

CONFLICT RESOLUTION BY YOUTH (CRY UGANDA)



Faiths /Traditions Represented: **Christians, Muslims and Bahai**

Location of CC: **Head Quarters: Ssiza Sub County, Bweya Central, Wakiso district**

Key Areas of Focus: **Youth-to-youth non-violent conflict resolution, Legal support to Indigenous and vulnerable communities, Policy and Constitutional Review, Youth Capacity building in Modern Debating Techniques, Entrepreneurship and Leadership, Good Governance, Democratization and Human Rights**

Summary:

Conflict Resolution by Youth (CRY) Uganda is headquartered in Bweya Central Parish, of Wakiso District and operates both in central Uganda and in the Teso region in North Eastern Uganda particularly in the Sebei, West Nile and KALATE region namely Karamoja, Acholi, Lango and Teso. CRY Uganda is actively in Bukedea, Amudat, Kween, Kapchorwa, Bukwo, Nakapiripirit, Moroto, Napak, Ngora, Soroti, Nyoya, Kole, Oyam, Amuria, Serere, Lira, Otuke, Wakiso, Abim, Palisa, Amolatar, Katakwi and Kumi Districts working with youth to lead non-violent conflict resolution among people of Christian, Muslim and Bahai religious backgrounds and among the Iteso (dominant tribe), Karimajong and Kumam communities. CRY Uganda's primary activities include Youth-to-youth nonviolent conflict transformation, transforming the land conflicts in the greater northern Uganda, empowering the traditional structures and leadership to reorganise and prepare to manage land conflicts as per the Uganda 2013 land policy and Uganda Land and Mineral Acts-otherwise providing legal support, to the indigenous and vulnerable communities, in particular widows from the Northern war.

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

In Uganda today, religion is being used by some of the leadership to win political votes, particularly in the fever of the upcoming presidential elections in 2016. Lately, they are seen making visits to the top clerics of mostly the Christian faith to get their blessings for



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the elections. *For example, I notice with concern that some presidents of political parties are seen running to one priest after the other in search of political blessings. This is quite a misleading action as people will now focus on religion being used to divide people other than uniting them...*"Agula Joseph Ogoror. Additionally, some political parties in Uganda are perceived by the public to be aligned to certain religions; For example, JEEMA (Justice, Economic revitalization, Education, Morals and African Unity) for Muslims, Democratic Party for Catholics, Uganda People's Congress for Anglicans and that National Resistance Party is increasingly being viewed by the public of Uganda as a favourite of the Evangelical churches such as Pentecostal Assemblies of God, among others. Unfortunately, public perception has a strong bearing on the conflict construction by society. The rise of the tribal vigilante, Anti-Stock Theft Units or Local Defence Units in Buganda, Teso, Karamoja, Acholi, Lango regions among others have but only reinforced the notion that the best way to resolve conflicts in Uganda is by wearing ethnic, religious and/or military lenses. This is what most youth in Uganda have grown up with. It is only fair to conclude that, we should not be surprised when they choose to strike violently both at schools and out of school environments.

Whatever the case, the youth are very central in driving the different agendas of the politicians in Uganda as campaigners who at times engage in political rows. There is also seen to be unanswered and unaddressed questions on tribal conflicts, regional underdevelopment, youth unemployment, tribal attacks and civil wars such as, the violent disarmament of Karimojong warriors by different Ugandan governments, the Uganda People's Army, Itongwa's urban rebellion in Central Uganda, Allied Democratic Front, the Colonial Resistance, especially in Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom which made the British Colonial Government to elicit friends from Buganda Kingdom to help violently subdue Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom; the Lords Resistance Movement/Army of Joseph Kony war among others which are simmering over time from our civil war experience, thus breeding a generation which is inheriting such foe. There is notable name calling and discriminatory treatment for example; the *Baganda* are perceived to be money hungry, *the Banyankole* as arrogant, the *Karimajong* walk naked, and so on and so forth. Though these rows are not so pronounced, they are held public perceptions of different regions and tribes in Uganda.

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

An Anglican Man in Amuria district had donated his land out his free will to a local Anglican Church. The Church started a community school. However, conflict has erupted because apparently the donor of the land is threatening to withdraw his gift from the Anglican Church and Church-aided School so that he can instead donate it to the Catholic Church. The reason so far given is that he recently converted to Catholicism and wants to rescind his donation to the Anglican Church and School. The Ugandan Laws governing land do not condone such acts.



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We notice with concern that although religion is a very essential uniting factor, it is at the same time used to divide people and to mobilise and organise people for negative activities. The Kanungu inferno, where hordes of Christian faithfuls were massacred through cultist self-destruction, is reported to be associated with a run-away Catholic priest who took a modern-day evangelistic approach to Christianity akin to the Pentecostal Assemblies. Similarly, the Allied Democratic Front rebel groups in Western Uganda was reportedly a Muslim rebellion outfit, the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement of Joseph Kony has often been taken together with the Alice Lakwena Movement as rebels who fused Catholicism and African Mysticism to narrate their power source for leading these two rebellions.

Again, our concern is recognising the public perception in all these cases and how that perception has shaped these conflicts or their resolution. Unfortunately, many lives have been lost due to these religious and ethnic conflicts. We target the current generation of the youth to drive the non-violent conflict resolution agenda, and to resist soft spots for violence which also happens to be the only language the government and people of Uganda understand. So to prevent such violent scenarios, we tend to tame the youth at a tender age. *We have a saying that; "it might be hard to tame a strike or plant that is already bent; but you can tame it easily when it's still young"*; therefore, because youth are the majority population in our country; the better for them to unite as people of different religions and culture for a common cause of peace.

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

This year we have and are focusing on seven main areas for the Uganda beneficiaries that include:

- a. Humanitarian Interventions;
- b. Alternative Livelihoods and Nutrition Interventions;
- c. Land Conflict Transformation Interventions;
- d. Youth-to-youth nonviolent conflict transformation locally, EAC and the Great Lakes Region
 - i. Early Warning and Response National with CEWERU and OPM, EAC with East African Community Conflict Early Warning and Response Platform, and Great Lakes Programmes under the GPAC and International Conference of the Great Lakes Region and IGAD.
- e. Legal support to Indigenous and vulnerable communities through CRY- Legal, Governance and Security Programme, in collaboration with Uganda National NGO Forum, Northern Uganda Land Platform;
- f. Capacity building to the Traditional Structures for managing Land Conflicts under Customary Land Tenure systems, and to local leadership in Modern Debating Techniques, and mentorship for the young members in collaboration with 7 different Interest Groups that are working on land conflicts in Teso region and 6 Interest Groups working on land conflicts in Karamoja region



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- g. Peace Policy Advocacy under the Civil Society Peace Network Forum and OPM's Platform on Conflict Prevention and Peace Building;
- h. Children protection and facilitation under the Uganda Child Rights NGO Network, UCRNN, and in collaboration with War Child Holland, among others.

Under the youth-to-youth non-violent conflict resolution and mentorship activities we are equipping the youth with leadership skills and use of non-violent conflict resolution means to promote a culture of peaceful co-existence. This is coupled with us grooming the young CC members to take over from where we the senior youth leaders have taken CRY Uganda, hence demonstrating that it's possible for them to lead as youth and not to wait for us to get old. For our communities in Ngora *and Kumi districts (Teso region)* we are giving direct legal support to the indigenous and vulnerable communities, in particular the deaf, survivors of torture, children, widows and orphans affected by the war in Northern Uganda in terms of processing their documents, informing them about their entitlements and other legal procedures. We do this because customarily women assume land after men. We have also organized workshops targeting the youth in *Teso region* to sensitize them on their legal rights specifically on succession matters.

As a result of these activities, we have processed a number of documents for the widows and reached out to the police to release youth and other people who were arrested illegally. This is notwithstanding the capacity building to the local government actors in Modern Debating Techniques which is done on the backdrop that most of them particularly those coming on a political ticket have very little or no education at all; and legally educational qualifications are not required at this level, yet they influence developmental decisions in their constituencies. *As an example, we had a one sub county speaker testify that it was his first time to physically see the national constitution and the Local Government Act. Anthony Okanyum.* The legal support is our new department-CRY Legal and its led by a team of more than six young lawyers (both old and fresh graduates) who in most cases have some little time to give free service. We are providing the Bridge programme where our experts in Sign-Language Interpretation provide professional services for both the Clients and Justice, Law and Order actors to dispense justice for the people living with disabilities.

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

We build bridges among Christians (Anglican and Catholic), Muslims and the Baha'i faith as well as the indigenous cultures of the *Iteso* (dominant tribe), *Karamajong* and *Kumam* communities. Our programs are all inclusive for women, children, youth, and leaders in their own capacities. We don't look at people's background to intervene but look at the problem at hand.

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.*



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Our core approach is youth-to-youth conflict transformation in which the youth speak to fellow youth as well as their elders and other people in society on non-violent means of peace building.

We also integrate what we call theatre for peace and run our mass regional peace camps for the youth/members where the diverse African culture in Uganda is celebrated with people learning from each other's' cultures through music, dances, and sounding of cultural drums, among others.

We have modern youth debates offered through our debate and diplomacy academy, which is not just your typical physical structure but a pool of experts leading the influential debating, negotiation and diplomacy training and practice agenda. Under this approach we train youth and adults in articulation, diplomacy, research, analytic, case-development, speaking, teambuilding and negotiation skills where one is able to table a cause with a purpose. *For instance, some of our members attest to these skills, like one of the presenters on one of the leading radio stations in Acholi region is an alumni as well as a sister in Rwanda who proudly refers to herself as the Oprah Winfrey of Rwanda, all products of our debating approach. Agula Joseph Ogoror.* This is not withstanding the usual strategies of capacity building workshops on selected thematic areas, and networking with like-minded people, community dialogues on common social problems.

Our activities help to offer the target groups of youth, widows and vulnerable communities such as the deaf youth, families living in poverty and marginalisation with alternatives to preventing and overcoming the effects of conflict, address social gaps such as legal representation and support for the widows of war veterans to gain access and use of the property of their deceased husbands; means of survival for women and youth, equipping the local government leadership with practical modern debate skills to influence effective service delivery; and embark on an early preventive strategy for the youth to participate and lead the non-violence conflict resolution agenda both in schools and local communities.

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

We want to see a non-violent youth generation because up to the present day, the most attractive venture in Uganda is the use of violence riding on the back of the youth who are soft targets. So we exist to counter the negative public stereotype of exploiting the youth and instead sell to them a culture of non-violence, which according to our experience is hard to sell as experienced during the 20 year long war of Joseph Kony, where violence was preferred to peaceful talks. *Unlike violence which offers temporal success, we are selling to them non-violent means which provides enduring peace for all nations to come. Agula Joseph*



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

Our CC work has united different youth from all social, economic, ethnic, political and religious backgrounds. In fact, ours is simply a one-stop centre which is open to all youth who are committed to nonviolent communication and allegiance to community service delivery. *Unlike elsewhere where people serve until they become old, we don't discriminate on age simply to empower youth to believe in themselves as leaders of today not tomorrow. We also open to all people of all sex, faith, persons with special needs, name it, as long as they live in our society, they belong to us!* Agula Joseph Ogoror. In Uganda one of our members won a district election as Local Council V Chairperson, one is a regional Youth MPs, thanks to their association to some of the CRY Uganda team of Debate training, coaches and adjudicators who have since started repeater Debate Programmes, more than three young female leaders are leading CSOs organisations. Two have returned with Masters Degrees from the West.

CRY Uganda's track –record for mobilising, organising and energising young people in the Uganda, EAC and Great Lakes region has earned her a call from East African Community when in late 2013 CRY Uganda was requested to present the voice of children and youth into the EAC conflict Early Warning and Response platform. Without the non-state actors, more so the youth and children, EAC regional cooperation dream would be utopia. CRY Uganda's CC is therefore in the right place and time to contribute to youth-sensitive cooperation in the EAC block. Our activities mentioned above are some of those moments where people cooperate to address common social challenges or even celebrating humanity during festivities.

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

CRY Uganda has worked very closely with almost all faith groups in Uganda. We have always viewed religious diversity as a beautiful thing just like the ethnic, sex, racial or any other diversity shade. CRY Uganda has worked with Muslims communities and leaders in Uganda, Qatar, Indonesia, Somalia, Sudan, and with Nepali and Indian Hindus, and Krishna faithful's, the Thai Buddhists, the Catholics, and Anglicans from all over Africa and all over the world. We have interacted with the African traditionalists from Africa.

We exist to counter the negative public stereotype of exploiting the youth and sell to them a culture of non-violence. Through our core approach of youth-to-youth conflict resolution we are sending out a message to the world that the youth are good change agents and peace ambassadors endowed with enormous numbers and once tamed early, can contribute to enduring peace for the generations to come. We are fact-finding so we continue to design and executive evidence-based interventions.



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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?

When people of different religious or cultural backgrounds work together; it is a sign of cooperation. *By the way for some countries it's so difficult to bring people of different faiths to sit on the same table! Anthony Bernard Okanyum, an Advocate.*

We mobilize youth of different religious background, particularly Muslims, Ugandan Jews from Mbale, Christians and the Baha'i on non-violent conflict resolution. Our action areas do not discriminate on religious or cultural background. Some of our interfaith activities include documentation and assessing conflicts from an inter-faith lenses, transitional justice interventions, mass regional peace camps for the youth/members, interfaith peace walks and an interfaith football match along with a non-discriminatory reach out to all people (women, men, youth, local leaders and general community) who hail from different religions and culture.

During CRY Uganda's Annual Regional Youth Peace Camps, members of different faiths are given a platform to say their prayers and teach some of their religious values to each other. Although this may sound as simple things, they leave a lasting impression on the participants. Even in the communities where we work, people are able to use the same resources such as the community wells to draw water, worship places, markets and others.

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?

A month ago, during the national census, some of the enumerators from the Teso region did not get paid for their work and out of protest they were forced to withhold the enumerating materials! After assessing the situation through fact finding, we organized a peaceful demonstration and approached the Chief Administrative officer and Sub county chief of the area to demand accountability which led us to be arrested. However, we were released that same night with the enumerators getting their payments that very instant. We came to appreciate more that people of different faiths and cultures can be helped or mobilized to achieve a common goal because as I speak now, some enumerators of the neighbouring districts are still demanding their pay. *Anthony Bernard Okanyum.*

In December 7th to 8th 2014, CRY Uganda's Consultant in Sign-Language Interpretation and Programme Coordinator enabled the deaf youth in Kumi district to communicate to the Police Authorities. CRY Uganda's Peace Communication and CRY Legal Programme are cross-linked. Before the intervention of our Consultant, John Micheal Anyou, there was chaos at the Kumi Police Station because of the communication barriers between a group of 10 deaf youth and the Ugandan Police Force, as well as



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with the accused person. Our Special Needs expert provided professional interpretation services.

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

URI looks at peace as the ultimate goal thus through networking with organizations such as ours which deals with non-violent conflict resolution by youth and targeting people of different religions and ethnicities; this serves as our contribution to URI's mission. In short, CRY Uganda may actually be URI's youth and children arm. CRY Uganda is a defector youth and children peace building network, coalition and alliance in the Great Lakes region. We have even provided the useful bridges between CSOs and public administration, sometime the war-zones and the peace zones, and the different cultural shades. URI lives within CRY Uganda Structures.

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

We observe that people have psychological perceptions against each other's religions or even tribes and as a way of preventing conflict situations they opt to at all times desist from actions that could incite violence. Our membership is composed of Muslims, Christians and the Baha'i as well as the indigenous traditions, but what brings us together are the common social problems we face together with the people we serve.

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

URI has afforded us a rich platform for knowledge sharing and exposure to the very extreme corners of the world which we wouldn't have reached on our own. We look at URI as our mother who offers us guidance in the interfaith cooperation and peace building agenda; an ingredient which is critical to the youth.

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

The youth are suggesting that we need a mother as the head of the interfaith fraternity but we feel you are not maximizing your potential! As an interfaith cooperation circle, URI should re-position herself to lead this agenda! Why? Faith bodies and in particular, their leaders earn the trust of every living human being, the government leadership notwithstanding! And the power of numbers is URI's wealth but under exploited! Let URI do a mass mobilization of all CCs through regular meetings and empower the CC structures in terms of capacity building, institutional strengthening and coordination among others to move the agenda forward. As CRY we may sound big with a youth muscle and tailor-made programs, but we are constrained in fundraising and operate on a skeleton staff which limits our reach out to the people that need us. One reason is that most of the time we are engaged in the front line and we need URI to take on policy



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engagement and attend to deeper conflict research, analysis and the resource mobilization role. We need URI technical and policy making personnel in jungle boots with us to get the issues at the frontlines of the grassroots Great Lakes Region. Help us with inter-CC collaboration especially where the context is inter-country.

URI also needs to reflect on some aspects that prevail in its grassroots localities, for instance, usually in Uganda elections come with a lot of intrigue among politicians and the electorate; and as a neutral body, URI can set the election agenda through organizing peace activities.

In my earlier submission I expressed thus some political party presidents are seen running to one priest after the other in search of political blessings which is quite a misleading action as people will now lose focus by aligning religion to politics and URI should stand up for this! Agula Joseph. Anthony Okanyum adds that; Uganda should borrow a leaf from Tanzania as during Julius Nyerere's time, the several ethnicities in Tanzania had to lose freedom so that the nation could gain it.

URI also needs to provide a more interactive platform for experience sharing especially on statistical information (research based) which can act as a research bureau and a repository body of events of the time, the conflict trends and dynamics, public pronouncements of historical leaders, and methods used by the key actors. This can serve as an archive where the public gets to know URI as the reference point for such information. *We need to determine the political agenda such that we don't give a chance to anybody to exploit religion or ethnicity, including age, for promoting violence because I want a Muslim, Christian, Bahai, a mother, a youth to have access to services not the politicians taking advantage of these vulnerable groups. Agula Joseph Ogoror.*
