

December 2020

ASEC

AFRICAN  
SISTERS  
EDUCATION  
COLLABORATIVE

# Rays of Hope

***Sisters are Unstoppable!***  
**Providing Essential Service**  
**in Uncertain Times**

# Diving into the "New Normal"

When the sisters from the founding institutions of African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC, pronounced *AYE-sek*) in the U.S. set out to train sisters in Africa with computer literacy and when ASEC developed a hybrid collaborative online delivery of higher education model for sisters in Africa in 2012, little did we know **these innovations were precursors to a "new normal" in 2020.**

## Yet, here we are, soaring above the dark clouds of COVID-19

...because of ASEC's innovations over the years! ASEC dived right into the "new normal" seamlessly! How? ASEC was designed to utilize information technology to deliver education programs to sisters in Africa. ASEC's Board of Directors, staff and students are all set to engage online to achieve our mission to provide education to sisters in Africa. Therefore, online and remote operations have been part of ASEC's culture and this has proved critically important to navigate the challenges of COVID-19.

Indeed, COVID-19 has taken much from us. We seem to be caught up in a circle of uncertainty, as we seek a *Ray of Hope* against the threats of the pandemic. Accustomed to constantly working on our "normal doings," we are confronted with the hard question: *who are we when all "normal doings" have been taken away from us and we are slowed down to a halt?*

Fortunately, we still have the possibility to be available to each other, to family, neighbors and loved ones. We have come to **appreciate each other's presence as an anchor of support to pull through the pains and losses of this pandemic.**

"We are in this together," is a common phrase which reminds us daily to support, protect, be kind and care for each other. At ASEC, our weekly online staff check-ins, check-outs and Zoom meetings with students in Africa have brought **warmth of presence amidst the chill of social distance** and non-physical contact.

**On the cover:** In Lilongwe, sisters respond to environmental degradation, a presentation topic from Malawi's Alumnae Workshop. After the workshop, sisters planted trees at St. Mathias Catholic church. Parish members, including young children, joined them (Feb. 2020).

The bold steps we took at ASEC to work remotely and deliver our programs in Africa without major interruption were commendable. Kudos to ASEC's dedicated team of staff in the U.S. and Africa for their continued commitment to keep the programs running online, onsite and in hybrid modes. It could not get any better!

Most importantly, it is **the resilience of the sister-students** in Africa who kept ASEC's programs running in spite of the unstable electricity and poor internet connection. The move by the sisters to search for internet signals from on top of rocks, trees, bush or single hot spots in their communities to sustain their participation in the online training was exceptional. **The sisters are unstoppable!**

In addition to their participation in the educational programs, **the sisters continue to minister to the most vulnerable individuals and families:** think of the urban poor who had no homes to return to and no food to sustain their lives during the lockdown. The garbage bins they got food scraps from were empty since restaurants and public eating places were closed. The sisters gathered them; shared food and light moments with them; made masks and liquid soap to provide protection against COVID-19 for these families and to keep them safe.

The year 2020 could have been a wasted year for ASEC had it not been for the commitment of the staff and the resilience of the sister-students in Africa. I am most proud of each member of the ASEC staff in the U.S. and Africa.

Dear friends, welcome to Rays of Hope Edition 2020! You each are part of the amazing service the sisters offer to communities in Africa. **ASEC is strong because of you.** Your contribution to educate the sisters in Africa means life for the most vulnerable people who depend on the sisters for their livelihood and dignity. We appreciate your continued support for ASEC in the years ahead.



**Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, Ph.D.,**  
ASEC Executive Director

\*References for articles within this publication are available on ASEC's website: [asec-sldi.org/rays20](https://asec-sldi.org/rays20)

# Quality Education: ASEC's Impact

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.

## 2020 ASEC Special Report\*

The central goal of this special evaluation report of ASEC is to explore how alumnae of the SLDI and HESA programs **are impacting ministries in primary and secondary education in Africa.**

The following 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:

1. Student Performance
2. Access to Education
3. Learning Environment
4. School Systems/Operations
5. Alumnae Performance

In total, 33 sisters completed the survey. In addition, 511 sisters completed the newly added education ministry section of the 2020 ASEC Alumnae Survey.



\*References for articles within this publication are available on ASEC's website: [asec-sldi.org/rays20](https://asec-sldi.org/rays20)



ASEC Programs Coordinator, **Sr. Maria Telesphora, COLU**, with secondary school students in Tanzania.

Here are some results from the special report:



### Reaching Rural Areas

**17 sisters** assisted in increasing access to education in remote/rural areas



### Increased Enrollment

**26 sisters** reported helping to increase enrollment at their school



### Jobs & Retention

Most sisters reported **increasing (11) or retaining (13) employees** in their schools



### Safer Schools

**13 sisters** implemented safety policies to protect students in their schools

Read the full report at [asec-sldi.org/2020special](https://asec-sldi.org/2020special)

**Tara Lopatofsky, Ph.D., CCLS**, Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation and licensed primary, secondary and special education teacher in the U.S.

**Jennifer Mudge, MSW, LSW**, Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation and licensed social worker in the U.S.

●●●●● **Left:** SLDI alumna **Sr. Doris Kiven, SSA**, gives students of Mokunda Primary School in Cameroon their very first practical computer lesson. "The [children] unanimously requested that I should be coming frequently," she says.

# Coronavirus Highlights the Importance of Educating Catholic Sisters

In the midst of a pandemic, educators from all corners of the globe were thrown into a situation most have never been in before: online learning. ASEC's doors closed on March 19, 2020. Here at ASEC, we took a breath and immediately scheduled Zoom meetings with program heads in the U.S. and our sister Directors and Coordinators in Africa. The sisters jumped right into action making ASEC workshops accessible online for the first time in the 20 years since ASEC began.



*Sr. Christabel, an SLDI student in Uganda, works from a tent on her congregation's farm to get the best internet connectivity.*

The sister-students faced so many challenges with online workshops due to internet interference or unstable connections. **Sr. Christabel Shitsukane, FMSJ**, an SLDI participant in Uganda, found her best internet connection in the middle of her congregation's farm and had their cook build her a tent to work in while online.

In Malawi, presidential elections caused political unrest and internet interference. HESA student **Sr. Esther Mwisinya, SBVM**, had to walk 17 kilometers (over 10 miles) to connect to the internet in order to continue her studies online. The voyage itself is not only long, it's dangerous due to political discord in her country.



*Fr. Charles Sokota, ASEC Country Director Sr. Juliana Zulu, RGS, and SLDI alumna Sr. Astridah Banda, OP, hold a radio program to disseminate information about COVID-19 to people in Lusaka, Zambia.*

Most of the sisters told us that without the pandemic they would not have been forced to learn the “new technology” because they were fearful of the unknown. But one sister put it best saying,

**“There is nothing impossible with God and with your hard work you can do great things in your life!”**

Throughout this pandemic the sisters did what they always do: **they got the job done**. Sisters go to places no one is willing to go. They do things others are not willing to do. They don't complain about their circumstances, they solve the problem and they move on to the next. The resiliency of the sisters is amazing.

**This pandemic is precisely the reason it is necessary to educate sisters in Africa.** They are problem solvers. ASEC took up the challenge of figuring out how to effectively deliver each program, in each unique country during quarantine when most were at a standstill. This just demonstrates their resilience and problem-solving skills. Equip African sisters with an education and there is no telling what they will be able to do.

*Kim Scalese, Office Manager*

# ASEC Programs

Our fight against extreme poverty happens in the **most vulnerable communities across Africa**. Sisters serve in areas that are geographically difficult to reach, lack adequate infrastructure and suffer from harsh climates, war, natural disasters, disease and violence. Catholic sisters courageously **seek out the overlooked and advocate for the underserved**. They are called to go to the hard places. We are called to give them the tools to make a bigger impact.

ASEC's programs are always evolving; **molding to fit the specific needs of sisters** working in the rural and poor communities of sub-Saharan Africa.



*Sisters in rural Cameroon producing palm oil.*



*Sr. Helena John Lukindo, Grail, and Sr. Sarah Enelbert Nchia, OLHC, reconnect at the 2020 Alumnae Workshop in Tanzania.*

## **Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI)**

SLDI provides sisters with technology, administration and finance training through three one-month workshops over three years. Through SLDI, sisters gain the practical skills and confidence to build strong networks and take up leadership roles in their congregations and communities. *Since 2007*

## **Institutional Capacity Building (ICB)**

Housed under SLDI, ICB supports the internal strength and the external service of national conferences/associations and congregations in Africa as they strive to positively impact human development. The goal of ICB is to strengthen systems and improve the vitality and vibrancy of African women religious. *Since 2019*

## **Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA)**

HESA provides opportunities for sisters to access higher education (diploma, undergraduate and master's degrees). HESA is delivered through partnerships with higher education institutions in Africa and online in the U.S. *Since 2013*

## **The Scholarship Program**

The Scholarship Program bridges the gap to higher education for sisters by providing two-year scholarships to complete secondary school or higher education credentials relevant to their ministries. Many of our scholarship recipients then continue their education through the HESA program. *Since 2012*



*HESA 2020 Veritas University graduates celebrate in Nigeria.*



*ASEC held its annual meeting for Africa staff in Uganda. Here, staff are making sure they have the perfect memory (Jan. 2020).*

## **Service Learning**

Students and sisters from ASEC's founding institutions participate in annual service trips to Africa. Accompanied by mentors, U.S. participants travel to Africa for three weeks and are immersed in a wide range of volunteer opportunities, serving side-by-side with African sisters. *Since 2008*

## **Research Initiative**

The Research Initiative aims to promote research on Catholic sisters in Africa, increase African women religious' research skills, provide opportunities for them to engage in research projects and develop ASEC as a central repository of data related to women religious in Africa. *Since 2010*

# Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA)

The Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) program facilitates access to post-secondary education for Catholic sisters in Africa. Since 2013, **more than 1,300 sisters have participated in HESA**, studying for college diplomas, bachelor's degrees and master's degrees.



## 1,300 sisters served

The HESA program has **served over 1,300 sisters** since 2013.

HESA students study at **24 partner higher education institutions in the U.S. and in 10 countries in Africa**. Delivered through an innovative model, HESA students participate in cohorts of 5 to 20 sisters at partner higher education institutions and receive technological and academic support to ensure their success as students, scholars and women religious.

HESA positions Catholic sisters as leaders of vital ministries, congregations and communities who address sustainable development in Africa. In March 2020, **ASEC received a grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to deliver HESA for a third phase through 2024**. The Hilton Foundation supported HESA from the beginning, providing a pilot grant through SLDI in 2012 and program-specific grants since 2013.

**HESA Phase III includes support for another 522 Catholic sisters in Africa** to receive college diplomas, bachelor's degrees and master's degrees. The grant will also provide sisters support with tuition, laptops, textbooks and other resources essential for their academic and professional development.

HESA operations in 2020 were shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic. ASEC is responding to the fluid situation of COVID-19 in 10 countries and at each of its 24 higher education partners.

In March 2020, many partner higher education institutions **moved to online or remote delivery** in response to COVID-19. To support HESA students studying online, ASEC provided support for internet data procurements. Furthermore, in a time of uncertainty and change for many students, Reflective Learning Workshops were held online. ASEC continues to respond to the fluid situation at each of its partner institutions.

In June 2020, **ASEC organized an open forum for partner higher education institutions** to discuss the impact of COVID-19 and to understand the needs of students. Necessary support for internet data will continue for sisters studying online in the 2020-2021 academic year.

## Enrollments

As of July 1, 2020, approximately **800 sisters were actively enrolled** in HESA at partner higher education institutions in 10 countries in Africa. In the 2019-2020 grant year, HESA welcomed **192 new students** who participated in orientation workshops in preparation for their studies and formed cohort networks at partner institutions. Recruitment is ongoing for 2020-2021 and it is anticipated that **approximately 290 new sisters** will enroll by June 2021.



## 430 sister graduates

**More than 430 sisters have graduated** through HESA, with degrees relevant to their ministries.

## Graduations

To date, more than 430 sisters have graduated from HESA with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. During the 2019-2020 grant year, **approximately 160 sisters graduated** from the following HESA at partner institutions: The Catholic University of Ghana (Ghana), The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (Kenya), ChemChemi Ya Uzima Institute (Kenya), Tangaza University College (Kenya), Sacred Heart School of Nursing (Nigeria), Veritas University (Nigeria), Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (Tanzania), Mwenge Catholic University (Tanzania), Saint Augustine University (Tanzania), St. Francis Hospital Nsambya Training School (Uganda), Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda) and The University of Kisubi (Uganda).



2019 HESA graduates, St. Augustine University College (SAUT), Tanzania.



*Sisters celebrate the graduation of HESA participants from ASEC partner university, St. Augustine University College (SAUT), in Mwanza, Tanzania (2019).*



## 75 academic awards

75 HESA sisters graduated with honors, with 7 receiving best graduating student awards.

Approximately **75 students** reported graduating with **honors** during this period. At least 7 graduating sisters received awards for best graduating student, best in department, or student leadership from their institution:

- **Sr. Theresa Uzoamaka Ezewelukwa, OLA:** Best in class & best in department, Veritas University, Nigeria
- **Sr. Suzana Gertrude Livinus-Didam, SSL:** Best in department, Veritas University, Nigeria
- **Sr. Margaret Okaima Ogbebor, SSMA:** Best in department, Veritas University, Nigeria
- **Sr. Felistas Kingori, RSM:** Best first year student, Tangaza University College, Kenya
- **Sr. Felicity Amikiya, SHCJ:** Overall best graduating student, Catholic University College, Ghana
- **Sr. Kirigha Kizia Felister, ASN:** Student leadership award as a class representative, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya
- **Sr. Honorine Akateh, FSFB:** Student leadership award as a class delegate, ChemChemi Ya Uzima Institute, Kenya



## 24 partnerships

HESA maintains **24 partnerships** in 10 countries in Africa and the U.S.

In the 2019-2020 grant year, **HESA maintained 24 partnership agreements** with higher education partners in the U.S. and Africa. Framework of Reference agreements were renewed between ASEC and Veritas University, Nigeria; Catholic University of Malawi; and Catholic University of Cameroon, Bamenda. Several agreements will be renewed in 2020.

## Reflective Learning

Reflective Learning is an annual workshop that brings together HESA sisters studying at colleges/universities in each country for academic and professional development. In the 2019-2020 grant year, **more than 760 enrolled HESA students participated in Reflective Learning Workshops** in 9 countries; 8 of these workshops were held online due to COVID-19.



*Sisters in Zambia participate in "virtual" HESA Reflective Learning.*

Workshop topics vary according to the needs of each country. This year, topics included stress management, research proposal writing, child protection, addressing COVID-19 and safeguarding against abuse and violence. Students praised the use of technology for Reflective Learning Workshops, as well as the opportunity to hone and learn new computer skills. You can learn more about the HESA program at [asec-sldi.org/hesa](https://asec-sldi.org/hesa).

**Rosemary A. Shaver, M.Ed.,** Senior Program Manager, HESA & Scholarships

# Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI)

The Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) program offers Catholic sisters in ten African countries the opportunity to enhance their leadership competencies and professional skills in the areas of technology, administration and finance. In the SLDI program, sisters not only learn relevant skills that benefit their congregations and ministries, but also receive a laptop, mentorship instruction and guidance. Upon completion of the program, sisters enter into the ASEC alumnae network.

The alumnae of the SLDI program are members of over **420 different congregations**, working in a wide range of ministries and representing more than **40 countries of citizenship**, allowing for new and exciting connections within a diverse network of sisters. The SLDI program collaborates with partner consultants, congregational superiors and national conferences/associations of Women Religious to develop and deliver the program, which is taught over a three-year period.



## 3,170 sisters served

Since 2007, the SLDI program has **served 3,170 sisters**.

As of 2019, **the SLDI program has served 3,170 sisters**, empowering them to become more effective in their congregations and apostolates. Through additional activities, such as workshops for General Superiors and other trainings, the program has served 4,095 stakeholders since 2007.

As the SLDI program began Phase V this past year, there is ample evidence that sisters complete the program with increased skills and leadership abilities, a desire to pursue higher education and the ability to create positive impacts on ministries, congregations and human development.

*Alumnae workshop in Kenya (Feb. 2020).*



*Sr. Victoria Ajio, MSBVM, attending a South Sudan SLDI Finance workshop.*



*Sisters in Cameroon receive laptops during an Administration workshop.*



*Tanzanian sisters receive books at a 2020 Administration workshop.*



## SLDI Phase V, Year 1: Exceeding Expectations Despite Challenges

ASEC successfully started SLDI Phase V, Year 1 in 2019. The program is projected to serve more than 610 sisters over the three year period (2019-2021) of Phase V. In the first year of the program, **681 unique sisters were served**. The program was able to increase the projected total number to be served during Phase V, to 751 sisters.



*SLDI participants in Ghana take part in a virtual workshop, where they received advice and guidance from ASEC staff.*

There were challenges in implementing SLDI workshops over the past year, due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, ASEC began close monitoring of the public health situations in each country of operation in Africa, as well as the U.S. and discussed how to adapt the program to a new reality. Although many SLDI workshops were postponed, ASEC Country Directors and Coordinators put their creativity and skills to use as they **transitioned SLDI workshops online, or partially online**, in several countries. In countries where in-person workshops could still take place, new safety precautions and protocols were implemented.

Overall, the SLDI participants and instructors handled the changes well and many were excited to attend or teach workshops online. More specific feedback about the online SLDI workshops will be provided in the SLDI Phase V, Year 2 SLDI evaluation report.

## Alumnae Impact: Making a Difference

Program evaluation outcomes indicate that SLDI alumnae are able to put the skills and knowledge they learn into action.

Impact can be observed at three levels: individual, congregational (or organizational) and ministerial (or societal). At the individual level, sisters have consistently reported that they **improve their self perception, relationships with others and leadership capabilities** through participation in the program.

The most recent data show that 91% ( $n = 378$ ) of alumnae improved their perception of themselves and 89.4% ( $n = 378$ ) saw improvements in their personal and/or professional relationships. **Alumnae also report taking up new leadership roles** within their ministries (77%,  $n = 365$ ) and outside their ministries (46%,  $n = 359$ ).

At the congregational level, about 82% ( $n = 401$ ) of SLDI alumnae have implemented or improved internal systems in their ministry and/or congregation in the areas of strategic planning, financial planning and management and/or human resources management.



### Creating systemic change

Nearly **3/4 of alumnae** create systemic change in their congregations & ministries.

About 72% ( $n = 401$ ) of alumnae are creating systemic change in both their congregation and ministry. A total of **163 congregations improved their internal systems through the work of alumnae**. Additionally, 92.6% ( $n = 378$ ) of alumnae serve as mentors and their mentees include both religious and lay people.



COVID-19 could not spoil this day for SLDI participants in Zambia; sisters eagerly explore their new laptops.



### Health & EDU projects

**52% of funding** secured by alumnae supports education and health needs across Africa.

Finally, at the ministerial, or societal level, ASEC alumnae and their mentees have secured more than \$19.3 million for human development projects across Africa, contributing to the achievement of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). **52% of all funds support education and health focused projects**, largely in rural areas. You can learn more about the SLDI program at [asec-sldi.org/sldi](https://asec-sldi.org/sldi).



**Sr. Prudence Lunsonga**, a contemplative Poor Clare nun living in Lusaka, Zambia, received the gift of education through ASEC's SLDI program.

**Jennifer Mudge, MSW, LSW**, Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation and **Jaime Lyn Bloxham, MPA**, Program Manager, SLDI & Service Learning



SLDI alumna, **Sr. Josemaria Anyanwu, HFSN**, is the “go-to” sister for preparing grant proposals and has successfully mentored four other congregations. She’s helped one congregation establish a computer lab, install a solar power system and secure a host baking machine. Another congregation was able to obtain an ambulance. She says,

**“The program [SLDI] actually made me to be acquainted with so many other religious sisters outside my congregation, sharing views together, networking together and mentoring others.”**

In January 2020, Sr. Josemaria served as a facilitator at the ASEC Alumnae Workshop in Nigeria, teaching grant writing skills to 42 fellow alumnae.



## Institutional Capacity Building (ICB) Program, Year 1 Outcomes

Through the SLDI program, sisters develop skills to positively impact their congregations and ministries. However, there **remains a need to further develop internal systems within the larger institutions to which sisters belong**, such as their congregations and their national conferences/associations.

With this in mind, ASEC initiated a **pilot Institutional Capacity Building (ICB) program**. In Year 1 of the pilot, ASEC staff engaged with the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious in Ghana (CMSRGH), with the help of local consultants on the ground. As a result, CMSRGH achieved several significant milestones, including **the legal registration of CMSRGH with the government**.

Although ASEC was unaware of CMSRGH's lack of legal status when the ICB process began, this was a key piece of the capacity building process. Without properly registering with the government, CMSRGH was not a legally recognized institution in the country.

CMSRGH obtained legal status and, as a result, **established a database of congregation members** and also **obtained land rights**. CMSRGH also **revised their constitution** to include a newly created executive body and **created a new 5-year strategic plan**. Some other outcomes include new financial assets, a new website and a search for a new Secretary General.

While each capacity building process with an institution will be different, the first year of ICB has proven more productive and fruitful than anticipated and provided many useful lessons for continued capacity building with CMSRGH and future institutions. You can learn more about the program at [asec-sldi.org/icb](https://asec-sldi.org/icb).

*Jennifer Mudge, MSW, LSW, Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation*

## COVID-19 Postpones 2020 Service Learning Trip to Ghana, but Recent Trends Show Benefits of the Program

In 2019-20, ASEC engaged 14 students, six Marywood University students and eight Chestnut Hill College students, in the Service Learning program. The students completed the required course to participate in the **service learning trip to Ghana** in the summer of 2020, however due to COVID-19, **the trip was cancelled**. ASEC plans to resume the program once it is safe to do so.

Although data was not collected from Service Learning participants in 2020, more than 120 students, sisters, mentors and faculty members have participated in the program to date. Recent evaluations indicate the program is **successful in fostering cross-cultural sharing and relationship-building** between participants and those they serve, creating a positive impact on students through in-country cultural activities, increasing participants' personal growth and increasing interest in international experiences among U.S. students.

The program faces some challenges as well, including effective implementation of daily spiritual reflections on the service learning trip, differing service expectations between students and site hosts and ensuring effective communication throughout the planning and implementation of the service trip.



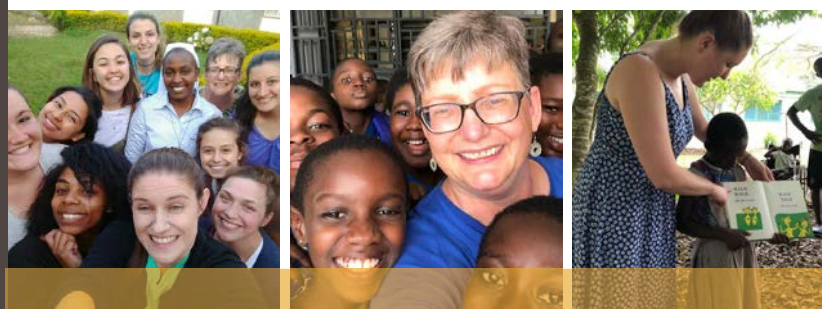
### Global Service

**All participants** reported an increased motivation to serve the global community.

Despite these challenges, evaluation outcomes show that the program provides a **unique and beneficial opportunity** for participants to engage in cross-cultural exchange and learning. ASEC plans to continue building infrastructure and partnerships to further enhance the Service Learning program and is eager to resume the program! You can learn more about the program at [asec-sldi.org/service](https://asec-sldi.org/service).

*Jennifer Mudge, MSW, LSW, Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation*

*ASEC Service trip photos from Kenya (2017) and Ghana (2019).*



# Service Learning Student Experience

*In May-June, 2019, a team of volunteers from Chestnut Hill College and Marywood University traveled to the West African nation of **Ghana** to serve at three service sites in the Cape Coast region.*

**Kirsten Gillern**, a 2018 alumna of Holy Cross High School and current Music Therapy major at Marywood University in Scranton, PA, was eager to share her experience with ASEC.



**"...the biggest lesson I learned was we did not have to speak the same language to show love and kindness to each other. In the bible, it states, 'Little Children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.'" (1 John 3:18)**

## Home is Where the Heart is

Kirsten did not realize how much her life would change when she stepped off the plane in Accra, Ghana, guitar in hand, greeted by her first of many *Awkaabas*. She said the welcome their group received was far beyond her expectations. It made her feel at home.

One service site in particular touched Kirsten's heart profoundly—**Padre Pio Rehabilitation Centre**, located in the village of Ahotokurom. Padre Pio serves the marginalized, disabled and disadvantaged with a family support center, a school for special needs, housing for leprosy survivors and much more. Kirsten said she was lucky enough to spend time with and serve special needs children, adding,

**"From my first encounter to my final moments at Padre Pio, I felt unconditionally loved."**

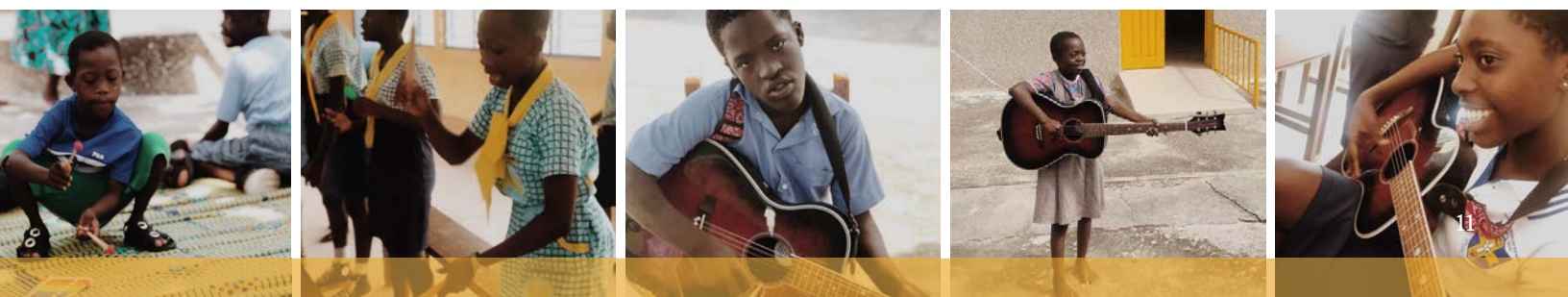
Communicating in English to children who spoke Twi was a challenge for the service group at first. But, Kirsten quickly discovered that music was a universal language they all could share. From that moment on, they bonded through instruments, song and dance.

While in Ghana, **Kirsten donated approximately 200 instruments** to the service sites she visited. She has plans to return to Ghana on the 2021 trip so she can share more music, catch up with her old friends and make many, many more.

You can donate to ASEC's upcoming service trip at [asec-sldi.org/servicetrip](https://asec-sldi.org/servicetrip). Read Kirsten's full story at [asec-sldi.org/kirsten](https://asec-sldi.org/kirsten).

**Amy Fedele**, Media & Communications Manager

*ASEC service trip photos from Padre Pio Rehabilitation Center in Ahotokurom, Ghana (2019).*



# Scholarship Program: A Monumental Year



In March 2020, sisters participating in ASEC's Scholarship Program in Tanzania gathered for orientation (Mar. 2020), thanks to our generous donors who sponsor them.

This has been a monumental year for the Scholarship Program, including expansion into a new country, the piloting of a new scholarship, longer scholarship options and COVID-19-related interruptions.



## Expansion to Ghana

In February 2020, ASEC's Scholarship Program **expanded to Ghana** to fund scholarships for Catholic Sisters pursuing degrees and training in Special Education.

During a recent Service Learning trip to Ghana, the school that was served by the Service Learning participants did not have any trained teachers or sisters to provide special needs education. Following the trip and reviewing participants' experiences, the ASEC Board approved **expansion of the Scholarship Program into Ghana**. A grant from the National Catholic Community Foundation (NCCF) made it possible for ASEC to provide scholarships.

Zambia, a country supported by the Scholarship Program since 2016, also saw a recent change in services. A governmental change took place that **expanded Zambia's diploma programs from two to three years**. This extended the length of the Scholarship Program in Zambia to three years so the sisters' tuition will be covered.

The Scholarship Program is currently **piloting a Ph.D. program** to support sisters in need of funding in their doctoral programs at select colleges and universities. The pilot stage is only accepting sisters attending the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) in Kenya.

Possibly the biggest impact on the program this year has been the impact of the coronavirus. While each country and school reacted in their own way, COVID-19 delayed recruitment and admission for scholarship recipients.



## 369 Scholarships Awarded

ASEC has **awarded 369 scholarships** since the program's inception. So far, **211 sisters** have graduated.

The Scholarship Program also received its first full evaluation report following the 2019 year. The 2020 year is still in progress and currently delayed due to COVID-19. However, from 2012-2019, **a total of 369 sisters have received scholarships** through the program. 211 scholarship recipients have graduated with degrees in fields related to their ministry work.

**A 97% retention rate reaffirms** that sisters who begin the program also tend to stay in the program. Scholarship recipients attend programs in various disciplines such as education, social work, law, accounting and pharmaceutical science.

While ASEC's scholarship program supports higher education and even doctoral degrees, **a large majority of scholarships are awarded to sisters who haven't completed high school**. In fact, the Scholarship Program was initiated in 2012 to meet this specific need expressed by sisters in Tanzania, where 65% of sisters did not have a high school diploma.



Scholarship recipient, **Sr. Gift Kabonde, LSMI**, is overwhelmed with joy upon receiving her General Nursing degree from St. Luke's College of Nursing & Public Health in Zambia. She says, "One day I told myself, Sr. Gift, you are here for a purpose and to achieve a certain goal so it is up to you to make it possible or not. It was that very day that I made a covenant with my God. Honestly these words changed my life for good."

ASEC partners with Bigwa Sisters Secondary School (Bigwa), a **boarding school** for religious women in located in Morogoro, Tanzania. Through ASEC, women religious are awarded two-year scholarships to attend Bigwa and **complete their secondary school education**. In addition to tuition, ASEC also provides stipends to support the teachers at Bigwa.



## Academic Award

Bigwa Sisters Seminary Secondary School recently received **Tanzania's Best Academic Performance Award** in the category of *Most Improved Schools*.

In October 2019, Bigwa received the **Most Improved Schools award** from the Office of the Regional Administration and Local Government in collaboration with the Examinations Council of Tanzania. We are so proud of our scholarship recipients for playing a part in the school's success! In celebration, **ASEC donated ten desktop computers** to Bigwa so our students can continue to achieve academic success.

**Sr. Jane Wakahiu, LSOSF, Ph.D.**, ASEC's former Executive Director and Associate VP of Program Operations & Head of Catholic Sisters Initiative at the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, **made a donation to provide the Bigwa school with antibacterial soap, sanitation items and protective masks.**

The Scholarship Program is constantly evolving and has changed so much since I started at ASEC two years ago. Our scholarships give sisters both training in their ministries and the opportunity to be prepared for higher education as well. I am excited to see where the Scholarship Program goes in the future.

ASEC's Scholarship Program is not grant funded and **relies on donations from our supporters to operate**. Would you consider supporting this valuable programs? Visit [asec-sldi.org/donate](https://asec-sldi.org/donate) to make a donation today.

**Kelsey Allison**, Research Assistant

*Scholarship recipients in Tanzania attend orientation (Mar. 2020).*



## Sr. Ana Treats Patients, "in a rural place, where doctors shun to go and work"

Zambia operates under the World Health Organization (WHO)'s minimum threshold of doctors, nurses and midwives (22.8 per 10,000 persons\*), with only 11.2 medical professionals per 10,000 people.\* Shortages remain the highest in rural areas, where attraction and retention rates continue to be a problem.

**Sr. Anastasia M. Kalingeme**, Sisters of Mercy, is filling this healthcare professional gap by providing quality healthcare services in her rural Zambian community.

**With the support of ASEC's Two-Year Scholarship Program**, Sr. Ana attended the Chainama College of Health Science and earned her Bachelor's of Clinical Science in June 2018. Since that time, Sr. Ana reports that she has been serving, *"in a rural place, where doctors shun to go and work"* and that the training she received has equipped her with the skills to perform surgical procedures.

Sr. Ana provides **obstetric, gynecological and surgical treatment** to patients who would otherwise have limited to no access to medical care. Of the education she received, Sr. Ana writes that she has been able to, *"acquire skills that will last forever in serving life in communities where I live and serve."* Sr. Ana is extremely dedicated to her patients, saying,

**"I find happiness in doing my service and satisfied when I see my patients well and discharged from hospital back to their homes."**

Read more at [asec-sldi.org/ana](https://asec-sldi.org/ana)

\*References for articles within this publication are available on ASEC's website: [asec-sldi.org/rays20](https://asec-sldi.org/rays20)

# Food for Thought

Approximately 11.4%\* of the world's population are chronically undernourished. And nearly 11%\* of the undernourished are children under five years old. What's worse? Severe food insecurity in Africa is on the rise. But educated sisters are changing that reality for the communities they serve.

SLDI alumna **Sr. Stephany Ayomah, SMI**, is providing hope in rural Ordorme, Ghana, where stunting rates due to malnutrition have reached a staggering 33%.\* She renovated her congregation's bakery, created jobs and provides the community with healthy food. She says,

**“SLDI changed my life in so many ways.”**

In Malawi, **Sr. Hellen Matchado, SS**, is using the skills she learned in ASEC's SLDI program to ease the stress of motherhood affecting women across Malawi. Her project gives mothers and their children access to supplemental nutrition and educational resources and has **reduced malnutrition rates from 10% to 6% in children under five years old** in her community.

In South Sudan, SLDI alumna **Sr. Helen Doru, SHS**, created the Sacred Heart School's **Feeding Program for Vulnerable Children** in order to improve students' ability to focus, learn and thrive at school.

**One project in particular** touched the hearts of ASEC staff who visited Uganda in June 2019. ASEC alumna **Sr. Maria Teopista Namigga, IHMR**, showed us how even a simple bakery can provide hope to a struggling community through employment, skill building opportunities and food security.

*SLDI participants of Administration Track visit school children in Fukayosi Villiage in Tanzania.*



**Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG**, ASEC Executive Director (center) learns the bread making process from Sr. Teopista's staff (June, 2019).

## Sisters' Bakery Brings Jobs and Food Supply to Ugandan Community

Cabana Sisters' Bread Bakery is run by the Immaculate Heart of Mary Reparatrix (IHMR) Sisters in Kampala, Uganda. As Bakery Manager, Sr. Teopista uses skills she learned in ASEC's SLDI and HESA programs to manage a staff of 30 employees.

The bakery supplies **70-80 loaves of bread per day** for schools, hotels, supermarkets and the local community. Sr. Teopista employs bakery workers from her local community, including orphans and school dropouts who need to support themselves.



Since implementing the savings scheme she learned through ASEC's programs, the bakery makes enough profit to run on its own. The savings also enabled Sr. Teopista to purchase two vans and pay a portion of her employees' school tuition.

Read more at [asec-sldi.org/teo](https://asec-sldi.org/teo)

See more sisters' projects at [asec-sldi.org/hunger](https://asec-sldi.org/hunger).

\*References for articles within this publication are available on ASEC's website: [asec-sldi.org/rays20](https://asec-sldi.org/rays20)



## Educating a sister provides food security for communities facing hunger

Donating to the education of a sister can reduce extreme poverty and food security issues that are plaguing sub-Saharan Africa.

Read more & donate at [asec-sldi.org/hunger](https://asec-sldi.org/hunger)



# Equality for Girls

As women themselves, Catholic sisters are aware of gender discrimination and the challenges facing girls in Africa. And at ASEC, we've learned that when sisters are provided with an education and the tools to make a difference, they are fierce advocates and protectors for the African girl child.

## Determined, Resilient, Aids-Free, Mentored, Safe (DREAMS) Project

One such advocate is SLDI alumna **Sr. Anacletha Nkopele, GSS**, in Lesotho. She and her congregation, the Good Shepherd Sisters, collaborated with several partners to fund and implement the *Determined, Resilient, Aids-Free, Mentored, Safe* (DREAMS) project. DREAMS aims to **reduce the prevalence of HIV** among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in countries with high HIV infection rates.

Sr. Anacletha secured the funding for DREAMS and serves as the Project Manager. The program teaches the girls life and social skills to increase their self-esteem, self-efficacy and decision-making skills. They also get **access to HIV/AIDS services and training**.

Because of this project, nearly 17,000 AGYW are empowered to make responsible choices that promote their safety, autonomy and well-being.



The project has also improved familial relationships; 1,150 parents reported **improved relationships with their children**. Read more about this amazing project at [asec-sldi.org/dreams](https://asec-sldi.org/dreams).

It makes our hearts happy that Sr. Anacletha is not alone in her mission. Many alumnae of ASEC's programs dedicate their lives to uplifting the precious girl child.

*The Cottolengo Sisters in Kenya care for abandoned and orphaned children who are infected or affected by HIV.*



SLDI alumna **Sr. Caroline Kimani, DHM**, is working to end the human rights violation of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Kenya. She **opened a rescue center** to provide shelter, food, counseling and educational opportunities for at-risk girls.

In central Uganda, HESA alumna **Sr. Mary Nalule, MSMHC**, is using her education degree to provide holistic education at the Bukulula Girls School. She says that the HESA program has brought her closer to fulfilling her career goals and **achieving her dream of becoming a secondary school teacher**.

Upon completing the SLDI program, **Sr. Augustina Thokoa, SNJU**, received a leadership position as Administrator of the Mazenod High School in Maseru, Lesotho, where she increased enrollment and made a multitude of improvements, such as:

- the installation of a solar power system
- adding fences and police patrols to improve safety
- acquiring 70 computers for a new lab
- starting a feeding program that benefits students as well as staff and teachers

To learn more about the sisters who are advancing the African girl child visit [asec-sldi.org/girls](https://asec-sldi.org/girls).

*\*References for articles within this publication are available on ASEC's website: [asec-sldi.org/rays20](https://asec-sldi.org/rays20)*



## Support sisters in their mission to uplift the African girl child

You can support young girls in Africa through the Sisters that uplift them by donating to a Sister's ASEC-sponsored education now.

Read more & donate at [asec-sldi.org/girls](https://asec-sldi.org/girls)



# Stream of Hope

According to the United Nations, billions of people still lack safe water, sanitation and hand washing facilities. 785 million people globally still lack even a basic drinking water service—that's over two times the U.S. population. A lack of clean water affects nearly 1 in 10 people worldwide, the majority of which live in isolated rural areas and spend hours each day to collect water.

Thankfully, Catholic sisters are addressing clean water and sanitation issues in Africa each and every day. In fact, as of 2019, **over \$1 million in funding\*** acquired by SLDI alumna is for projects addressing United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6): clean water and sanitation.

In Ghana, SLDI alumna **Sr. Mary Lucy Afful, SSL**, and the Sisters of St. Louis initiated the Louisville Filtered Water Project, providing 13 schools and thousands in the community with clean drinking water.

In Nigeria, SLDI alumna **Sr. Rose Katung, OLF**, acquired funding to fix a damaged borehole, providing the Sisters of Our Lady Fatima with potable water at their training house in Jos.

In Malawi, SLDI alumna **Sr. Stella Ovientaoba, MMM**, ensures that the hospital has running water by acquiring funds for a solar power backup generator. She says,

**“[We] are immensely grateful to Hilton Foundation for giving us this opportunity to achieve our goal of being able to aptly carry out diagnosis, provide treatment and all necessary services, without delay, in a safe and hygienic environment.”**

*Because of Sr. Esther's project, 7,000\* Kenyans have access to clean water within a 15 minute walk.*



*Sr. Esther with the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Gilbert Kaplan at the official opening of the Water Purification Plant.*

## Innovative Technology Provides Fluoride-Free, Clean Water to Kenyans

After experiencing the challenges of extreme water shortages firsthand, SLDI alumna **Sr. Esther Waithera Wangari, LSOSF**, spearheaded a project to provide clean water to her community in Kenya. Upon drilling a water well, the Little Sisters of St. Francis realized their water source was contaminated by high levels of fluoride.

Sr. Esther took on the important role as Project Manager and collaborated with organizations like The Kenya Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (KIWASH), USAID, The Dow Chemical Company and several others. Together, they implemented **an innovative water filtration system** that removes fluoride from well water using reverse osmosis! She also secured funds to install **automatic water dispensers**, offering a hygienic way to dispense water to the community.

This clean water project is the **first to use this type of nanotechnology system in Africa** and reaches beyond those served in the Little Sisters compound, far into the community. An estimated 7,000\* Kenyans now have access to clean water within a 15 minute walk.

Read more at [asec-sldi.org/waterfiltration](https://asec-sldi.org/waterfiltration)

See even more water projects at [asec-sldi.org/cleanwater](https://asec-sldi.org/cleanwater)

\*References for articles within this publication are available on ASEC's website: [asec-sldi.org/rays20](https://asec-sldi.org/rays20)



## Educate a sister, provide clean water to African communities

Your support will help provide an education to sisters so they have the skills needed to effectively serve their communities every single day.

Read more & donate at [asec-sldi.org/cleanwater](https://asec-sldi.org/cleanwater)



# Tools to Change the World

We recognize that women religious in Africa profoundly impact their communities and society. The services they provide are making a significant contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. To advance these efforts, ASEC provides educational opportunities for women religious in Africa so they can further develop their talents and potential, build their education credentials and enhance the leadership and ministerial roles they assume at all levels of society.

Catholic sisters are *Rays of Hope* in their communities. By providing an education to sisters who are already serving in areas of sub-Saharan Africa where help is needed most, you are able to reach more people living in extreme poverty. With an education, sisters are armed with:

- The critical thinking skills to determine what projects are most needed.
- The technical skills to find funding and support for these projects.
- The management skills to ensure their projects run smoothly and efficiently.
- The analytical skills to report back to their funders about their success.
- The confidence and strong networks to do it over and over again.

At ASEC we say, *if you give a sister the tools, she's going to change the world.*

## Winning Donor Confidence

In **Malawi**, SLDI alumna **Sr. Magdalena Ndawla, TS**, used her proposal writing skills to secure funds to feed the hungry. The Teresian Sisters then distributed the 200+ bags of maize to 400+ Malawian households. She says,

**"I am able to achieve all this because of the skills I got through ASEC, now I have won donor confidence and many donors are giving when I ask."**

*LSOSF sisters care for individuals with various disabilities.*



*SMI sisters, Tanzania, visit an elderly woman who is in need of assistance.*



*Teresian sisters distributing maize using the funds secured by an SLDI alumna.*



## Supporting Seniors

*Sr. Josephine, a Mary Immaculate sister, cares for an elderly woman in a German aged centre.*



**Sr. Fransiska Kimario, SMI**, an SLDI participant in **Tanzania**, believes that caring for the elderly is our collective responsibility.

**"Most of the elderly people in Tanzania are living below the poverty line and facing many problems, like lack of food, shelter and healthcare. ...That is why our congregation has realized the importance of setting up a care centre for various needs..."**

In **Lesotho**, SLDI alumna **Sr. Theresia Noko, SCO**, uses her education to serve the elderly and initiate many other human development projects in her community. She says,

**"We hope what we have learned here... it will continue. Because in the world we are serving now, we need skills like leadership and technology. So we are very thankful that we are not behind."**

# Thank You To Our Amazing Supporters

*Our gratitude goes out to you, our generous partners, donors and friends. What we do is not possible without you. Every single dollar you've given makes such a big difference. You are always in our thoughts and prayers.*

## Donors between 9/1/2019 and 8/31/2020

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- the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart, Inc.
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- Vincent & Elaine Fedele
- Wants of the Age (WOTA)
- William Stout
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## Special Thanks

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- Chestnut Hill College and the Sisters of St. Joseph, Philadelphia, PA
- Marywood University and the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, PA
- Neumann University and the Sisters of St. Francis, Philadelphia, PA
- Rosemont College and the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Rosemont, PA

### ASEC Associate Members

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### Special Thanks

- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- Franciscan Sisters of Chicago
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- ASEC Partners in Africa

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- \*Sr. Ellen Marvel, Srs. of the Redeemer
- Jeffrey D. Senese, Ph.D., St. Leo University

*\*Welcome new Members*

thank  
you

## Board Honorees

From the bottom of our hearts, we thank our Board Member Honorees for your service to ASEC. We will greatly miss your insights, expertise and dedication to ASEC's mission.

- **Sr. Kathy Dougherty, OSF** (Board Chair) and Congregational Minister, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia
- **Sharon L. Hirsh, Ph.D.** (Board Vice-Chair) and former President, Rosemont College



## 2020 ASEC Annual Board Meetings Take Place Virtually

On April 27-28, 2020, ASEC's annual Advisory Board and Board of Directors Meetings took place via Zoom due to social distancing restrictions.

Staff presented data about ASEC's programs, which was followed by an interactive question and answer session between ASEC Advisory Board Members and staff. Several guests were also invited to this year's meeting to provide input and guidance on program activities. Afterwards, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation shared about their initiatives for 2020 and beyond.

## ASEC Advisory Board Members

- \*Sr. Hellen Anthony Bandiho, STH, Ph.D.
- Sr. Patricia M. Bombard, BVM, D.Min.
- Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, Ph.D.
- Susanne Dumbleton, Ph.D.
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- Sr. Jane Wakahiu, LSOSF, Ph.D.
- HESA Liaisons of ASEC USA partner colleges/universities

*\*Welcome new Members*



A portion of the SHCJ grant provided food for boys living at Kwetu Home of Peace in Nairobi, Kenya

## Grant Provides Resources to Africa During Pandemic

In May, 2020, ASEC received a Want for the Age (WOTA) grant from the Society of the Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ) sisters, American Province. The grant is an ASEC effort to support sisters in Africa as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding was divided among three ministries:

- **Kayeyi Home for the Urban Poor** in Ghana (to provide sanitation and food for the poor)
- **Kwetu Home of Peace** in Kenya (to provide food for the street boys living in the home)
- **Sisters of St. Therese of the Child Jesus of Buea** in Cameroon (to provide personal protective equipment for the sisters who were recently exposed to COVID-19 and suffered the loss of their General Superior to coronavirus).

ASEC is so grateful to the SHCJ sisters for providing this grant funding so that together we can support sisters in their ministry work during these unprecedented times.

Read more at [asec-sldi.org/2020/covid-grant](https://asec-sldi.org/2020/covid-grant)

# COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected most countries in the world, and sub-Saharan Africa is no exception. Sisters from ASEC programs are **responding through prayer and service to the poor and vulnerable**.

Here are some of their stories.

In Nairobi, Kenya, the Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco (SDB) received grant funding for sisters to provide masks, sanitizers, soap and food to the vulnerable in the community and safety equipment to their healthcare workers.



SLDI alumna, **Sr. Gisele Ndekezi, SDB**, says,

**"...As religious, we felt that we could also do our part together in order to give a message of hope to our people, to the young people, to the children and to the families."**

In Lesotho, young boys (below) received masks and attended a workshop facilitated by SLDI alumna **Sr. Theresia Noko, SCO**. Sr. Theresia received funds from an American donor to buy materials to make masks for the vulnerable. The donor also gave her extra money to purchase food for the hungry. She says,

**"I managed this because of the good skills I got from ASEC program... I am able to express the situation that people are going through and people do understand."**

During the workshop, the boys learned proper sanitation and other techniques to prevent contracting COVID-19. The boys also cleaned out the garden beds at the Elizabeth Bruyere Old Age Home where Sr. Theresia serves. Now the elderly will be able to grow vegetables there.





**Sr. Teresa Mulenga, TS**, ASEC Programs Coordinator in Malawi, recently wrote a successful grant proposal to **supply sanitation materials to 5 HIV/AIDS support groups** in the Dedza District in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Sr. Teresa is also an alumna of ASEC's SLDI program, where she learned valuable grant writing, technology, administration and finance skills to help her be more effective in her ministry to the poor.

Individuals with a chronic illness (like those affected by HIV/AIDS) have a low immune system and are prone to contracting many diseases including COVID-19. Those who are vulnerable need special care during these challenging times. Sr. Teresa says,

**"...I managed to supply tap buckets for keeping water for washing hands, bar soaps and hand wash to members of 5 support groups, reaching a total 125 households."**



The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) are **feeding the poor** in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. **Sr. Veronica Fatoyinbo, SNDdeN**, ASEC Program Director in Nigeria writes,

**"It is a good thinking to impose lock down to save the lives of the citizens from being infected by this virus. However, there is hunger in the city and the Nigerian government has no plan how to feed people who are locked down indefinitely. It is difficult to stay indoors when one's stomach is empty."**

So, in the spirit of solidarity and love, the Notre Dame sisters shared what little resources they have with the poor in their community. The poor were very close to the heart of Jesus as well as their congregation foundress, St. Julie Billiart.

*Amy Fedele, Media & Communications Manager*

## ASEC Family Lost to COVID-19

Several ASEC family members lost their lives to this devastating pandemic.



**Mother Grace Ngu, Cameroon**

(April 11, 2020)

Mother Grace was the General Superior of the Sisters of St. Therese of the Child Jesus of Buea (SST), which is the congregation of our Cameroon Director, Sr. Clarisse Remjika Jaiwo. For sisters, losing the General Superior is similar to losing a parent. We pray for the peace of the Sisters of St. Therese during this difficult time.



**Dr. Edward Ddumba, Uganda**

(April 11, 2020)

Dr. Ddumba initiated and signed ASEC's first Framework of Reference with HESA Partner St. Francis Nsambya Hospital Training School in Kampala, Uganda. Our prayers are with Dr. Ddumba's family and friends in their grief.



**Sr. Irene Lucy Onyai, LSMIG, Uganda**

(September 4, 2020)

Sr. Irene is from the congregation Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Gulu (LSMIG) in Uganda. She served as the Programs Coordinator for ASEC Uganda until her passing. Sr. Irene is greatly missed by all who were blessed to know her. We pray that she may rest in eternal peace.



Make a donation to support the ministry work of Catholic Sisters at [asec-sldi.org/donate](https://asec-sldi.org/donate).



Congratulations to ASEC Researcher, **Sr. Kevin Karimi, LSOSF**. Sr. Kevin successfully defended her doctoral dissertation about ASEC's SLDI program on January 21, 2020 at Marywood University, Scranton, Pennsylvania. She received her Ph.D. in Strategic Leadership and Administrative Studies.



**ASEC's 20th anniversary celebration** was held in Uganda on January 10, 2020. Many ASEC staff were in attendance. ASEC is grateful to the Association of the Religious in Uganda (ARU) for organizing this event!

## ASEC Staff Members Celebrating 25 Years of Religious Life

We have three ASEC staff members who celebrated their Silver Jubilee in 2020, marking 25 years of religious life. Happy anniversary, sisters!

- **Sr. Juliana Chibaula Zulu, RGS**, Zambia (May 2020)
- **Sr. Lina Wanjiku Ndung'u, SE**, Kenya (June 2020)
- **Sr. Joyce Kwamboka Nyakwama, SSND**, Kenya (December 2020)

## Executive Director Receives Patriotic Employer Award

ASEC Executive Director, Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, received the **Patriotic Employer Award** from the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense. The award is to recognize her support of Sneh Akruvala, ASEC's Data Manager, in her year-long leave of absence for military service with the U.S. Army.

## In Memory of our Sister Students

It is with sadness we report the passing of four ASEC students. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family, friends, teachers, classmates and congregations of these sisters. May the Lord crown them with eternal glory.



### **Sr. Lucia Kehlane, FCSCJ, Lesotho (HESA)**

Sr. Lucia was a Daughter of the Charity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus who was studying Humanities at the National University of Lesotho. She passed away in January 2020 after an illness. Sr. Lucia's friends say that she was unique, had a beautiful voice, was ever-smiling, responsible, cooperative and hardworking.



### **Sr. Stella Teru, SHS, Uganda (HESA)**

Sr. Stella is a Sacred Heart Sister who was studying for her Masters in Education at Uganda Martyrs University. She passed away in April 2020 after a courageous 1.5 year battle with cancer.



### **Sr. Anna Unzia, ESM, Uganda (HESA)**

Sr. Anna is an alumna of ASEC's HESA program from the Institute of the Missionary Congregation of the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary in Uganda. She passed away in August 2020, after a brave battle with cancer. Sr. Anna graduated from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) in 2017 with her Bachelor's of Education.



### **Sr. Caroline Kiambi, CSJB, Kenya (SLDI)**

Sr. Caroline was a Kenyan nun of the congregation Sisters of St. John the Baptist and a participant in ASEC's SLDI program in Zambia. She passed away suddenly in October 2020, hours after renewing her religious vows. Those who knew Sr. Caroline describe her as a devoted and prayerful woman, with a cheerful spirit and glowing smile.

## ASEC/CARA Hold Inaugural ICR Conference

ASEC, in collaboration with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), held the inaugural **International Consultative Research (ICR) Conference** virtually on September 21-23 and 28-30, 2020. The conference provides an opportunity for researchers around the globe to collaborate in the initiation of an **international network of research on religious life**. Learn more at [asec-sldi.org/icr](https://asec-sldi.org/icr)



Staff & partners visited Nkozi Hospital in Kampala, Uganda, where HESA alumna Sr. Harriet Baker, IMHR, serves as Nursing Director, supervising ≈100 healthcare workers. From L-R: Rosemary Shaver, Sr. Harriet Baker, April Fowlkes, Tara Lopatofsky

## My Experience as a HESA Liaison

I've had the pleasure of working as the HESA/ASEC coordinator for Chestnut Hill College for the past six years! And, in June 2019, I had the honor of attending the **very first HESA conference in Uganda**. From our pick up to our drop off at the airport 12 days later and at every moment in between, the sisters' care and compassion were tangible.

Our site visits opened my eyes to the deep rooted impact that HESA has on the sisters and, in turn, **the power of change** that it has created for the communities in which they serve. I felt proud that I could represent Chestnut Hill College during the conference.

At the forefront of my experiences during the site visit was **my time spent in the schools** with the children and staff. Their joy and way of living reminded me that our community with one another and the earth is beautiful because of its simplicity. In the busyness of my day to day life, I will cherish these memories and strive to instill the same sense of peace within others.

The HESA inaugural conference was brought to fruition with great thought and care. There was not any detail left unaddressed. It allowed for **a free flow of conversation among colleagues and ideas to be shared among new friends**. I was grateful for the opportunity to meet with our partner schools in West Africa, discuss new opportunities and share best practices moving forward. Additionally, despite being only miles from our other founding partners, Rosemont College and Marywood University, for the first time, we were able to share a space for new ideas to grow the partnership.

*I would be remiss if I did not, with the sincerest gratitude, acknowledge Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, Rosemary Shaver, M.Ed., and Tara Lopatofsky, Ph.D., for their planning, coordination and inherent leadership leading up to and throughout the experience. Additionally, I extend many thanks to Sr. Carol Jean Vale, SSJ, Ph.D., Sr. Kathryn Miller, SSJ, Ph.D., and Elaine Green, Ed.D., at Chestnut Hill College for their endless support of HESA and my role within the program. I'm excited as we embark on our sixth cohort for 2020!*

*April Fowlkes, MS, HESA Liaison, Chestnut Hill College*

## Visiting Sister Scholars Travel to the U.S. to Gain Research Skills

Through a grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, ASEC partners with Georgetown University's **Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)** to run a Visiting Scholar program for African Sisters.

Sisters selected for the program spend six months working with researchers at CARA in Washington, D.C., to acquire applied research skills in the apostolate. The grant also supports the development and implementation of at least one research project in the home country of each sister scholar.



**Sr. Aloysia Sebueng Makoe, SNJM, Lesotho**

Sr. Aloysia holds a Ph.D. in African Languages from the University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa. She is the sixth visiting scholar, arriving in the USA in February, 2020.



**Sr. Lucy Dora Akello, LSMIG, Uganda**

Sr. Lucy holds a Ph.D. in Behavioural and Social Science/Pedagogy from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. She is the seventh visiting scholar, arriving in the USA in September, 2020.

# Sister Stories

## The Computer is Not Just for Academics

ASEC has done a lot of good things for many religious nuns as well as the communities which they serve. Personally, it became a blessing to me on the very day when I received my admission letter in June, 2018.

I was computer illiterate but with the support of ASEC, I **learned how to use a computer**. During HESA orientation, one of the sisters who had attended the SLDI workshop shared how she was able to acquire a grant to support her institute to construct a chapel. I was not convinced, but she tried to explain to me that many religious institutes have enjoyed such donations and grants. She told me that the computer is not only for academics, but can do other things such as writing project proposals, designing cards and other things.

I started to search for funders which support religious institutions. Thank God I came across many, but decided to try just one inquiry letter **for the construction of a house for our elderly sisters. I got a positive response!** With excitement, I started the project proposal right away.

In January, 2020, construction began. I compile every expenditure so we should have a right and clear accountability. The construction is still in progress but the structure is complete and only finishing touches remain.

Thank you Dear Mother General. If you had ignored my idea, I would not make it on my own. I am very hopeful that this is just the beginning of the taste on the fruits of ASEC. I know that after my studies, my fruits will be shared. I am never ashamed to call ASEC my parent because you have done wonders and miracles to me as well as helping me to

do the things I had never thought of before your support.

***Sr. Moleen Birungi, CSHJ,**  
HESA participant, Uganda*



## Graduating at the Age of 50

My story has been a journey with challenges but with the Lord's goodness, I have been able to pull through. I was supposed to start my academic journey at CUEA 20 years ago (1999) but things could not work as planned. I had what was needed to enter university but I was not given the chance.



I've learned that God's timing is the best. The year 2019 was a year of blessing for me. I obtained my degree at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) **at the age of 50**. I successfully completed my undergraduate degree **with second class upper division [honors]**.

I wish to thank the Lord for his goodness. I attained my heart's desire. A big thank you to Sr. Angelina and Sr. Juliana (ASEC staff in Zambia) for support. I thank ASEC for both material and financial support given to me all was made possible with your generosity. My appreciation to my congregation for everything they contributed to my success.

***Sr. Judith Nkolonga, SOM,** HESA alumna, Zambia*

## The Challenges of a Primary School Teacher During COVID-19



Graduating with my education degree from the Catholic University of Ghana with **First Class Honors as the first Cameroonian alumna of the HESA program**, I feel humbled and deeply indebted to ASEC and to my congregation.

Coming home, my congregation was full of high expectations and immediately **assigned me to head a newly created Nursery and Primary School** in the outskirts of Yaounde, Cameroon. Another challenge was yet to begin. **During COVID-19**, we had to be creative and keep the enthusiasm of the pupils. We followed up home lessons with them through assignments, calls, visits when possible and successfully brought them to the end of the academic year. I am ready to face the next academic year with more confidence, skills and enthusiasm. I love working with the kids. They are amazing.

***Sr. Lucy Anjeh, SST,** HESA alumna, Cameroon*



## A Message of Gratitude from SLDI Participants in Nigeria

We, the participants of the Admin Track-August 2020, wish to express our truest gratitude for your benevolence and kindness to us. **Words alone cannot convey the joy in our hearts.** We are very thankful for the gift of the set of computers we have received to enable us be more effective and efficient in our various ministries.

We would also want to share our sentiment of gratitude once again for the opportunity to develop ourselves through this program. This time has offered us already **an avenue to learn new things**, relearn the things we had forgotten and unlearn the things we thought we knew and were doing well, when in actual sense we were not doing them right. We know the weeks ahead of us are packed with many more to be received from our seasoned facilitators and we look forward to those days with hope.

We wish to assure you that **we will use all that we shall learn here** for our own growth and for the development of our various ministries, congregations and the entire church. **We will also help to empower those with whom we work so that they can become secondary beneficiaries of this GOODNESS.**

**Do extend our appreciation to the donors** who have made our time here very comfortable and memorable, who through their generosity we will become better equipped for the mission of Christ. We love them and you all and will continue to hold you and them closely in our hearts/prayers during this time and always. Blessings! Thank you so much!



Yours lovingly,  
**SLDI Admin Track Participants,**  
*Nigeria (Aug. 2020)*

## Kidnapped Children Rescued by Sisters in Cameroon

The Sisters of St. Therese of the Child Jesus (SST) in Cameroon engaged in the prison apostolate are very much committed to provisions of the International Convention on the Rights of Children. It is within this framework that the sisters seek to preserve children from inhumane, degrading or cruel treatment and also alert competent authorities in matters of protection of children when their rights are violated.

It is in line with one of such activities, in March 2020, SLDI participant, **Sr. Ayumbi Ndeng, SST**, spearheaded a team that **liberated 20 kidnapped children, between 3-12 years old**. The children were taken hostage in the PK-10 neighborhood in Douala, Cameroon.



The innocent children were locked up in a house by themselves with little to no food, medical or moral attention. When the sisters were notified of this worrisome and illegal practice, they alerted the Social Welfare and Public Security authorities.



The children were immediately dispatched to a safe home. Investigations are ongoing to ensure that the children get back to their homes. In the meantime, the sisters will provide the children with spiritual, moral, psychological and material needs.

## The Impact of ASEC on the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph Congregation

The Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph (FMSJ) were founded in 1883 in England, to minister to those most in need—the poor, the uneducated, the sick and the dying. In Africa, we continue to fulfill this mission with zeal and dedication. Through our apostolates, we reach thousands of people **living in remote parts of Kenya and Uganda.**

Without the support that we have received and continue to receive from ASEC, it would have been difficult for us to realize this dream.

ASEC is also one of our close collaborators in the area of capacity building and education of our sisters. **The management of our projects has improved and that has earned us respect** from our partners in the field including the government ministries, the dioceses and other like-minded institutions in the different areas where we work.

More importantly, **the poor and the marginalized of society that we serve receive quality and improved services** due to the capacity of sisters. Here are some of the quotations from some of the sisters who have participated:



"It would not have been possible for me to deliver services effectively to the community of Salawa, where I serve as the sister in charge of the Salawa Catholic Mission Dispensary, were it not for ASEC SLDI course on Administration" -**Sr. Priscah Bonarereri, FMSJ, SLDI alumna**



"I count myself among the luckiest students who has benefited fully from ASEC program which has transformed me into who I am now: a leader with a difference and creativity in the apostolate." -**Sr. Norah Nyausi, FMSJ, HESA alumna**

We are very grateful for the support received from ASEC.

**Sr. Tecla C. Sambu, FMSJ, Regional Leader of the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph**

\*References for articles within this publication are available on ASEC's website: [asec-sldi.org/rays20](https://asec-sldi.org/rays20)

## Catholic Sisters are Shining Rays of Hope

Catholic sisters have been involved in education for many years. In Africa, children, especially girls who are often the most marginalized, feel safe and protected in the schools where sisters constantly advocate for their education.

**School is a safe haven and a place to pursue one's dreams.** The majority of these girls look up to the sisters as their role models and mothers.

As COVID-19 hit the world and schools closed, many young students fell victim to domestic and sexual abuse.

Consequently, **teenage pregnancies and marriages increased significantly in Africa.** Many countries in Africa reported a 38% increase\* in teenage pregnancies as well as early marriages that occurred behind the closed doors of families during the lockdown.

The COVID-19 pandemic that has affected us globally has also revealed the vulnerabilities of our lives. The lockdown restrictions have exposed economic differences in every nation. The pandemic pushed so many people into poverty, homelessness, unemployment and hunger. Sisters in Africa continue to sow the seeds of hope in their communities during COVID-19. The sisters are not only advocating for the vulnerable and marginalized girls, but also they are seeking justice and addressing the challenges in their societies.

The internet is increasingly becoming the new way of communication as the world battles this pandemic. Sisters in Africa are using the technological skills and the education they received through ASEC to protect and defend the vulnerable and the marginalized people they serve in their societies.

Will you join our efforts and be a *Ray of Hope*? I invite you to join us and be part of our mission. Mindful of the difficult financial shortfalls due to COVID-19, I request you to consider donating to ASEC to continue its mission to serve the most vulnerable through the sisters in Africa. We rely on you to continue ASEC's mission. Your contribution will make a huge difference and will help us impact the lives of so many people that the sisters in Africa serve.

**Sr. Nancy Kamau, LSOSF, ASEC Director of Development**

Make a donation at [asec-sldi.org/donate](https://asec-sldi.org/donate).

# ASEC Partners in Africa & USA



## Today in Africa...



A child will recover from malaria, thanks to a Catholic sister who has dedicated her life to healing the sick.



That same sister now uses her education to keep her community healthy through local medical clinics.



A village has food to feed their previously starving population, thanks to the education of a Catholic sister.



That same sister now builds sustainable farms so villagers in rural areas won't have to go hungry again.



Orphaned boys are rescued from the streets and are receiving an education, thanks to the efforts of a Catholic sister.



That same sister now dedicates her life to mentoring abandoned kids so they can become the future leader of Africa.

**Donations support ASEC's scholarship program**, which bridges the gap to higher education for African sisters in Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia and Ghana by providing **two-year scholarships** to complete secondary school or receive higher education credentials relevant to their ministries.

Will you become a *Ray of Hope* and help educate women who are serving the poor communities across Africa?

We are committed to alleviating poverty in Africa through the education of Catholic sisters... sisters who are already working where help is needed most. Will you join us? Donate today and make a big difference for years to come. Your impact is a great blessing!

### The impact of your donation:

\$3 provides **one day** of education for a Catholic sister

\$20 = **one week** of education

\$85 = **one month** of education

\$250 = **three months** of education

\$500 = **six months** of education

\$1,000 = **one year** of education



Make an online donation through our secure system by visiting **[asec-sldi.org/donate](http://asec-sldi.org/donate)**.

Or, mail checks made payable to **African Sisters Education Collaborative** to 2300 Adams Avenue, Scranton, PA 18509

## More ways you can help

Here are some of the ways you can support our ASEC sisters



### FUNDRAISE

Set up a Facebook fundraiser at **[asec-sldi.org/fb](http://asec-sldi.org/fb)** to raise money for our important cause.



### SHARE

When you like, comment and share our social media posts, you help us get our story out to more people.



### AMAZON

Select ASEC as your charity of choice at **[asec-sldi.org/smile](http://asec-sldi.org/smile)** and Amazon will donate .5% of your purchases to ASEC.



ebay

### EBAY

Sell items on eBay and donate a portion of the sale, or buy from other ASEC supporters at **[asec-sldi.org/ebay](http://asec-sldi.org/ebay)**.



### VOLUNTEER

Sign up on our website to learn about our volunteer opportunities at **[asec-sldi.org/get-involved](http://asec-sldi.org/get-involved)**.

For more information, visit **[asec-sldi.org/Rays20](http://asec-sldi.org/Rays20)**