



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Action for Fundamental Change and Development (AFFCAD)

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Muslims, Pentecostal, Protestants, Catholics

Key Areas of Focus: Education, Youth Empowerment and Skills Building & Community Development

Summary

Action for Fundamental Change and Development (AFFCAD) is located in Bwaise, Kampala, Uganda. The CC is primarily focused on working with youth and families in economically underserved communities. AFFCAD's programs aim to unite individuals across cultural and religious divides via community partnerships and open dialogue in their communities. AFFCAD's platforms have helped bring people together to combat common social issues present in their communities such as health, drainage system, disease outbreaks, and floods.

1. Can you please help me understand the current religious/cultural/political contexts in the area where your CC is working?

As is expected in any slum, Action for Fundamental Change and Development (AFFCAD) CC was founded to respond to the multiple problems in Bwaise slum located in the capital Kampala, Uganda. Bwaise slum is famously known as Kampala's largest slum with over 9,000 slum dwellers, the majority of whom are women, children and youth. More than 50% of the populations have never attended school, 80% live on less than one U.S dollar a day, and the majority struggle with large families of about five to ten people congested in one tiny room; with no clean water for domestic use.



Paul and May (extreme left) meet students writing a computer applications exam

From the religious context, Bwaise slum area is a collection of people from various religious backgrounds; Muslims, Pentecostal, Protestants, and Catholics, with Islam as the predominant religion. Muhammed Kisirisa observes that, before AFFCAD's intervention, people of different faiths could not easily mix. The Christians and Muslims would often engage in verbal fights against each other's faith practices and values. This



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

negatively influenced their relationships. Such tensions made it difficult to sustain any kind of work together. The mistrust based on faith still exists but more engagements are planned to bridge the gap.

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

Like in any heterogenous community, interfaith/intercultural bridge building is necessary in the Bwaise slum area to unite people to address the socio-economic challenges they face on a daily basis. The slum's rundown conditions cause poor health, poor drainage systems, disease outbreaks, and floods affect everyone equally and do not discriminate against their religious or cultural background.



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

Most of our activities are ongoing! The very first initiatives, Excel Education Centre and Bwaise Youth Employment Centre serve 800 youth each respectively. The centers provide basic education and skill-building techniques. These two initiatives were started to provide basic education to the poor slum children and youth who had no means to attend school.

The Youth Employment Centre reaches out to 800 male and female youth in the slum communities of Katanga, Kalerwe, Kikoni and other surrounding areas. The school provides youth with vocational skills in: Tailoring and Fashion Design, Electrical Installation, Hair Dressing and Cosmetology, Computer literacy, Graphic Design, Photo and Video Editing, among others; thanks to the US Embassy in Kampala.



AFFCAD also conducts slum tours which are the backbone for sustaining activities and receiving funding. The tours are given for \$20 each to the different tourists, local and international; who in turn interest friends to visit and learn more about slum livelihoods.

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

Our work specifically builds relationships among Muslims and Christians (Pentecostal, Protestants, and Catholics); with the Muslims as the dominant population in the area.

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.

Through the community dialogue strategy, in partnership with CIVICUS; the team observes a lasting impact in the Bwaise community. Community cooperation has been enhanced due to the open platforms availed to people of different walks of life to engage on common social issues, including Muslims, Pentecostal, Protestants, Catholics; who now mix easily without any hesitation. Such an approach is thanks to the United Religions Initiative (URI); who introduced us to the importance of integration of the interfaith aspect in our work.





COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

This is one of the best tools which helped us make a difference in our work. And we could not have reached where we are now had it not been for joining URI.

The community dialogues are not in isolation from participation in national thematic campaigns such as HIV and AIDS Voluntary Counseling and Testing, Youth Summer Camps, and other community outreach programs. Through the youth summer camps, (which usually lasts for three weeks), together with international volunteers; and selected communities, we undertake development activities such as construction of community wells, schools, mosques and churches. Such activities cut across every person and therefore do not discriminate anyone's religious, social or cultural background.



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

AFFCAD envisions a future in which we are able to reach about 2,000 youth annually who will then be able to start their initiatives. We want a community where tolerance of each other is reinforced and where members cooperate passionately for the promotion of a safe, healthy and harmonious society for everyone to live in.

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

Through URI's support in encouraging interfaith dialogue, we notice that the long held barriers against interfaith interaction have been gradually bridged. Now we witness people interacting freely during festive seasons. For instance, Muslims get to feast with the Christians during Eid, and so are the Christians during Christmas and Easter; something which never happened before. In their community too, AFFCAD reported that



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

members of a one *Masjid Aliyu* (a mosque) donated sanitary towels to young girls in an Anglican church.

Through their programs and activities mentioned above, more tolerance and inclusion is being enhanced among the community members. For example, in the Bwaise community which is dominantly Muslim, the interfaith conflicts which they used to witness before their intervention have gradually receded as a result of the continued interactive dialogues between Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, the Muslims used not to shake hands with Christians under the pretext that “they are unclean”, but now it’s done willingly and where they cannot shake hands they endeavor to explain. The women too, cooperate in small savings groups to initiate small income generating businesses and their unions don’t have room for religious intolerance.

8. How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflicts? (as this in areas with open conflicts)

Our community is not profoundly prone to violent extremism; however, we continue to engage people on religious pluralism by mobilizing them equally on developmental programs such as youth vocational training, skills building, health campaigns, community outreaches and others. In such gatherings we communicate messages against inciting of violence based on culture, religion or political grounds.

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?

As noted above, we are observing that the question of religion or culture is minimal when people meet for social causes. For instance, the continued interaction with people has led them to appreciate that religious differences don’t address their poor health or poverty situation. During festive seasons too such as Eid, Christmas or Easter, people of different religions feast together, something that was not witnessed before AFFCAD’s intervention.

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?

Nyombi Jaffer, shares a childhood experience: I remember one time; I was forcefully evicted by my landlord, after learning that I used to use a small jerrycan in the toilet to clean myself before prayers; says Jaffer. Our continued interaction with people has led them to appreciate that religious differences don’t address their poor health or even poor hygiene.



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

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

Our subscription to URI has elevated our potential to appreciate the power of interfaith bridge building. As founders are of different faiths, and that gives us focus for our interventions. We often strike a balance to involve all people of different faiths and cultures because we believe that discrimination of one group can easily jeopardize our objectives. And by doing this, we automatically contribute to the achievement of URI's mission of interfaith bridge building.

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

As already stated, before our intervention, we used to observe wide polarization among people of different religions. It was a common scenario to see the Born Again faith (Pentecostal) fighting with the Muslims on the grounds of their religious values and each was hell-bent at proving the other's religion as superficial. But gradually, such tendencies are receding with more people uniting for their social causes such as cleaning their environment and joining financial savings groups for the wellbeing of their families.

The systematic and technical challenge our AFFCAD team faces does not stop us from advancing our vision. Our envisaged future is one in which we are able to reach about 2,000 youth who are able to start their own initiatives, annually. The addition of reproductive health education for the youth will also be an added value to address the reproductive health challenges faced by this social group.

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

Joining URI is the best blessing that has ever happened to our lives and the work we do. As youth, we have found love, care and recognition for our potential, something we have been fighting to gain a long time. People used to undermine us as youth; but URI's mentorship of young people has inspired our vision. Muhammad from our team says, *"URI has given us a wealthy platform for global exposure. It has made us to reach places and heights we had never dreamt of reaching in just a small time. I remember, from a small meeting with the Great Lakes Regional Coordinator at her office in Bukoto-Kampala, was the turning point for our opening to URI's door. And when the Executive Director, The Rev. Victor H. Kazanjian, Jr, and later, Liam Chinn, the Director of Evaluation and Learning, learnt about our work, they welcomed us with open arms.*



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

With URI, we feel at home and we always look at the great leadership there as our guardians. We always believe that even when we get lost, URI is ready to pick us up. And we have great hopes in the support URI will continue to give us. *“What we need is someone to give us a listening ear, help us to tell our story, build our capacity in information exchange, professional excellence and guide is in our cause and we have no doubt that URI shall not cease to support our cause!” Muhammed affirms.*

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

We at AFFCAD are open to linkage building, and technical and moral advice to support us in nurturing our vision. We envision a place where growth and advancement of community based programs and activities continues in a self-propelling manner even when the founders choose to move on. What is immediately needed is a strategic thinking and reflection process to guide us through our focus-based activities for a defined period of time.