



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Undugu Family

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Christianity and Islam and several ethnic groups

Location of CC: Kibera, Nairobi

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Approved: This group didn't go through approval process

Key Areas of Focus: Holding peace forums through dancing and sports, economic empowerment (through beadwork and garbage collection) and HIV/AIDS awareness initiatives.

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Summary

Undugu Family CC is a youth-led effort that works with young Christians and Muslims in the Kibera community in Nairobi, Kenya. "Undugu" means brotherhood in Swahili, and this CC aims to continue the current peaceful relations in Kibera, even in an increasingly polarizing political atmosphere. CC members use their deep ties in the community to promote the message of cooperation and peace in schools and different Kibera neighborhoods. They primarily engage in environmental efforts: cleaning up their community and educating their peers on the importance of conserving the environment. They aim to lead by example, fostering relationships within their group as they spread the peace to those outside.



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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?

Many Kibera residents are Muslims from the Nubi ethnic group - while the rest are mainly Christians. Kibera is made up of villages in which particular ethnic groups dominate. Sarangombe village is mainly comprised of Luo, Makina is predominantly Nubi while Laini Saba is mostly Kamba. The villages are ethnically divided and act as "safety zones" for residents because they feel safe among their own ethnic groups. Also, most Kibera residents regardless of ethnic and religious affiliations belong to the opposition party - amounting to a degree of harmony particularly during election periods. Relationship between these groups is therefore fairly good although, conflicts are bound to take place here and there as part of any society- particularly in Kibera where poverty poses a great challenge.

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

Interfaith and intercultural bridge-building is necessary because of the demographic composition here as well as the need to constantly remind residents to maintain the good relationships that they have enjoyed for long in the past. With an era where political dynamics is that of using religion as a tool for incitement, there is a need to sensitize residents to remain calm. As mentioned earlier, Kibera residents have always enjoyed peace among themselves regardless of ethnic and religious affiliations but stereotypes against certain groups exist such that some people for example, believe that Muslims are not good people, that those who practice witchcraft exist and are evil etc. This is the reason that made us form the Undugu Family-which means, brotherhood; to neutralize such stereotypes and promote unity as one family. Our philosophy is that both Christianity and Islam teach love and peace and so there is more similarity than differences, and that should be well utilized.

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

We participated in the World Environment Day on 5th June 2014 by engaging in an environmental cleanup exercise and created awareness on the need to keep our environment clean. We also plan to continue nurturing talents in music and dance as well as in activities such as football that are aimed at initiating dialogue to solve problems such as theft which is rampant here.

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

Christianity, Islam and several ethnic groups.



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- 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.**

First of all our membership is both multiethnic and multi-religious which supports our belief of leadership by example. Secondly, we use our own members to reach out to their “own” groups - because we believe that people trust one of their own better as opposed to strangers. At the end of the day we share encountered challenges, support each other and find solutions together.

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

Our ultimate aim is to make Kibera a peaceful, cleaner and better place — where communities co-exist and treat each other as equals.

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

Our activities such as dancing, singing and exhibition involve engaging different groups of people and in this way they get to interact and understand each other’s traditions. We have not yet reached the level that we aspire because of financial challenges as well as the fact that most people have a “dependency” mentality when it comes to participating in such activities, but we believe we will get there eventually.

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

As youths; born and brought up here in Kibera, we understand this place very well and know most people here. We therefore get to receive first hand information of anything happening here - a sort of intelligence information- and in a situation of an upcoming conflict such information helps in tackling it before escalation. We engage in continuous dialogue and work closely with community and religious leaders whose influence is of great value.

- 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?**

The calm and unity currently witnessed in parts of Kibera is partly as a result of our sensitization work. We have gone to the extent of visiting ailing HIV/AIDS patients regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliations. This had boosted our name and so we are a recognized group given that we are often called upon when issues within our scope of work transpire. Our garbage collection activity is functional and so are some of our target groups (eg. HIV positive groups) that have managed to start their own small businesses. All these are indications of the impact that we are creating.



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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! There was an incident that took place four years ago in a nearby school here whereby as different (Christian and Muslim) religious groups were coming from their weekly religious services, an argument came up concerning the identity of Jesus between a Christian and a Muslim boy. It went on to the extent that it led to a fight as the Christian boy threw the Islamic holy Book; the Qur'an—down. The Muslim boy immediately ran to announce the “throwing of the Qur'an” to the nearby mosque leading to an escalation of the situation. Intervention by teachers in the school bore no fruits and this is where our Undugu Family came in and managed to persuade the groups not to fight through our Christian and Muslims members. Later, after calm returned, we came back to give a talk on the teachings of both Christianity and Islam and that throwing the Qur'an down was a taboo in Islam. Understanding this led to forgiveness and reconciliation between the two boys as the message was spread across churches and mosques - hence the establishment of procedures to resolve conflicts in the school – something that was non-existent before. The lesson we drew from this experience is the importance of understanding and respecting other's religions.

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

The mission of URI, which is to promote inter-faith bridge building is visible in our work since we engage people from different faith and cultural traditions by use of communication.

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?

Our name “Undugu” is a Swahili term that means brotherhood and so the Undugu family stands for sons and daughters of God. Our main challenge is that ethnic stereotypes are so deep-rooted that we sometimes find ourselves unknowingly making the same mistake. We however try hard to counter it by ensuring that newcomers fully understand what we do before joining. Overall however, relationship among our members is quite good.

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

URI has been helpful to us in terms of networking and so we have come to know different groups and people that have been quite helpful to us. We have also gotten to know about other religious groups such as Baha'ism and Hinduism beyond Christianity and Islam that we are used to.

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

We understand that URI is not a funding organization but perhaps it can connect us to funding organizations within its network or any other that can support our work. URI can also advise us on whether we are on the right track and train us for better engagement in our communities. We are open and glad to participate in more URI activities.