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# ASEC Special Evaluation Report

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



## QUALITY EDUCATION: ASEC'S IMPACT



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April 2020

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# Quality Education: ASEC's Impact

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**On the Cover:** SLDI participants of Administration Track visit school children in Fukayosi Villiage in Tanzania.

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# Introduction

The central goal of this special evaluation report of the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) is to explore how alumnae of the Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) and the Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) programs are impacting ministries in primary and secondary education in Africa. Annual evaluation reports of each program show that many alumnae work in primary and secondary education as teachers and headmistresses. Reports also show evidence that alumnae in education ministries improve the internal systems of schools, have taken on various leadership positions, and have mobilized resources to improve the quality of education for children in ASEC's 10 countries of operation. ASEC's 10 countries of operation include Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Therefore, this report will take a deeper look at how the SLDI and HESA programs are enabling sisters to make positive impacts in their ministries and improve education for all.

This is the second special report produced by ASEC both of which have focused on qualitative data. Through its special reports, ASEC aims to provide a complete picture of the outcomes and impact of ASEC's programs.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question for this special evaluation report stemmed directly from each program's evaluation objectives. The central research questions to be answered by this report is: What impact do alumnae of the SLDI and/or HESA programs have on their education ministries in Africa?

## METHODOLOGY

ASEC staff, with the assistance of key stakeholders, developed specific indicators of measurement for success in the field of education. The developed objective measures of impact were then used to create an applied Education Ministries Survey and were also included in the annual 2020 ASEC Alumnae Survey. This was the first instance in which the Education Ministries Survey was distributed to alumnae. Sisters who indicated serving in ministries related to primary and secondary education were asked questions surrounding the developed indicators, results of which were collected via Survey Monkey. This produced qualitative data that was then analyzed for themes using NVivo 11 software, employing the constant comparative method for analysis.

## PARTICIPANTS

Purposive convenience sampling was used to identify which program participants would be surveyed. Only SLDI/HESA alumnae who met specific criteria were selected to complete the survey. Required criteria included graduation from the SLDI and/or HESA program, verification of service in an education ministry by ASEC staff and agreement to complete the survey. Also, to be included in this report, alumnae must have indicated that they were currently serving in an education ministry at the primary or secondary school level. Efforts were made to include participants from each of ASEC's countries of operation. Using this selection criteria, Education Ministry Surveys were sent to 109 ASEC alumnae. In total 33 sisters completed the survey (17 SLDI, 7 HESA, and 9 both). One sister, an SLDI alumna, agreed to be interviewed via Zoom. In addition, 511 sisters (401 SLDI, 157 HESA, and 47 both) completed the newly added education ministry section of the 2020 ASEC Alumnae Survey.



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# Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education

In 2015, all United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As part of this agenda, SDG 4 is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."<sup>1</sup> Progress towards meeting SDG 4 is measured by a set of 10 targets and their corresponding indicators. Targets include free, equitable and quality primary/ secondary education for all, increased literacy/ numeracy, improved education facilities, and an increased supply of qualified teachers, among others. Sub-Saharan Africa ranks among the regions least anticipated to meet SDG 4 targets, having the highest rates of education exclusion and an overall lack of resources.<sup>2</sup>

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Inclusive and quality education is the key to achieving all of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. Increased education allows people to break out of the cycle of poverty and empowers them to lead sustainable and healthy lives.<sup>1</sup> However, 18% (262 million) of youths, aged 6-17 years, remain out of school and it is anticipated that this number will only decrease to 14% (225 million) by 2030.

In addition, progress towards reducing the number of children out of school in low and middle income countries has halted since 2010. Many schools lack adequate infrastructure, qualified teachers, and the basic resources necessary to provide quality education. This is attributable to the lack of public aid provided to the education sector by governments since that time.<sup>3</sup>

These statistics indicate a need to continue to provide services in the education sector, in low and middle income countries, a role many women religious find themselves fulfilling.

Knowledge gained through ASEC's prior evaluative studies indicates that the largest number of program alumnae are serving in education ministries, many in rural, high need areas.

## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The education sector in sub-Saharan Africa is particularly in need of additional support and services. Since 2000, the proportion of trained teachers in sub-Saharan Africa has significantly decreased. This is due to schools hiring teachers without qualifications to cover teacher shortages at a lower cost.<sup>4</sup> This highlights the importance of providing access to training and educational credentials throughout the region, through programs such as SLDI and HESA.

## WOMEN + GIRLS

Given the low quality of public education in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, parents are often reluctant to make sacrifices to send their girl children to school.<sup>4</sup> Women and girls' lack of access to education translates into limited skills and opportunity in the labor market.

Without specific attention given to women and girls' education, worldwide gender quality may never be achieved.<sup>4</sup>



# Education Indicators of Impact

To complete the 2020 ASEC Special Report, a committee of key stakeholders was convened to support the process of generating the required information. This committee was asked to review a set of indicators, originally developed by ASEC staff based upon a review of the current literature in this area. The indicators aim to measure the impact of ASEC alumnae in education ministries in Africa. The committee was asked to review the validity of the proposed indicators and to recommend the addition of any other important areas of measurement. Based on feedback obtained from the committee, a final set of indicators was developed. These indicators informed the questions on the ASEC Special Report 2020 Education Ministries Survey, which was then distributed to selected participants. The indicators focus on five thematic areas, listed here. The results of this special evaluation project are subsequently arranged in this report according to these five indicators.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## FIVE INDICATORS

### 1. Student Performance

- Higher Completion Rates
- Improvements in Test Scores
- Improved Integrated, or Holistic, Learning
- Improvement in Implementation of the Curriculum

### 2. Access to Education

- Increased Enrollment
- Increased Access to Education

### 3. Learning Environment

- Improvements to School Facilities
- Improved School Safety
- Increased Resources for School

### 4. School Systems/Operations

- Improved Systems within Schools
- High Retention Rate of Teachers
- Improved Levels of Communication
- Staff Training
- Improved Evaluation
- Long-Term Planning

### 5. Alumnae Performance

- Additional Responsibilities
- Professional Development Trainings
- Innovations
- High levels of Job Satisfaction
- Personal and/or Professional Actualization

# 1. Student Performance

Academic performance is typically used as a measure of the quality and quantity of knowledge and skills students achieve through schooling. Further, the World Bank posits that academic performance can be evaluated by the grades a student achieves on examinations and end of semester/year grade point averages.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, improved student academic performance is a standard to which quality education can be measured. SDG 4 (Target 4.1) aims to ensure that all girls and boys complete "quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes."<sup>6</sup> Results of this evaluative study indicate that ASEC alumnae are improving their students' academic performance in a variety of ways, assisting in the achievement of this target.

## SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES

Twenty-eight (28) sisters indicated that they have contributed to increasing their students' school completion rates. When asked how they accomplished this, the majority stated that it was through positive student interactions such as relationship building with students and improving guidance and counseling resources at the school. Sisters also attributed improved completion rates to maintaining good standards (i.e. no repeat policies, individualized education plans, reduced class size), improving collaboration (i.e. teamwork, parental involvement, holding stakeholder meetings), providing better leadership (i.e. supervision, better record keeping), financial interventions, and assisting in building the capacity of other teachers.

|| My school is now the school of choice, transfers, drop outs have decreased.  
-HESA Alum #2

## HOLISTIC LEARNING

Twenty-nine (29) sisters reported that they have improved the level of integrated or holistic learning at their school. The types of activities the sisters have implemented in order of frequency were: life skills lessons, religious activities, games and sports, community engagement, environmental activities, guidance counseling, and choir.

## STUDENT TEST SCORES

Thirty-two (32) sisters reported that since completing an ASEC program they have helped to improve their students' test scores. Study participants attributed the increases to encouraging/motivating students, utilizing effective teaching practices, increasing monitoring and evaluation, providing interventions for low learners, employing qualified teachers, and teamwork.

In addition, in the 2020 ASEC Alumnae Survey 26% (N = 511) of ASEC alumnae reported that they helped improved student test scores after completion of either the SLDI or HESA programs.

|| [Student test scores increased by] empowering the average and poor performing students to attain their potential in education.  
-SLDI/HESA Alum #11

## CURRICULUM

Twenty-six (26) sisters stated that they have improved the curriculum at their school. The most common way sisters reported doing so was through organizing teacher workshops or training. Sisters also stated that increased supervision, attending workshops themselves, and having necessary learning materials available also contributed to this improvement.

## 2. Access to Education

A key focus of SDG 4 is to ensure inclusive education for all, regardless of where a person resides, their income, or their gender. However, children and adolescents from the richest 20% of the population, continue to score much higher in reading and math proficiency than the poorest 20%, as do those from urban areas in comparison to those residing in rural localities.<sup>7</sup> Studies have also found that effective leadership is crucial to the implementation of inclusive practices and ultimately creating sustainable change within school systems.<sup>8</sup>

### STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Twenty-six (26) sisters reported on the Education Ministries Survey that since completing an ASEC program they have helped increase enrollment at their school. Ways in which the sisters were able to achieve this was through increased advertising (i.e. radio announcements, posters, appeals to the community), improving the school's academic performance and thus bringing in more students, word of mouth (i.e. student alumnae advocating for new student enrollment), and improving the school facilities (i.e. building infrastructure, purchasing equipment).

In addition, in the 2020 ASEC Alumnae Survey 27% of alumnae serving in education ministries reported assisting in increasing enrollment in their schools after completing the SLDI and/or HESA programs.

### GIRL-CHILD ENROLLMENT

Focusing specifically on girl-child enrollment, 22 sisters indicated that they helped their school in making increases. This was accomplished through three main endeavors: advocacy and education about the importance of girl-child education, implementing a girl-child friendly learning environment, and offering scholarships or sponsorship to girl children.

### ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

Seventeen (17) sisters indicated that they have assisted in increasing access to education in remote/rural areas, through things like building a school or increasing its catchment area in remote/under-served areas. Sisters indicated this was done through offering scholarships or sponsorship to children from remote areas, promoting the school/advertising, and directly serving in remote areas.

It is worth noting that we are really in a remote and rural area where education is not yet a priority and evangelization as a whole is still at the primary level. The bore hole we intend to do for the school will equally serve the local communities.

-SLDI Alum #27

On the 2020 ASEC Alumnae Survey, 13% (N = 511) of alumnae reported working to increase access to education in rural areas after completing the SLDI and/or HESA programs. This percentage was slightly higher for SLDI alumnae (15%, n = 60) than for HESA alumnae (12%, n = 18).

However, overall the reported percentage was highest for sisters who completed both the SLDI and HESA programs (21%, n = 10).

Presently, in my new mission area, we are working hard to extend the catchment area by going into Hinterland and farm settlement area to talk about the need and benefit of girl-child education.

-SLDI Alum #33



# 3. Learning Environment

The school learning environment is listed as Indicator 4a under SDG 4, emphasizing the need to "build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all." <sup>6</sup> Within this indicator, improvements to school building structures, access to clean water and sanitation facilities, access to computers, and access to electricity and internet services are all specifically noted as aspects of the learning environment that, when in place, will help achieve quality education for all.

## MOBILIZING RESOURCES + IMPROVING SCHOOL FACILITIES

Twenty-three (23) sisters indicated that they have mobilized resources to help improve school facilities. Mostly this was accomplished through grant writing efforts and engaging parents in fundraising. In fewer cases, sisters sought funds from the local community, their congregation or through income generating activities. Also 17 sisters stated specific improvements made to the school, which include construction of: toilets (4), laboratories (4), classroom blocks (4), administrative offices (4), dormitories (2), boreholes (2), and a water pump (1). Funds were also used to improve agricultural projects, obtain academic materials, and pay teacher salaries, among other improvements. In the 2020 Alumnae Survey, 17.2% (N = 511) of all alumnae reported making improvements to school facilities.



Sr Esther Waithera (center), LSOSF, an SLDI alumna, collaboratively implemented an innovative water filtration project in Kenya which serves a congregation-run school, as well as the greater community.

## SAFETY + SECURITY

Thirteen (13) sisters implemented safety policies in schools, including policies on substance abuse, discipline, and bullying. Also 12 sisters reported making improvements to the school facilities in order to improve security which was accomplished through building fences, installing electricity or security lights, or obtaining safety equipment. Other sisters report monitoring school visitors (5), increasing parental involvement (4), hiring security guards (4) and improved communication (2) as safety measures they implemented.

### IMPROVED SCHOOL FACILITIES LINKED TO INCREASES IN ENROLLMENT

There has been increased enrollment at my school because when we were funded to build a 1 x 3 Science Laboratory, the old 1 x 2 Laboratory was turned into a classroom block thereby increased the junior classes from 2 stream to 3 streams.

-SLDI/HESA Alum #11

Increasing of the resources for the school was made possible by the increased enrollment of the pupils.

-SLDI/HESA Alum #10

I have helped in increment of girl child enrollment especially for vulnerable children. I have increased infrastructures such as classroom, latrines and kitchen cum dining hall.

-SLDI Alum #21



## 4. School Systems & Operations

The UN Education for All Agenda notes the lack of effective management systems in schools in Africa and less developed countries.<sup>9</sup> The agenda highlights the need for institutional capacity building in schools, higher levels of accountability, and increased collaboration and effectiveness on the local level. The World Bank<sup>10</sup> has also stressed the importance of effective governance and management systems in schools in sub-Saharan Africa; there is a need for accountability and professionally trained school leaders to offer quality academic education for students.

### SCHOOL SYSTEMS + LONG TERM PLANNING

Nearly all sisters (29) reported that they improved internal systems within their schools. About half (14) reported the creation or improvement of policy manuals in child protection, school regulations or human resources. Eight (8) sisters implemented financial management systems, 5 trained staff, 4 implemented human resource systems and 2 created strategic plans. In the 2020 Alumnae Survey, 17.8% (N = 511) of alumnae improved school systems. Many sisters (21) engage in long-term planning as well, developing strategic (14), financial (8), and educational (2) plans.

### COMMUNICATION

Sisters (26) described the impact of improved communication in their schools, which included improved relationships (19), increased collaboration between teachers and students (12), and increased collaboration outside the school with parents and the local community (8). Sisters (9) also explained the ways communication improved, such as holding training or meetings (8), and using technology (2).

“The impact [of improved communication] is that there is a healthy relationship between administration, teaching and non teaching staff and students.”  
-HESA Alum #5

### STAFF RETENTION + TRAINING

“I managed to lobby for four new academic staff and improve the number of tutors in the college. I managed to engage the management team to improve ways of how we would be able to collect fees and we made a payment plan which made it easier for parents to follow.”

-SLDI Alum #34

Most sisters report that they increased (11) or retained (13) employees in their schools, and Alumnae Survey results indicate about 13% of alumnae (N = 511) increased staff or teachers. Sisters achieved this through motivating employees with rewards or benefits (8), building relationships (8), increasing student enrollment (4), maintaining salary payments (4), offering professional development (3), and appealing to higher offices (1). Many sisters (19) prioritized staff training. They offered educational workshops, supported employees' further education, and helped them access training in: leadership, financial management, child protection, technology, and workers rights.

“We have implemented bench marking whereby each year we try to visit other institutions which are well performing.”

-HESA Alum #4

### EVALUATION

The majority of sisters evaluate the performance of their schools (23). This is accomplished through benchmarking (6), staff performance evaluations (5), quality assurance (5), testing (3) and tracking attendance (1).

## 5. Alumnae Performance

Research indicates there are correlations between high performing schools and teachers who report satisfaction with their jobs.<sup>11</sup> Understanding that satisfied teachers may be more effective in their positions, alumnae performance in their roles was included as an indicator. SLDI and HESA program evaluation outcomes indicate that after completion of their program, alumnae improve their perceptions of themselves and can effectively use the skills they gain to benefit their ministries.

### ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Most sisters (29) reported taking on additional responsibilities within or outside their ministry. Nine sisters gained responsibilities related to their religious community, five were elected Superior, four led spiritual activities of the school, three taught classes or workshops, three are members of associations, two are Education Board members, two are financial administrators, one is a Boarding Mistress and one is a student. Some of these responsibilities were given to sisters by their Superiors (9) but some new responsibilities were a result of their own initiative (9). Others were asked to take on more tasks by school administrators (4), a bishop or priest (3), the community (2), fellow sisters (1) and /or the government (1).

|| As the Provincial superior asked me to take office at the national level as one of the secretariat staff members (ARU)...I accepted the invitation backed by the training I went through offered by ASEC." -SLDI/HESA Alum #8

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nineteen (19) sisters have completed training or certifications as part of their professional development. Sisters report completing specific skill courses (7), religious training (4), certificate programs (4), SLDI (3), Masters of Education degrees (2), Bachelor of Education degree (1), conference participation (1) and teacher certification(1).

### IMPLEMENTATION OF BEST PRACTICES + INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

|| Networking with NGOs has enabled us support many of the vulnerable children achieve there [sic] goals through paying school fees. More of those who could not afford to get education due to being orphans / victims of HIV/AIDS can now access education, believing in themselves and living like any other persons. -SLDI Alum #35

Nearly all sisters (31) shared best practices or innovative projects they have implemented in their ministries. Sisters renovated school facilities (10), reached out to vulnerable children (7), implemented practical projects (5), improved use of available resources (4), engaged parents and community (4), implemented policies (3), improved information technology (3), improved teamwork (2), held workshops (2) and conducted evaluation projects (2).

### SATISFACTION WITH PERFORMANCE

Most sisters (25) reported that their congregations are satisfaction with their performance and that they are satisfied with their own performance as well (32).

|| I am very satisfied with my job performance as my school was adjudged the best performing Senior High School in Ghana in the year 2016 and four of my staff within the past five years have won best teacher awards (two at district level and two at National level). My Congregation is satisfied with my performance as the school has seen massive improvement in discipline, academic performance and infrastructural development since my administration. -SLDI Alum #32

# Participant Case Study

## SR. AUGUSTINA THOKOA, SNJM

Sr. Augustina Thokoa, SNJM, is the current Administrator of Mazenod High School in Maseru, Lesotho. She graduated from the SLDI Administration track in 2018. She received her leadership position while she was in the SLDI program and is in her third year leading the school. In her role, one of the first changes she implemented was in the financial management of the school. Sr. Augustina learned that the school faced significant financial difficulties, especially regarding the boarding facility for the girls. Through a needs assessment she conducted with teachers, parents, the school board, and non-teaching staff, she developed a new financial plan, separating the boarding facility finances from the rest of the school. This change has clarified the financial system and helped the school engage in long-term financial planning. She also worked to improve the boarding facility, installing a solar power system to reduce electricity consumption and increase available hot water. With the changes she implemented, enrollment for boarding students has increased by 13 students.



“ [SLDI] has helped me a great deal because I couldn't stand in front of different stakeholders and you know address them on issues. ASEC give me the courage and stance to say yeah this is what has to be done. For that, I'm grateful. -Sr. Augustina Thokoa

Enrollment for the entire school increased under her leadership as well. Sr. Augustina developed a computer lab for the school, partnering with a company to obtain 70 computers for student use. Also the school now offers a feeding program, which is not available through any other area schools. Teachers and staff receive a free lunch as well, and are offered opportunities for networking and professional development. These benefits for students and teachers served to stabilize student and staff retention, which has remained consistent throughout her placement. In addition, providing teachers with necessary educational materials, in combination with a holistic education that prepares students with life skills and a spiritual foundation, has led to improved academic performance and student behavior. Sr. Augustina's approach to leadership, learned through the SLDI program, empowers her to work with transparency and effectively collaborate with stakeholders. According to UNICEF, Lesotho faces challenges in enrollment and retention in secondary schools, as well as a lack of school infrastructure.<sup>12</sup> Sr. Augustina's stewardship and dedication to long-term sustainable solutions helped her make a significant impact in these key areas, benefiting the students, teachers, and school community she serves.



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# 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.

