not a story per se but a community experience of disunity. In my neighborhood, I came across two families that were having endless quarrels over the use of a drainage system that one of them made. One of the families claimed to have made the drainage/trench and was against the neighbor using it and whenever she could see water running through it, it would ignite a fight between them. After inquiring into the matter, I learned that it was a problem that had reached the authorities to no avail. I was able to introduce the dialogue strategy to the local authorities who later agreed to invite the aggrieved parties and immediate neighbors to discuss the matter. The meeting was able to generate more underlying problems between these two families some of which were based on religious difference (one Muslim and the other Christian) and the claimant was accused by the neighbours for planting poisonous flowers that had caused health problems to the children who played with them.

The meeting resolved that the owner of the flowers should uproot them to prevent any further causalities and both parties were made to understand that neither could have any control over the water that ran through the trench.

I came to appreciate the dialogue strategy more in bringing people to open up and discover other underlying issues rather than dwelling more on addressing the immediate causes which are often just catalysts but mistaken to be the root causes; *as shared by Paul Bulamu.*

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

Paul and Molly note that, generally, IYPA strives to promote common values such as love, respect, cooperation, peace and harmonious existence for one another and above all respect one another's religion and culture.

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

The technical and funding constraints affect the full implementation of our programs and activities at IYPA. The work done is a commitment by members but at times facilitation is necessary, since like any other human being survival is key. IYPA is looking at a future where it's able to address its human resources, logistical and fundraising capacity



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and become a more vibrant organization that is able to respond to the community's needs.

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

URI is helping IYPA CC to appreciate the human values of interfaith cooperation and our ability to bring people together who would otherwise have not cooperated. As members, we are learning from other CCs' work and appreciating these values even more and use them to strengthen our understanding of religion and culture such that we can contribute to having a safer living environment for everybody free from intolerance, discrimination, extremism and any other barbaric acts. URI's values have helped us to help people work together and to elevate conflicts which is a major hindrance to social and economic development. Paul Bulamu and Molly Basimaki cannot forget to mention the environmental seed grant, going to Mayapur as youths for the global assembly, and being able to share their work with a global network every time they carry out an activity.

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

We look up to URI for the continued participation in the local and global platforms on peace building, interfaith, and the environment to further promote our work. Such platforms including; meetings, conferences, joint programs, the website and others are good sources of information and knowledge exchange and linkage building among our members.