



## STRATEGIC PLAN

# ASEC 2023: STRENGTHENING CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN AFRICA



ASEC



AFRICAN SISTERS  
EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE



**AFRICAN  
SISTERS  
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# MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN AFRICA

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## I. INTRODUCTION

# LETTER FROM ASEC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

December 2020

### Dear Colleagues, Stakeholders, and Friends of ASEC:

In the spirit of collaboration and following the footsteps of our founders, I would like to present to you the revised strategic plan of the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC), **ASEC 2023: Strengthening Capacity and Sustainability of Catholic Sisters in Africa**. I believe the plan will serve as the strategic compass to advance our support for women religious and the continent of Africa.

The plan provides a strategic framework containing mission, vision, values, and six strategic directions to guide ASEC in the next three years 2021 through 2023. This plan is a revised version of the highly collaborative process that began in 2016 and involved both a qualitative and quantitative planning process, including program information, interviews, board and advisory board focus groups, board retreat and staff and partner interviews, culminating in the ASEC 2020 Strategic Plan. At the threshold of 2020, the ASEC Board of Directors determined that the strategic framework generated then is still relevant to the mission of ASEC today. Therefore, a revision and an update of ASEC 2020 was deemed sufficient to take ASEC through the next three years. During that time, a more robust process of development of the ASEC 2025 strategic plan will be undertaken, beginning in 2021.

The plan for the future of the African Sisters Education Collaborative is based on the revised six strategic directions below:

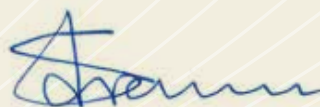
1. High Quality Sustainable, Educational Programs
2. Diversify Funding Sources
3. Strengthen the Board's Governance and Structure
4. Getting Our Story Out
5. Infrastructure Development
6. Systemic Sustainability of Catholic Sisters in Africa

These strategic directions are our collective aspirations. Key to attaining them are our dedicated staff, board directors and partners located across ten countries in Africa and in the United States. Together we commit to strengthening sustainable human development in Africa. ASEC is dedicated to supporting and contributing to the UN's 2030 transformative agenda, articulated in its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Selected targets and indicators, together with how ASEC programs are meeting these targets, are measured annually. The spirit of collaborative partnership to attain the specific goals continues to define ASEC's mode of operation. Please take the time to read it and think about your role in reaching our goals.

I am deeply grateful to the four member Strategic Plan Review Team, committees of the Board, the Board of Directors, and ASEC staff for their talents invested in revision and shaping this document. This collaborative effort defines ASEC's mode of operation and highlights its core value of collaboration.

With your support, I am committed to providing leadership to achieve ASEC's mission. However, the desire to bring the Strategic Plan 2023 to fruition must come from within each individual person for ASEC's mission to flourish.

Sincerely,



**Sr Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG,**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## MISSION

Facilitate access to education for women religious in Africa that leads to enhancement and expansion of the education, health, economic, social, environmental and spiritual services they provide.

## CORE VALUES

### TRANSFORMATION

ASEC provides educational opportunities for women religious in Africa in order to facilitate attainment of their human potential, as well as that of the people in the communities and societies they serve, with special concern for persons most in need.

### COLLABORATION

ASEC nurtures multi-layered partnerships that further its mission in accordance with the gospel call to unity and solidarity. Recognizing the shared goal of furthering educational opportunities for women religious in Africa, ASEC works together with partners in the spirit of global sisterhood to support the personal and spiritual growth of sisters in Africa.

### SERVICE

ASEC cultivates an environment of service among its stakeholders by promoting social responsibility and community engagement to meet the needs of society. ASEC recognizes that women religious in Africa devote their lives to service in a spirit of compassion, humility, love, and protection for all of God's creation.

## VISION

To be a sustainable organization with a proven capacity to collaboratively develop and deliver educational programs that strengthen the capacity of women religious in Africa.

### LEADERSHIP

ASEC fosters the leadership capacity of women religious in Africa to leverage their strengths and those of their sisters, staff, students, and others they influence, to achieve common goals while developing their individual gifts and talents.

### CAPACITY- BUILDING

ASEC is committed to strengthening skills, competencies, and credentials of women religious in Africa, by engaging the capacity of experts through training to increase the sisters' ability to build sustainable programs and organizations that address the social, human and spiritual needs of their societies.

### REVERENCE

ASEC respects the special value, unique talents and gifts of each person created and sustained by God. To revere life is to act and respond with deep respect and compassion for the dignity and diversity inherent in humanity. ASEC extends services across multiple cultures and communities, to the global north and south, operating with an appreciation for the uniqueness of people and their worldviews; and with empathy by listening, reflecting, and promoting communication that is meaningful, honest and inclusive.



40,000

SISTERS  
IN ASEC  
REGIONS

5,000 SISTERS SERVED  
BY ASEC TO DATE

80%



DEPRIVED OF HIGHER EDUCATION

## ASEC BACKGROUND AND HISTORY



While Africa is a continent of vast potential, it currently faces serious obstacles of poverty, chronic hunger, disease, ecological degradation, and violence. Catholic women religious are a strong force in harnessing that potential, addressing these issues and offering hope for the future. These women, who are deeply trusted by their societies, work to improve life at the community and national levels by leading and serving where the needs are the greatest: in schools, in healthcare facilities, and in human service, environmental, and economic projects across the continent. However, although the impact of women religious on society is significant, many of them lack higher education credentials or professional preparation; some lack even the secondary school qualifications required for entry to higher education.

The African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) recognizes that women religious in Africa profoundly impact their communities and society. The services they provide are making a significant contribution to the advancement of sustainable human development and to addressing the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). To advance these efforts, ASEC provides educational opportunities for women religious in Africa so that they may further develop their talents and potential, build their education credentials, and enhance the leadership and ministerial roles they assume at all levels of society.

The history of ASEC dates back to 1995 when growing solidarity among women religious in Africa and the United States sparked a commitment to work together to address the issue of educational access. As a result of needs assessment and careful analysis, ASEC, a 501(c) 3 organization, was inaugurated in 1999 by the leaders of four congregations of women religious in Pennsylvania and the presidents of the colleges and universities founded by their congregations, for purposes of providing educational opportunities for women religious in Africa.

Recognizing the need for new and creative ways to provide African sisters with education in the context of their own countries and cultures, ASEC began by developing a technological base to open various opportunities for working collaboratively with women religious in Africa toward this goal. The initiative began with having sisters in Africa go to the U.S. for technology skills training and was followed by technology workshops held in East and West Africa. Since then ASEC has grown into an organization that is providing women religious in Africa with opportunities for further education through five different programs: Higher Education for Sisters in Africa program (HESA), Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI), Scholarship Project, Service Learning, and Dissemination of Best Practices, including training in research and evaluation. The geographic area where these programs are offered has expanded from the initial five countries of Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda, to ten, including Cameroon, Lesotho, Malawi, South Sudan, and Zambia, with sisters from Benin, Rwanda, Togo, and Zimbabwe also attending.

To date, ASEC has served over 5,000 sisters and students through its programs, and that number continues to grow. Graduates of ASEC's programs demonstrate that educating a sister can result in rippling, far-reaching impacts that significantly contribute to sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa. From improving healthcare and access to clean water, to building infrastructure and initiating income generating projects, educated and empowered sisters are key players in overcoming many of Africa's biggest development challenges. Sisters who graduate from ASEC programs go on to take up leadership positions, improve the functioning of their congregations and ministries, and mobilize resources to meet urgent human development needs. As of early 2020, ASEC alumnae have raised more than \$19.3 million for projects focused on education, healthcare and other important areas of human development. Through these funded projects, more than 2.2 million people have been served and over 3,800 jobs have been created.

Although the accomplishments to date are spectacular for so short a time, much remains to be done. As of 2018, it was estimated that there are approximately 37,905 women religious in the countries served by ASEC, an increase of 1,828 sisters since 2017. ASEC has served about 13.2% of the sisters in ASEC's ten countries, an increase from about 12% in 2018-19. There are, however, many sisters still in need of academic education and professional training. A 2016 ASEC survey of Superiors revealed that 78% of sisters need postsecondary education. With a growing sisterhood in most ASEC countries, ASEC remains committed to educating and empowering sisters in Africa.



## LISTENING FOR THE EMERGING FUTURE OF ASEC

ASEC 2023: Strengthening Capacity and Sustainability of Women Religious in Africa is a continuation of and building on an ambitious, nine-month, comprehensive planning process launched by ASEC in early 2016 to provide direction for the organization for the next three years and beyond. The resulting ASEC 2020 plan was based on many months of listening deeply to important conversations for the future with the many important voices that together constitute ASEC to uncover what was needed to bring ASEC to its next stage of development. The plan included input from staff in the U.S. and Africa, the Board directors, Advisory Board members, ASEC partners and other stakeholders. ASEC 2023 retains, as essential to the continuation and growth of ASEC for the next three years, the six important strategic directions that emerged in 2016, relevantly modified and updated.

ASEC has grown exponentially since 2013, successfully developing, implementing, and expanding critically needed programs, and benefiting previously unimagined numbers of sisters. While creating educational opportunities for women religious in Africa continues to be ASEC's central focus, this plan's emphasis on organizational development is intentional and designed to allow ASEC to build organizational structures to sustain its current level of operations as well as those envisioned for the future.



As we proceed to implement the plan in a spirit of collaboration and service, may it serve as our guide for ASEC's continued evolution as an organization and for providing women religious in Africa with opportunities for the education necessary for their roles in reducing poverty, hunger, illiteracy, malnutrition and environmental degradation. May ASEC 2023 help all the stakeholders to own and transform this plan into action, with energy, enthusiasm, and initiative at its implementation.



## II. STATEMENTS OF STRATEGIC DIRECTION

### READING THE STATEMENTS OF STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

ASEC has retained the six major strategic directions with modification as the basis for this strategic plan ASEC 2023. Each strategic direction is expressed in a **Statement of Strategic Direction** and each statement is presented in six parts:

- Each ***bold statement*** represents an ideal for which we are striving.
- A ***big idea*** follows each statement, describing changes that need to happen in order for ideals to become reality and why change needs to occur.
- ***Strategies*** to achieve change provide a broad design for how we will move forward.
- ***Metrics*** to assess change provide a broad design for how we will measure progress.
- ***Success indicators*** highlight what our experience will be when we move in the direction of change.



A glossary is provided afterwards to help readers better understand key terms.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

## HIGH QUALITY, SUSTAINABLE, EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

*ASEC offers high quality, sustainable, educational programs that expand the capacity of women religious in Africa to contribute to advancing human development through their education, health, economic, social, environmental and spiritual ministries and to furthering progress toward the realization of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*



### WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Women religious who are beneficiaries of ASEC programs dedicate their lives to service by improving the social, healthcare, educational, environmental, and economic conditions and spiritual enrichment of communities and society in Africa. The majority of them, although in professional positions, lack the relevant higher education credentials, training, and/or resources they need in the global environment of the 21st century to achieve the fullest impact with their essential ministries. ASEC programs fill this need by providing support for the sisters to acquire education credentials and training and by providing them opportunities for further education through the following programs: Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) program, Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI), Scholarship Project; Service Learning, and Dissemination of Best Practices, including training in research and evaluation. Each program focuses on growing in its contribution toward realization of the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs).

### Strategies for Strategic Direction 1

- A.** Continue to innovate and implement HESA, SLDI, Scholarship Project, Service Learning, and Dissemination of Best Practices.
- B.** Cement strong and productive partnerships among groups, institutions, organizations, and individuals that are committed to advancing ASEC mission and SDGs.
- C.** Provide appropriate, cutting-edge resources and technologies to ASEC program participants to support ongoing skills building and mentorship.
- D.** Develop ASEC's capacity for research on the impact of its programs on women religious in Africa, their congregations, and the communities they serve.
- E.** Encourage U.S. partner universities to involve campus ministers in the Service Learning Program.

### How will we measure progress?

- Monitor and evaluate individual ASEC programs as part of a larger organizational evaluation plan.
- Collect data through qualitative and quantitative methods, from sister beneficiaries, instructors, ASEC staff, partners, and other stakeholders to determine program outcomes and program effectiveness.
- Use the framework of United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to highlight ASEC's program outcomes.
- Produce annual progress and summative reports to assess progress towards programmatic and organizational goals and objectives.
- Level of activity of Campus Ministers in Service Learning Program
- New research interest in positive change effected by ASEC programs and activities is generated among individuals beyond ASEC staff and alumnae.

### How will we know we have achieved Strategic Direction 1?

- Increased skills and knowledge in the curricular areas in which participants receive training or education.
- Meet or exceed projected number of participants and alumnae engagement in long-term planning for their ministries and/or congregations.
- The majority of SLDI alumnae engage in mentorship of other sisters and/or lay people.
- Sustained or increased funds raised by alumnae through grants, fundraising, and donations to support community projects and sustainability of ministries and organizations.
- The majority of alumnae engage in ministries or projects that are contributing to the UN SDGs.
- Number of new ministries/ organizations initiated because of alumnae leadership
- Improvements in congregational functioning as a result of participation in ASEC programs (i.e. initiation or improvement of strategic plans, financial systems, HR management, etc.).
- New research on positive change effected by ASEC programs and activities published by individuals beyond ASEC staff and alumnae.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

## DIVERSIFY FUNDING SOURCES

*Expand and diversify funding streams to solidify and strengthen the continuation and growth of ASEC programs, and ensure ASEC's ongoing viability through reliable, flexible and diversified funding resources.*



### WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

As a grassroots organization providing leadership, education and development for women religious engaged in human development in Africa, ASEC must build, expand and strengthen its financial portfolio to meet evolving program needs for women religious in Africa as they continue to transform their society towards meeting SDGs in Africa. ASEC must build the financial capacity to receive large grants directly, diversify its sources of funding to strengthen the reliability of resources to continue its programs, and ensure financial investment in ASEC internal infrastructure and operations.

### Strategies for Strategic Direction 2

- A.** Develop a viable financial model to support ASEC's strategic plan through increased revenue from broadened philanthropic and volunteer support and a growing investment portfolio.
- B.** Establish an annual fundraising goal for ASEC
- C.** Strengthen existing strategic partnerships and collaborations with foundations, and institutional and individual donors for sustainability.
- D.** Initiate an annual giving campaign and other fundraising activities, engaging partners, associates, Board Directors, and friends of ASEC.
- E.** Execute robust digital plan integrating all forms of web and social media into the cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship process.
- F.** Develop strategies to increase the level of participation of ASEC's current donors.
- G.** Expand ASEC's donor base to include as many of the Catholic colleges and universities in the U.S. as possible.

### How will we measure progress?

- Development of a fundraising plan and sustainability model.
- Realistic fundraising goals established annually.
- Partner's level of engagement and satisfaction in ASEC educational projects.
- Usage of online and social media fundraising strategies.
- Established benchmarks for fundraising efforts.
- Increased potential to raise funds for ASEC programs and activities.
- Request made to the President of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) and other associations of colleges and universities for a presentation about ASEC to the college and university presidents at their annual meetings.



### How will we know we have achieved Strategic Direction 2?

- Operationalized financial plan and sustainability plan.
- Achievement of the annual fundraising goals.
- High levels of partner engagement in support of ASEC projects and high levels of partner satisfaction.
- Increased donations from online and social media platforms.
- Increase in the number of Catholic colleges and universities in the U.S. that are Associate Members, making financial contributions to ASEC, and/or accepting and funding ASEC students for the doctoral degree.





## WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

The Board consists of Members (sitting Presidents of colleges and congregations), additional elected directors, associate directors, and directors emeritus. Directors possess experience and/or areas of expertise that assist ASEC in fulfilling its Mission; these include academic, financial, legal, cultural, marketing, administrative, entrepreneurial, and other related areas. Potential Directors exhibit commitment to the Mission and Vision of ASEC, willingness to attend meetings and serve on committees, ability to provide financial support with a minimum annual contribution (to be determined), and openness to identifying potential financial supporters and people of influence.

### Strategies for Strategic Direction 3

- A.** Expand the Board of Directors to include additional laypersons and to represent diversity of gender, race, geographic location, financial potential, age, and areas of expertise.
- B.** Actively seek to create a diverse pool of individuals who are committed to ASEC's mission and meet the criteria for election to the Board.
- C.** Encourage all board directors and other stakeholders to nominate candidates.
- D.** Engage partners and other stakeholders to identify possible candidates for Board directorship.
- E.** Explore the possibility of increasing the number of institutional Members to include additional catholic colleges/universities and/or religious congregations.
- F.** Expand Associate Membership.
- G.** Encourage participation of Associate Members in Board Committees.
- H.** Expand Board committees to include non-directors to cultivate Board Membership.

### How will we measure progress?

- Diversification of board directors and advisory board.
- Number of institutional Associate Members and Friends of ASEC.
- Process established for determination on admission of additional institutional Members.
- Recruitment of young adults and Associate Members into Board Committees.
- Increased number of lay people on the Board beginning with alumni of the Service Learning program.

### How will we know we have achieved Strategic Direction 3?

- Increased diversification of the Board
- Increased capacity of the Board to offer expertise in diverse areas of knowledge, skills, and lived experiences.
- Decision made on whether to seek additional institutional Members and process for recruitment and selection developed.
- Increased financial resources due to increase in Associate Member and Friends of ASEC donations.
- Increased involvement of young adults and Associate Members in ASEC Board committees.



ASEC Board of Directors (May, 2019)



*Transform ASEC into an organization known locally and globally for its expertise and best practices in educating women religious in Africa to become leaders who are creating sustainable development on the ground, at the policy level and in other decision-making groups.*



## WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Too few people are aware of the extraordinary achievements of ASEC, its valuable programs, its success in obtaining funds for these programs, and its far-reaching impact on women religious in Africa and the society in which they work. To support both the transformation of ASEC into an organization that is known locally and globally for its excellent programs, and the diversification and expansion of its funding streams, it is vital for ASEC to tell the story of its accomplishments, the needs they meet, the transformational impact of the services provided by women religious in Africa, and the vast gaps in their education that still remain. A variety of resources will be developed and media used to promote ASEC's message and its work.

### Strategies for Strategic Direction 4

- A.** Communicate ASEC impact to global audience, including its contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- B.** Create a marketing and public relations plan using various online and offline platforms.
- C.** Develop a message for a variety of audiences through talking points, focusing on the significance of the work done by women religious in Africa, the importance of educating them, and the power of partnerships in achieving ASEC mission.
- D.** Identify higher-level decision-making bodies where ASEC beneficiaries might influence local, national and global policy.
- E.** Seek Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Affairs Division (ECOSOC).
- F.** Expand the Development Committee to include a focus on communications and rename the Committee as the Mission Advancement Committee.
- G.** Build profile of institutions and individuals that currently support ASEC in order to develop a prospective donor profile and shape ASEC's story for specifically targeted audiences.

### How will we measure progress?

- Progress made toward developing a marketing plan.
- Engagement in social media, production of visual and print stories on ASEC's work. Use of Videos and other marketing collateral to communicate ASEC's work and impacts in Africa.
- Level of relation of UN SDGs to ASEC impact in publicity materials and stories about ASEC.
- Application for Consultative Status with ECOSOC submitted.
- Mission Advancement Committee formed to include development and communications functions.
- Strategy to guide achieving increased public attention for ASEC from targeted audiences developed.
- Research and data gathering on characteristics of those who support ASEC underway.



### How will we know we have achieved Strategic Direction 4?

- Increased visibility and awareness of ASEC's work in the public domain.
- Increased awareness of UN SDGs among ASEC stakeholders and audiences.
- Expanded use of UN SDGs in communicating how ASEC contributes to sustainable development in Africa.
- Consultative Status with ECOSOC achieved through affiliation with group that already has Consultative Status.
- Profile of ASEC supporters developed.
- Expertise engaged to shape the story of ASEC for targeted audiences.
- Increased attention for ASEC success stories from target audiences captured.



*Build the appropriate operational infrastructure for human resources, finance, governance, and program delivery, to support growth and ensure stability for growing impact.*



## WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

The development of structures for human resources, finance, governance, and program delivery, is a priority to meet the needs of ASEC as a growing organization. ASEC is working toward holistic infrastructure development at the administrative and board level, creating structures at all levels to develop policies and procedures for board members, administrators, partner institutions, funders, and sister-students, as well as to establish clear expectations. Exploratory research on the question of independence, or semi-independence, for ASEC beyond 2020, with the intention of understanding its benefits and drawbacks, as well as necessary processes and legal implications will be included.

### Strategies for Strategic Direction 5

- A.** Strengthen and develop administrative structures for program delivery.
- B.** Strengthen infrastructure for ASEC's two largest programs, SLDI and HESA
- C.** Build infrastructure for ASEC's Scholarship Program, Service Learning Program, and Research Initiative.
- D.** Conduct research to investigate expansion of ASEC programs.
- E.** Continue to develop policies and procedures for ASEC Board, administration and partnerships.
- F.** Streamline communications and processes among USA office and country offices in Africa.
- G.** Implement succession planning for board members, administrators and staff in the USA and Africa to ensure sustainability of the programs in the long term.
- H.** After 2020, when ASEC will have been implementing its programs for 15 years, assess organizational growth, challenges, success, human resources, finances and the map out the future.
- I.** Assess and solidify an organizational structure that will support the growth of ASEC.

### How will we measure progress?

- Creation and operationalization of an Intranet.
- Creation and distribution of relevant manuals or written procedures/policies.
- Board and staff succession planning, program delivery, staff, and internal communications.
- Conduct self-study of ASEC and its constituents.
- Include Service Learning participants in the database.
- An organization chart that is inclusive of staff in the USA and Africa.
- Develop a database for ASEC in the USA.

### How will we know we have achieved Strategic Direction 5?

- Updated communication, expectations, documentation regarding staff policies and program implementation.
- Board members and staff have shared understanding of Board and staff succession planning procedures.
- Increased understanding of organizational goals and processes.





## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 6

## SYSTEMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF SISTERS IN AFRICA

*Support systematic sustainability of congregations participating in ASEC programs to insure continued resourcefulness and vitality into the future. Facilitate the growth of inter-congregational partnerships to improve the professional and apostolic preparedness of women religious in each country of Africa where ASEC serves.*



### WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

ASEC's programs are developed and implemented with the purpose of fostering professionalism among women religious in Africa so that they can expand and sustain their ministries and thereby improve the quality of life in their societies. To achieve this goal, ASEC works in partnership with the institutes of women religious and individual congregations in each country where it operates to ensure the activities of ASEC are promoting the sustainability of the congregations.

### Strategies for Strategic Direction 6

- A. Support institutional capacity building initiatives of national conferences and congregations in specific areas of need.
- B. Strengthen the capacity of congregations in Africa to make data-based decisions by educating women religious on the importance of data collection, and training them to collect the data necessary for assessment and evaluation.
- C. Support additional educational activities organized by the national or regional conferences of women religious.
- D. Develop a plan to expand degrees earned through ASEC to include the doctorate.

### How will we measure progress?

- National conferences and congregations receiving support from ASEC in identified areas of need.
- Number of research/evaluation capacity building trainings with sisters and other stakeholders.
- Number of women religious educated on importance of data collection.
- Number of women religious trained in data collection and evaluation.
- Number of national or regional conference educational activities supported by ASEC.
- Level of resources needed to assist sisters in obtaining doctoral degrees.

### How will we know we have achieved Strategic Direction 6?

- Improved institutional capacity of national conferences and congregations.
- Improved ability of women religious to conduct research and evaluation.
- Increased activity in research and data collection and management.
- Plan developed with timeline, goals, and resources needed to incorporate doctoral degrees into ASEC programming.



### III. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

## ASEC PROGRAMS

### SISTERS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (SLDI)

The Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) program, the largest program run by ASEC, provides leadership and technology training to Catholic sisters in Africa. The following are the SLDI program's overarching goals:

1. Improved ability to effectively transfer the skills and knowledge gained for more effective site management
2. Improved creative and effective leadership
3. Increased ability to identify and mobilize resources
4. Expanded knowledge of development issues that impact the socio-economic and political life of individuals and communities
5. Enhanced human relations competencies
6. Improved ability to engage in strategic planning
7. Improved ability to explore and develop plans to ensure the sustainability of ministries and congregations
8. Increased ability to practice sound financial management for increased effectiveness and efficiency

To attain the overarching goals, the program has five specific attainable objectives to:

- A. Increase the leadership, administrative, financial and technology competencies of the participants;
- B. Assist SLDI alumnae to become lifelong learners, educators, and leaders who use their acquired skills and knowledge to enhance and sustain their ministries;
- C. Support the development and continuation of mentoring relationships to broaden the impact of the program;
- D. Support alumnae and congregations of women religious in developing improved systems to strengthen their sustainability;
- E. Disseminate best practices and learnings from ASEC and the SLDI program, as well as models of innovative access to leadership.

The number of participants has increased over the course of the program with 3,207 sisters (3,170 unique sisters) served to date.



Phase 5 is only in its first year and will likely see an increase in number of participants (numbers include duplicate participants).

In the SLDI program, sisters complete workshops in technology and leadership over a three-year period. In Year One, sisters complete a month-long technology workshop in the Basic Technology or Web Design track; in Year Two, sisters complete a month-long leadership workshop in either the Administration or Finance track; and in Year Three sisters complete the program with a month-long leadership workshop in either the Administration or Finance track.

Since the program's inception in 2007, 3,170 sisters have benefited from SLDI technology and leadership development workshops. SLDI alumnae and their mentees have raised over \$19.3M in grants for their communities. In Phase V, Year 1 the SLDI program served 684 sisters (681 unique sisters) and it is projected that the program will serve a total of 751 sisters in Phase V. In Phase VI, the program expects to serve 800 sisters.

### INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING (ICB) PILOT PROGRAM

The Institutional Capacity Building (ICB) program grew out of an identified need for congregational and organizational capacity building beyond the level of training individual sisters and for superiors to have a better understanding of the skills acquired by sisters participating in ASEC programs. The expected long-term impact of the ICB program is to create expanded leadership and organizational management capacity of women religious in Africa through the creation or strengthening of internal systems of congregations and National Conferences/Associations, in areas such as governance, strategic planning, financial or asset management/ development, human resource management, leadership/administration, and data management.

This impact is achieved through three program objectives:

- A. Improve prioritized areas of internal systemic need within National Conferences/Associations and congregations through a targeted capacity building process.
- B. Promote inter-congregational learning, networking, and mentorship through convenings and mentorship pairings.
- C. Disseminate best practices and learnings from the Institutional Capacity Building program to increase the reach and impact of the project, as well as literature in the field on this topic.

The program was piloted in Year 1 of SLDI Phase V in 2019 and saw many positive outcomes. Two trainings for Superiors, took place, serving a total of 91 Superiors and their representatives. Intensive capacity building took place with the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious in Ghana (CMSRGH), in collaboration with the consulting group, AdviseWise. The CMSRGH achieved: legal registration, a new website, a member database, a new strategic plan, revised executive structure and job descriptions, revised financial plans and new bank accounts, a revised constitution submitted to Rome for approval, land rights, and grant awards from major international funders. Additional capacity building trainings for individual CMSRGH member congregations have taken place with positive outcome and more are planned.



## HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SISTERS IN AFRICA (HESA)

Initiated in 2013, the HESA program provides opportunities for Catholic women religious in ten countries in Africa to access higher education, both through online distance learning and onsite in Africa. HESA empowers sisters to become responsible leaders and citizens in their communities and in society through acquiring quality, affordable higher education leading to a college diploma, bachelor's degree, or master's degree. It is delivered through partnerships with 24 higher education institutions, 21 in Africa and 3 online in the U.S. SLDI and the Scholarship programs are pipelines to the HESA program for many participants. The long-term desired impact of the program is for participants to apply the knowledge, skills, and resources they gained through HESA to strengthen the sustainability and systems of their congregations and to positively impact human development through their various ministries.

**HESA's program structure is designed to provide multiple options for study that meet the unique needs of women religious in Africa, including:**

- A.** Online-onsite hybrid study with partnered colleges/universities in the U.S. and Africa, to accommodate congregations and provide a transition period for sisters who are nontraditional students.
- B.** Entirely onsite study at colleges/universities in Africa.

**The HESA Phase III program objectives are:**

- A.** To provide opportunities for Catholic sisters in ten African countries to access and obtain post-secondary education credentials through onsite and online distance learning;
- B.** To increase sisters in Africa's competencies and leadership capacities in their respective fields of study, towards greater effectiveness in accomplishing their ministries;
- C.** To increase African sisters' capacity to strengthen the sustainability and internal systems of their congregations;
- D.** To assist HESA alumnae to become lifelong learners, educators and leaders who use their acquired skills and knowledge to enhance and sustain their ministries and/or congregations;
- E.** To disseminate best practices and learnings from ASEC and the HESA program, as well as models of innovative access to education.

**Multiple support components are built into the HESA program to ensure students' success and attainment of education credentials. These components include:**

### **Cohort System:**

All HESA students enter a partner college/university as members of a cohort of 5 to 20 participants.

### **Orientation:**

HESA cohorts participate in orientation prior to entry to the university/college in their first year of study.

### **Reflective Learning:**

All HESA students meet for reflective learning at the end of each academic year to develop learning, professional and social support during their studies.

### **Scholastic Materials:**

ASEC provides each HESA student with a laptop on entry to the college/university, a stipend for textbooks each semester, and internet data bundles as needed.

### **Alumnae Workshop:**

HESA alumnae join SLDI alumnae annually for networking opportunities and workshops on topical issues relevant to their ministries.



Since the program's inception in 2013, 1,382 sisters have participated in HESA (as of October 2020). As of October 2020, 440 sisters have graduated and 891 remained enrolled in the program. Sisters are earning diploma (261), bachelor's (822), and master's (299) degrees in needed academic disciplines. In HESA Phase III (2020-2024) ASEC expects to support over 520 sisters at partner colleges/universities, including nearly 130 who will complete a portion of their studies online.

PHASE I	2013-2017	216 BACHELOR'S DEGREES 62 COLLEGE DIPLOMAS
PHASE II	2016-2020	500 BACHELOR'S DEGREES 200 MASTER'S DEGREES 130 COLLEGE DIPLOMAS
PHASE III	2020-2024	423 BACHELOR'S DEGREES 99 MASTER'S DEGREES EXPECTED

## SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Numerous Catholic sisters in Africa lack secondary and postsecondary education credentials, and the stringent requirements for admission to four-year colleges/universities, as well as the high cost of education, are a barrier for many. ASEC's Scholarship Program typically provides scholarships for women religious to complete high school or a college diploma. The long-term desired impact of the program is to provide sisters the opportunity to acquire secondary or postsecondary education credentials, better positioning them to successfully carry out their ministries and bridging the gap for sisters unable to otherwise obtain higher education.

Initiated in 2012 to meet the unique educational needs expressed by sisters in Tanzania, the program expanded in 2016 to Malawi and Zambia, and to Ghana in 2020. Further, in order to meet the need for advanced degrees among sisters in Africa, ASEC provides limited doctoral level scholarships. The Doctoral Scholarship program was piloted at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Kenya in 2020.

### **Specific attainable objectives for the ASEC Scholarship Program include:**

- A.** Provide opportunities for Catholic sisters in African countries to obtain secondary education degrees or college certificates/diplomas;
- B.** Increase African sisters' competencies in their respective fields of study, towards greater effectiveness in accomplishing their ministries;
- C.** Promote the achievement of higher education by ensuring sisters qualify to continue their education after obtaining their secondary school or college diploma/certificate through the Scholarship Program.

The Scholarship Program has grown to serve 396 sisters (as of October 2020) from 84 distinct congregations, enrolled at a total of 89 educational institutions (schools, institutes, colleges, and universities) across the four countries. As of October 2020, 240 have graduated (2012-2020) and 144 remained enrolled studying for form 3-4 (13), form 5-6 (70), diplomas (33), certificates (19), and bachelor's degrees (9). Boasting an overall retention rate of 97%. The most common fields of study among scholarship recipients include (in order of frequency): form level, education, medical sciences, economics and business administration, accounting, sciences, humanities, social work, and counseling/psychology.

The newly piloted ASEC Doctoral Scholarship, launched in 2020 under the Scholarship Program, is the result of an identified demand stemming from past ASEC evaluation tools and assessments. Attainment of post-graduate degrees in sub-Saharan Africa is low, especially at the doctoral level. In Kenya, doctoral students represent 1.3% of total higher education enrollments, and only 34% of staff at higher education institutions hold a doctorate. As of October 2020, two doctoral scholarship recipients have been identified.

### **The pilot ASEC Doctoral Scholarship has four specific objectives:**

- A.** To provide opportunities for Catholic sisters in African countries to access and obtain doctoral-level education credentials;
- B.** To disseminate knowledge and contribute to the literature on Catholic sisters in Africa;
- C.** To increase African sisters' competencies and leadership capacities to conduct applied research that informs and enhances their ministries;
- D.** To increase African sisters' capacity, through applied research, to strengthen their congregations and/or national conferences' ability to respond to emerging global issues, integrate findings in their approach to ministry, and more effectively carry out their missions.

## SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM

ASEC administers a spirituality-based, global, immersion experience that enables students, faculty, and women religious from founding institutions in the U.S., as well as ASEC alumnae serving in Africa, to engage in a cross-cultural exchange and learning. Students, faculty, and sisters in the U.S. travel to a country in Africa served by ASEC for 2-3 weeks to provide service in sisters' ministries and participate in cultural activities. Students are also required to complete a Service Learning course prior to the visit to learn more about the country's history, culture and society.

The goal of ASEC's Service Learning Program is to provide international service learning opportunities for faculty, students, and sisters of ASEC member colleges/universities and congregations that broaden the cultural perspectives and enrich the lives of those who serve and those who are served. Through these opportunities, the participants deepen their understanding and appreciation of a culture different from their own and see more objectively the strengths and weaknesses of their own cultures. ASEC's Service Learning Program promotes global leadership, a key attribute in building the next generation of leaders.



## ASEC PROGRAM FRAMEWORK



### The five objectives of the Service Learning Program are to:

- A.** Provide participating U.S. students, faculty and sisters with authentic situations for cultural immersion;
- B.** Enhance participating students' academic course content as it relates to globalization and the service learning experience;
- C.** Diversify participating students' career perspectives and prospects;
- D.** Enhance cross-cultural awareness, mutual respect, networking, and relationship building;
- E.** Provide an opportunity to experience service with a spirituality foundation.

< Four subcomponents of the student experience, within the framework of the ASEC Service Learning Program.

## RESEARCH INITIATIVE

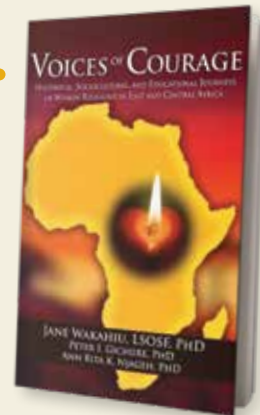
Sisters are undoubtedly creating sustainable change in sub-Saharan Africa, but their work is not well-documented or widely known. In an effort to increase awareness of their integral role in advancing human development, ASEC's established its Research Initiative in 2010. Research generates the knowledge necessary to implement policies and conduct strategic planning, essential tools for continued progress in sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, the African continent contributes less than 1% of the world's research output. Given this context, ASEC's Research Initiative endeavors to fill the research gap and propel African women religious to become critical investigators, recognized for their achievements not only in the religious life arena but in academia as well. The initiative is designed to 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. Evaluation and research-based strategic planning are also built into the workshop curriculums of the SLDI and HESA programs.

### The Research Initiative has four specific and measurable objectives:

- A.** Provide workshop and conference opportunities for sisters to engage them in research dissemination and publication;
- B.** Develop opportunities for women religious to engage in collaborative research projects;
- C.** Collect, analyze, and share data about African women religious, their historical background, ministries, institutional systems, and impact on human development;
- D.** Create a central repository of research data related to sisters, congregations and national conferences that have participated in ASEC's programs.

**Research Initiative achievements as of October 2020 include academic journal/book publications, a completed information manual, and a plan/proposal for the initiative through 2025. A full listing of research conducted under the initiative can be found on the ASEC website, some project/proposal highlights include:**

- 1.** *Voices of Courage*: ASEC's first book published in 2015 to share the work and lives of sisters in Africa.
- 2.** *Transformative Partnerships: Role of Agencies, Foundations, Institutions in Promoting Strategic Social and Sustainable Change for Women Religious in Africa*: ASEC's second book, published in 2019, it invites readers into an emerging field of research on women religious in the Global South.
- 3.** Publication of academic book chapters and research articles in journals, on a continuum.
- 4.** Dissemination of knowledge from doctoral dissertations on participants from the Higher Education for Sisters in Africa-HESA (Lopatofsky, T., 2019) and the impact of the Sisters Leadership Development Initiative-SLDI (Karimi, K., 2020).
- 5.** Two research training workshops delivered for sisters and religious life scholars. Over 60 participants from East, Central, and West Africa engaged in two workshops on qualitative research and data gathering during 2015-16.
- 6.** Fully operational partnership with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University since 2016 for the Visiting Scholars Fellowship Program. CARA hosts a sister from Africa for a six-month fellowship at its office in the U.S., training her in data collection and analysis. ASEC helps to identify and mentor the sister, also linking her with a network of alumnae and partners. More on research projects completed by the Visiting Scholars can be found here [Visiting Scholars Research](#).



- 7.** International Consultative Research (ICR) Conference with a diverse group of participants engaged in the study of religious life in selected countries. A partnership of CARA and ASEC starting in September 2020.
- 8.** Conference opportunities for professional development of ASEC Staff.
- 9.** Longitudinal tracer (Census) study on the Ugandan alumnae of the SLDI and HESA programs by the end of 2020.
- 10.** Call for proposals for chapter contributions for the third book publication by 2025.
- 11.** History of ASEC to be documented by 2025.
- 12.** Proactive response to unprecedented and instantaneous study of emerging issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 13.** Development of an ASEC Central Database for program evaluations and a repository for research resources by 2021.
- 14.** Research mentorship for ASEC's flagship, pilot doctoral scholarship, to be reviewed by 2023.



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## UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE GOALS

At the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change.



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- |                               |   |  |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. No poverty                 | 7. Affordable and clean energy          | 13. Climate action                         |
| 2. Zero hunger                | 8. Decent work and economic growth      | 14. Life below water                       |
| 3. Good health and well-being | 9. Industry, innovation, infrastructure | 15. Life on land                           |
| 4. Quality education          | 10. Reduced inequalities                | 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions |
| 5. Gender equality            | 11. Sustainable cities and communities  | 17. Partnerships for the goals             |
| 6. Clean water and sanitation | 12. Responsible consumption, production |  |



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**ASEC:** African Sisters Education Collaborative

**UN SDGs:** United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

**Women religious:** Catholic sisters, nuns

**HESA:** Higher Education for Sisters in Africa

**SLDI:** Sisters Leadership Development Initiative

**ICB:** Institutional Capacity Building

**ICR:** International Consultative Research (ICR) Conference

**CARA:** Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

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*ASEC sincerely thanks members of the Strategic Plan Review Committee for their service.*

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**HESA  
PROGRAM**



**RESEARCH  
INITIATIVE**



**SCHOLARSHIP  
PROGRAM**



**SERVICE  
LEARNING**



**SLDI  
PROGRAM**



**ASEC  
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