

AFRICAN SISTERS EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE (ASEC)

APRIL 1, 2019 TO MARCH 31, 2022  
PILOT PHASE (SLDI V)

# INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM

## ASEC Special Evaluation Report



PREPARED FOR: THE CONRAD N. HILTON FOUNDATION  
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## April 2022 ASEC Special Evaluation Report

### Pilot Institutional Capacity Building (ICB) Program

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African Sisters  
Education Collaborative

2300 Adams Avenue  
Scranton, PA

t: 570.961.4700  
e: [admin@asec-sldi.org](mailto:admin@asec-sldi.org)

To contact staff,  
visit [asec-sldi.org](http://asec-sldi.org)

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@ASECSLDIHESA



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## **ASEC Evaluation Administrative Leadership:**

- Sr. Mary Perisco, IHM, Ed.D., President, Marywood University
- Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, Ph.D., Executive Director, ASEC
- Tara Lopatofsky, Ph.D., CCLS, Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation
- Jaime Bloxham, MPA, Program Manager, SLDI & Service Learning

## **ASEC Staff Contributors to this Report:**

### **U.S. Headquarters**

- Sr. Nancy Kamau, LSOSF, Director of Development
- Rosemary Shaver, M.Ed., Senior Program Manager, HESA & Scholarships
- Betsy Hartshorn, Finance Manager
- Francesca Saldan, M.A., Data Manager
- Kim Scalese, Office Manager
- Monica Simon, Web Content Manager
- Sneh Akruvala, Ph.D., Data Manager/Analyst
- Tara D'Amico, Program Manager
- Emily Culligan, Research Assistant, HESA & Scholarships
- Shelby Ohotnick, Graduate Assistant, SLDI
- Anna Overman, Graduate Assistant, HESA
- Sr. Prisca Phiri, Graduate Assistant, SLDI
- Amanda Tyrrell, Graduate Assistant, HESA

### **East & Central Africa**

- Sr. Lina Wanjiku Ndung'u, SE, Regional Director East & Central Africa
- Sr. Joyce Kwamboka Nyakwama, SSND, Director – Kenya
- Sr. Joyce Rita Karambu, NSA, Programs Coordinator – Kenya
- Sr. Anacletta Lempe, FSCG, Director – Lesotho
- Sr. Hilaria Chombo, SBVM, Director – Malawi
- Sr. Teresa Mulenga, TS, Programs Coordinator – Malawi
- Sr. Veronica Daniel Othow, SHS, Director – South Sudan
- Sr. M. Tryphina Burchard, STH, Director – Tanzania
- Sr. Maria Telesphora, COLU, Programs Coordinator – Tanzania
- Sr. Mary Germina Keneema, MSMMC, Director – Uganda
- Sr. Monica Opige Ajok, LSMIG, Programs Coordinator – Uganda
- Sr. Juliana Chibaula Zulu, RGS, Director – Zambia
- Sr. Patricia Mulenga, SOM, Programs Coordinator – Zambia

### **West Africa**

- Sr. Francisca Damoah, SIJ, Regional Director West Africa
- Sr. Martha Attakruh, SHCJ, Programs Coordinator – Ghana
- Sr. Clarisse Remjika Jaiwo, SST, Director – Cameroon
- Sr. Mbom MaryCleophas Afumbom, SUSC, Programs Coordinator – Cameroon
- Sr. Veronica Fatoyinbo, SNDdeN, Director – Nigeria
- Sr. Clare Abisola Adedokun, DHS, Programs Coordinator – Nigeria

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**On the Cover:** SLDI-ICB targeted institutional capacity participants pose for a picture in Ghana.

To request a full copy of any of ASEC's evaluation reports, please contact [tara.lopatofsky@asec-sldi.org](mailto:tara.lopatofsky@asec-sldi.org).

# Introduction

Institutional Capacity Building (ICB) is understood as a process of developing skills, abilities, systems, and resources of an organization in a logical, systematic, and timely manner, so that the organization can fulfill its overall mission to optimum effect and to operate to its full potential in everything that it does. The two arms of institutional capacity building consist of training and empowering personnel and building systems to improve efficiency and effectiveness of organizational performance. Central to capacity building is the idea to induce a policy or a general direction that can guide actions and development of the capacity of organizations in the long term (Ika & Donnelly, 2017).

Since 2007, ASEC, through grants received from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, has successfully carried out professional skills training and educational upgrading of individual sisters through the Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) and Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA), respectively. The SLDI and HESA programs continue to register positive results as individual sisters impact communities through their ministries across 10 African countries, namely: Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. On one hand the value of training and skills improvement of individual sisters remain crucial for capacity development of congregations and remains an important part of the capacity building process. On the other hand, it also remains true that many congregations in Africa lack proper management systems to effectively put to use their human, financial, and physical resources. The urgency to strengthen institutional capacity of congregations in Africa has become necessary, especially as religious women take on leadership positions and continuously engage with the public through their ministries.

## **ICB WITHIN SLDI PHASE V**

In SLDI Phase V, ASEC proposed to incorporate institutional capacity building (ICB) for national conferences and congregations of women religious to run alongside the leadership training of individual sisters. The long-term expected impact of the ICB Program being to expand leadership and organizational management capacity of women religious in Africa through the creation of strengthening of internal systems of congregations and national conferences, in areas such as governance, strategic planning, human resources management, asset management, and data management. It was anticipated that in this pilot phase of the ICB Program, two countries would be served, one in West Africa (Ghana) and one in East Africa (Uganda).

## **ICB SPECIAL REPORT**

The following sections of this report detail the progress made in ICB's pilot phase, as well as the challenges encountered and the necessary adjustments made as a result.

## **3 OBJECTIVES**



Improve prioritized areas of internal systemic need within national conferences and congregations through a targeted capacity building process.



Promote inter-congregational learning, networking, and mentorship through convenings and mentorship pairings.



Disseminate best practices and learnings from the Institutional Capacity Building Program to increase the reach and impact of the program, as well as literature in the field on this topic.



# Learnings from Year 1

April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020



The ICB Program completed its first year of capacity building in March 2020. In ICB Year 1, ASEC partnered with consultants in Ghana to primarily focus on building the vitality and internal capacity of the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious in Ghana (CMSRGH), a national institute/conference of women and men religious.

In addition, in Year 1, ICB Superior Workshops began to take place in the 10 countries ASEC serves. The purpose of ICB Superiors Workshops was to develop congregation leaders' capacities in an area of systemic improvement, such as strategic planning or financial management, the topics of which are determined by leaders of the national conference/association.

Key learnings from Year 1 are shared below.

## ICB Superiors Workshops in Year 1 were held in:

- Zambia on data & financial management
- Ghana on strategic planning & strategy formulation



## ICB PROGRAM YEAR 1: KEY LEARNING POINTS IN BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL VITALITY



### Committed & Knowledgeable Partners

Collaboration with dedicated, engaged partners (i.e., consultants) who are knowledgeable about their areas of expertise, as well as religious life, were integral in making institutional changes. It is also important that consultants are able to adapt the approach and methodology to suit the local context.



### Participatory, Transparent & In-Depth Organizational Assessments

Assessing the organization from multiple stakeholder perspectives, with trusted relationships in place, can reveal significant issues within the institution and areas of potential growth.



### On-Boarding of Stakeholders (i.e., Generating Buy-In & Trust)

Allocating time to engage the leadership of the institution to buy into and appreciate the need for organizational assessment and development is crucial. In Ghana, acknowledging and gaining permission from the Bishops, including the Chairperson and the In-Charge of Religious Life, was a key ingredient in not only accessing CMSRGH but also facilitating ownership of the capacity building process and contextualizing the ICB program. Awareness of stakeholders who are invisible yet serve as gatekeepers in determining the acceptance of the ICB program (i.e., Ecclesial Leaders) is essential, and helps facilitate trust between all parties involved in the program.



### Improved Communication and Relationships

Regular meetings among CMSRGH executive leaders were put in place to discuss internal systems issues. One executive leader commented that over the past four years, there was a struggle to come together to legally register the National Conference. However, within several months of beginning the capacity building process, legal registration was achieved. There is also more communication among the congregations of women religious.



### Building Capacity Can Create a Ripple Effect

Building organizational capacity in certain areas sometimes revealed new opportunities for further capacity building within, and outside, the institution. For example, once the institution obtained its legal status, it became possible to build a registered member database, gain land rights, improve financial management systems (including discovery of unused assets) and work with large-scale funders. There were also ripple effects outside the institution. As Superiors of congregations were able to work with the consultants through training workshops, congregations sought assistance from the consultants to help with their own legal registration, strategic planning, and/or other internal system needs.



### The Need for Individualized Processes and Goals

Each institution has unique needs, challenges and strengths, and there may be new discoveries about the institution throughout the capacity building process. The ability to remain flexible, adapt the capacity building plan and creatively problem solve were very important in achieving milestones with CMSRGH. The process also revealed that sensitization on best practices should be done to support institutions in initiating a path towards capacity development.

# Achievements Made in Year 2

April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021



The ICB Program completed its second year of capacity building in March 2021. In ICB Year 2, **ASEC completed its partnership with consultants in Ghana to build the vitality and internal capacity of the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious in Ghana (CMSRGH)**, a national institute/conference of women and men religious. In addition, in Year 2, **ICB Superior Workshops continued to take place** in the 10 countries ASEC serves.

Year 2 of ICB implementation was **greatly effected by the COVID-19 pandemic** and many delays were encountered. This was especially true in regards to ICB Objective 2, which outlined that the program would hold convenings and provide mentorship pairings.

Key achievements from Year 2 are shared below.

## ICB Superiors Workshops in Year 2 were held in:

- **Cameroon** on data collection/ management & strategic planning
- **Lesotho** on leadership/ admin & financial management
- **Malawi** on resource mobilization & partnership
- **South Sudan** on ethical leadership & finance
- **Tanzania** on leadership & admin

## ICB PROGRAM YEAR 2: NATIONAL CONFERENCE + CONGREGATION ACHIEVEMENTS



### Overall Strengthening of Governance & Policies

As part of their five-year Strategic Plan, the national conference implemented several internal systems that will assist them in governance. The conference was reorganized to include a governance executive council of seven members, as well as a management layer consisting of secretariat staff. Financial and administrative policies were developed and implemented. A constitution was mounted to guide the activities of the conference and a monitoring and evaluation framework was developed, including a budget to carry out the plan.



### Appointment of Administrative Staff

In order to effectively lead the national conference, it was determined that individuals would need to be appointed to carry out key leadership roles. An administrator was appointed, as well as a resource mobilization officer. Members were also elected to the executive council- spearheaded by the President.



### Increased Engagement of National Conference Member Congregations

Member institutes were mobilized as a result of the strengthening of the national conference. At the conclusion of Year 2's engagement, 48 institutes were registered with the national conference.



### Equivalency Determination Status Achieved

As a by-product of engaging with the consultants, the national conference was able to achieve equivalency determination status which allows US-based funders to transact with the conference.



### Increased Funding

Strengthening the internal systems of the national conference has attracted donor funding, increasing the availability of funds for vital projects. In addition, funds legally allocated to the national conference were also discovered.



### Legal Incorporation of Conference & Institutions

The conference achieved legal incorporation in Ghana which will allow them to own assets and properties, sue and be sued, and operate bank accounts. Legal incorporation also increases visibility and credibility in the eye of the public. A total of 10 institutions were also able to achieve legal incorporation.



### Progress Made Towards Building Secretariat

In order to provide physical credibility to the national conference architectural design plans were made to build a secretariat. Land rights were also registered and the land was walled.



### Development of Websites & Logo

With the assistance of the consultants the national conference and the two identified congregations were all able to develop websites to enhance their visibility. As part of this endeavor, the national conference also developed a logo.

# Conclusions Drawn in Year 3

April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022



The ICB Program completed its third year of capacity building in March 2022. In ICB Year 3, ASEC renewed its partnership with consultants in Ghana to begin the vitality and internal capacity building process with the Association of Religious in Uganda (ARU), a national institute/conference of women and men religious. In addition, in Year 3, ICB Superior Workshops concluded with workshops taking place in three additional countries (10 workshops total, in 9 countries).

Due to challenges encountered in Year 3, including COVID-19 related lockdowns and leadership transitions, not all anticipated outputs/outcomes were able to be achieved in the ICB pilot phase. The targeted capacity building process in Uganda will continue into SLDI Phase VI, Year 1, with hope that it will conclude by April 2023.

Overall successes and challenges of the ICB pilot phase are listed below.

## ICB Superiors Workshops in Year 3 were held in:

- Nigeria on transition & succession planning
- Kenya on grant/proposal writing
- Zambia (second workshop) on basic technology



## ICB PILOT PROGRAM CONCLUSIONS: SUCCESSES + CHALLENGES



### 10 ICB Superior Workshops Held

A total of 10 ICB Superior Workshops were able to be held, despite challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, two workshops were held in Zambia and no workshop was held in Uganda due to the country's engagement in the targeted capacity building process.



### Committed ICB Consultants

The consultants selected to work on the capacity building processes in Ghana and Uganda have been extremely adaptable and dedicated, and possess a nuanced understanding of religious life. They also have expertise in strategic planning, organizational structuring, governance practices, and other areas that have been vital to the capacity building process. These qualities have been instrumental in achieving ICB success.



### Exceeded Expectations in Ghana

Progress in Ghana was a result of the continued participatory, transparent, and in-depth assessment that was conducted by the consultants. The generation of confidence, trust, and buy-in amongst all parties involved was essential in the ICB process and crucial for success.



### Engagement in Uganda

The program was able to begin the target capacity building process in Uganda and an institutional capacity assessment was completed in Year 3. The national conference in Uganda is now making strides to build capacity in identified areas of weakness and it is hoped that this will conclude by March 2023.



### ICB Superior Workshop Logistics

With the purpose of the ICB Workshops changing close to implementation, execution and evaluation of these workshops was a challenge. Topics selected for the 2-3 day workshops were intensive and difficult to cover in such a short period of time. COVID-19 delayed workshop scheduling, which pushed workshops to be held in all three years of the phase. Data collection and evaluation from these workshops proved difficult due to these changes.



### Discovery of Higher Needs

There were significant internal systems issues within the national conference in Ghana that were unknown to ASEC staff and the consultants prior to the capacity building process, the most significant of which was that the conference was in need of legal status. This lengthened the original estimate of time allotted for the targeted capacity building process, as well as increased the financial support required to complete the process.



### Cancellation of Convenings

Anticipated large convenings and some workshops were unable to be held due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the unexpected intensiveness of other aspects of the ICB Program limited availability to plan such convenings.



### Congregation & Mentorship Engagement

Due to unforeseen challenges encountered with resource limitations, the COVID-19 pandemic, and leadership turnover, no congregations were able to be engaged in the targeted capacity building process in Uganda and the mentorship component of the program was eliminated altogether.



## AFRICAN SISTERS EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE (ASEC)

The mission of ASEC is to facilitate access to education for women religious in Africa that leads to the enhancement and expansion of the education, health, economic, social, environmental, and spiritual services they provide. Established in 1999, ASEC was built on a foundation of solidarity and global sisterhood developed between Catholic sisters in the USA and Africa. The organization continues to forge partnerships that enable ASEC to grow, and, in turn, benefit sisters and the people they serve.

ASEC's vision is to be a sustainable organization with a proven capacity to collaborate, develop and deliver educational programs that strengthen the capacity of women religious in Africa. In order to accomplish this, the organization is informed by six core values: transformation, collaboration, leadership, service, capacity building and reverence.

