



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

MISERCORDE ASSOCIATION CC

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Muslim, Christian Catholic and Protestants, African Traditional.

Location of CC: Minembwe, South Kivu-DRC

Key Areas of Focus: Peace building (Reconciliation), Support orphans and Vulnerable Children in Education, Youth empowerment, Women skills building, Environmental protection, Civic Engagement, Interfaith Dialogue and Action

Key Languages: Kinyarwanda, Swahili, French, Kifulero

SUMMARY:

Misercorde Association CC operates in Minembwe, in the high plateau of South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The CC convenes about 50 members of the Muslim and Christian faiths to intervene on the effects of war in the DRC. The war has left many orphans and widows in dire need of support. Misercorde CC's primary focus is to provide services to war victims, primarily orphans and widows by helping them reconstruct, reconcile, forgive, and learn to live in peace. Misercorde also collects funds from members to send orphans back to school, and provides education for widows to work collaboratively and support each other by building skills in tailoring. The CC is also committed to environmental protection by raising awareness and action in environmental efforts. As a CC working in a nation stricken by war, MISERCORDE strives to create an interfaith effort among people of different religions to connect on common social problems in order to spur peaceful co-existence and development in the area.

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

The people of Minembwe are yet to recover from a past marred by ethnic tensions between the Banyamulenge ethnic group (Congolese of ethnic Tutsi origin), the Babembe, and the Bafulero all living in South Kivu. The animosity is brought about by frequent raids against each other for livestock or land, along with the persistent violence in the region, which draws in several multiple Congolese and foreign armed groups. Misercorde is committed to mobilizing and restoring relationships among communities of the Muslim (dominant), Catholic and Protestant faiths, towards a culture and a future of peaceful co-existence



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without war or anarchy. Antoinette Masoso shares a sneak peak impression about the current situation of the area:

“... In Minembwe, a high mountain in the south of Kivu in DRC, just as there are different religions in the World, even in DRC we have different religions. The persistent war which started long ago during the pre-colonial era has generated a great deal of depression and instability the population chiefly in the East of the country. It has brought awful draw back on the entire population, mostly among the socially vulnerable groups, women and children. In fact, we have observed a heavy mortality due to great slaughter and murder. We have also observed the rape of women and little girls committed by gun men in different villages giving birth to a lot of Widows, orphans, forsaken women exposed to sexually transmitted diseases especially HIV/AIDS. Most of these women and little girls are crowded in MINEMBWE where they are leading a dreadful life. These widows have trouble taking care of the food needs of their families, medical care, etc for they are helpless. This background defines our story of intervention to the war victims of Minembwe village to prevent deviation of these children and allowing widows a ray of hope through support.”

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

Our area of operation is one that has suffered persistent war dating back to the pre-colonial times where setting ethnic groups and armed factions against each other was the norm. The country's road to peace is one that requires the cooperation and commitment of every member of society to appreciate that peaceful action begins with them. This explains our point of departure for reconciliation to heal the wounds of the war and encourage people to forgive each other for committed crimes.

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

Our activities this year are mainly focused on peacebuilding (reconciliation), support to orphans and vulnerable children through education, skill building for women, environmental protection, and interfaith dialogue and action. With the war orphans now aged between 8 to 14 years, we continue to fundraise as members to raise money for school fees and other scholastic materials. At this point we thank the MIDAC Ministry which decided this year to initiate a project for providing scholastic help to some orphan children for the duration of a year. We are also building the skills of women in tailoring to enable them to earn a living and help support their families. We have a total of three sewing machines which the women share as a group. We take pride in our tree planting and awareness exercises on environmental protection. This year we took advantage of the International Day of Peace to plant more trees and disseminate messages within the Minembwe neighborhood on conserving the environment. As members we visit each other for moral support, sharing on social issues, and devising means where we can promote our work in a more effective way.



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

Our work spreads across people of Muslim, Catholic and Protestant faiths. We engage individuals in interfaith dialogue and action in places of worship and through radio talk shows on radio Minembwe. We emphasize the importance to co-exist as sisters and brothers with one common culture, which is Congolese and to minimize discriminatory tendencies based on ethnicity or religion.

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.*

Our areas of work are always defined by the methods we use to bring together people of different cultures and faiths. For instance, during our initial forming we came together as people of Islamic and Christian backgrounds, as well as from different ethnicities such as the *Banyamulenge*, the *Babembe*, and *Bafulero*, in order to support war victims, women and orphans to reconstruct their lives through skill-building and education. The religious gathering became neutral ground where we encouraged people to live together in peace through love, peace messages, and awakening them to the binding factor of Congolese as one uniting culture. The radio talk shows are also helpful in expanding our reach to the very remote areas of Minembwe and the entire South Kivu. During the talk shows, some of our members give peace messages and provide discussions on the rampant problems faced by youth with early marriages, teenage pregnancies, HIV, AIDS, and other reproductive health issues.

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

We want to see a Congo of peace. We want to prepare our next generation through education and creation of opportunities for them to be better placed in elevating their status. We believe this vision will be realized through supporting our orphans.

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

Our services target the entire community of Minembwe. When women gain the skills in tailoring to start own businesses to make different fabrics, the public is availed with new clothing. When it comes to supporting orphans, the general society is relieved of the would-be spill over associated with children out of school such as crime activity, early marriages, and pregnancies. By responding to community needs, we are directly enhancing cooperation of people from all walks of life because of the common challenges they face.



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

We have experienced war as a nation and each of us has witnessed how ugly it can be: tearing families apart, breaking the social fabric, and suffocating development. As a CC therefore, our emphasis is for people to respect each other's religion or culture in order to avoid future wars.

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?

I observe that the cooperation of our members is healthy in the manner in which we work together to address fellow members' problems as well as the people we serve. We encourage knowledge sharing and use our meetings to reinforce our relationships through fellowship and community service work, as seen with tree planting. The passion to empower our groups is also visible in the fundraising spirit for our programs. Our members give in the little they have to keep the programs going.

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

Just as URI's mission is creating a network of interfaith, peace and justice around the world, Misericorde's goal is to engage people to bridge religious and cultural differences.

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

We see a people that are committed to forgetting the haunting past of war for peace in the nation. For instance, it's common to find people of different faiths associating with a Catholic or Protestant church to work together on community issues such as HIV/AIDS and reproductive health problems. The challenges we face include having no connection to the internet and mobile phones with poor reception, mainly due to our remote location very far from the city.

"For example, I had to commute to town today in order to do this profiling interview. This means I have to incur transport costs, leave aside office work, meet the internet café fees and endure a harsh journey of our roads." -Antoinette Masoso.

Our public transportation is very poor and it affects our mobility. We also suffer from limited funds to meet the scholastic and other basic needs of orphans and women.



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

Yes of course! Our subscription to URI has opened us to a global learning experience through interaction with people of diverse cultures and religions. I am very confident that this wide exposure will help us to improve our knowledge in global interfaith and peacebuilding approaches and connect us to more partners that may find our cause worthwhile.

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

URI can support us by sharing ideas and experiences in peacebuilding and development.

Below are pictures taken during this year's International Day of Peace celebrations with Messages of environmental protection were amplified to put end deforestation:



