



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

UMODZI YOUTH ORGANIZATION

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Muslims, Hindus and Christians

Location of CC: Mbayani Blantyre, Malawi

Key Areas of Focus: conflict resolution, health, education, human rights, and good governance

Summary:

Umodzi Youth Organization (UYO) is located in Mbayani Blantyre, Malawi. Umodzi Youth Organization's focus work includes issues of conflict resolution, health, education, human rights, and government. UYO operates and facilitates various programs in low-income areas of Mbayani and Chirimba. The major objectives of UYO's programs are: to advance spirituality in communities, working in peace and harmony, as well as supporting each other regardless of origin, skin color, creed, and tradition, religious or cultural beliefs.

1. What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?

Umodzi Youth Organization (UYO) operates and facilitates various programmes mindful of its major objectives: to advance the spirit of living, working in peace and harmony, as well as supporting each other regardless of origin, skin color, creed, and tradition, religious or cultural beliefs. We strive to make the world a better place for all living beings. UYO's focus areas include the low-income areas of Mbayani and Chirimba townships where the residents currently live in harmony regardless of their religious, cultural and social differences. However, there's still some passive discrimination based on the three aforementioned factors.

2. Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?

Despite the population living in relative religious and cultural harmony, the interfaith/intercultural bridge building is still required to nip some minor elements of prejudice in the bud. These prominently feature when a Muslim wants to marry a Christian. We believe the bridge-building is also salient to avert further widening of social gaps resulting from financial status.



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3. Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out this year?

UYO CC in partnership with Youth Activists Initiative Organization is carrying out the “Lesson for Life Program,” in which parenting skills and childhood development feature prominently. The program which is being supported by UK based - Strategies for Hope Trust, ensures it involves participants from different religions.

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

Though passive, there are still some elements of religious prejudice between Christians and Muslims; and cultural aspects between the Chewa and the Lhomwe, the Yao and Tumbuka. We are working to combat these prejudices through our work.

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.

UYO CC uses wide participatory approach methods in its activities such as: seminars, workshops, and social development programs. We deliberately invite participants from different religious, cultural and social backgrounds to ensure spaces where all people are brought together to interact and cooperate.

6. Given the current context you described, what does your CC hope to achieve (goals)?

Our CC has already started making strides towards achieving its goals as evidenced by various development projects being implemented by people of different cultures and faiths. This had also been demonstrated in the URI funded Permacultural Natural Conservation and Climate Change project, where all people regardless of their cultural or religious background harmoniously worked together.

7. What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?

We observe an increase in tolerance of marriages between Muslims and Christians in the community.

8. Please share a specific short story about your CC's work that might teach a lesson about interfaith or inspire other CCs.

UYO was commissioned to conduct an issue-based civic and voter education campaign which entailed educating electorates ahead of the 2014 elections not to vote based on religion, ethnicity, regionalism, gender, or political party affiliation, but instead based on issues articulated by their candidates. Despite resistance towards the campaign in the beginning, the results were overwhelming, and we witnessed a change in the pattern of elections in the district where the project was being implemented. Candidates were



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voting based on their manifestos and other development project agenda. To achieve these results UYO CC made sure that the campaign was participatory and interactive regardless of people's backgrounds.

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

UYO CC's work is helping to achieve the mission of URI by ensuring that all peoples are living and working in peace and harmony, as well as supporting each other regardless of origin, skin color, creed, tradition and religious or cultural beliefs. We strive to make the world a better place for all living beings.

10. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? What are the challenges?

Our organization is comprised of members from several different faiths and cultural traditions including Muslims, Hindus, and Christians; Lhomwe, Chewa, Tumbuka and Yao. At UYO, CC decisions are collectively made through cooperative and interactive sessions for individual contribution towards achieving concerted initiatives. Where challenges arise, the CC applies the principle of tolerance through compromise.

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

Being part of URI has tremendously helped our CC get connected to the outside world and stay updated on international affairs through various internet platforms where CCs share lessons and experiences. UYO CC, before changing to its current name from CAST CC, has also benefited from some funding provided by URI for the implementation of Environmental Project.

12. Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?

URI could better support our CC by providing technical assistance on project delivery, visiting our offices in Malawi, as well as creating international forums where CC members can share experiences in person.