



STRATEGIC PLAN

ASEC 2028: Broadening Capacity & Impact of Women Religious in Africa

ASEC  **AFRICAN SISTERS
EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE**

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A Letter from ASEC Executive Director



Dear Colleagues, Stakeholders, & Friends of ASEC,

In the spirit of collaboration and following in the footsteps of our Founding Mothers, I would like to present to you the strategic plan of the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC), **ASEC 2028: Broadening Capacity and Impact of Women Religious in Africa**. This plan will serve as the strategic compass to advance the mission of ASEC, educating Catholic women religious in Africa and thereby strengthening their capacity to provide services that address local, regional, and global challenges.

The plan provides a framework containing mission, vision, core values, and five strategic directions to guide ASEC in the next five years (2024-2028). It is the result of a highly collaborative process that began in March 2023 and involved both qualitative and quantitative data collection, including a review of existing program documents and information, mission and charism consultations with key stakeholders (i.e., Board of Directors, Corporate and Associate Members, national conference representatives, donors, and staff), multiple surveys, and extensive synthesis of collected information. At the threshold of ASEC's 25th anniversary, the ASEC Board of Directors requested that a new and robust process of listening, discussing, and reflecting on the mission, vision, core values, and strategic directions be initiated to guide ASEC for the next five years (2024-2028).

The plan for the future of ASEC is based on the five strategic directions below:

1. Deliver High Quality, Responsive Education Programs
2. Build a Funding Model for Growth and Continuity of Mission
3. Tell a Compelling Story
4. Enhance and Expand Collaboration, Partnership, and Networking
5. Strengthen Organizational Infrastructure in Alignment with the Strategic Plan

These strategic directions are our collective aspirations. Key to attaining them are our dedicated staff, Corporate Members, Board of Directors, Associate Members, and partners located across ten African countries, the United States, and Canada. Together we commit to strengthen sustainable human development in Africa. ASEC is dedicated to supporting and contributing to the United Nations' 2030 transformative agenda, articulated in its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ASEC measures and reports annually how impactful its programs are in meeting selected SDG targets and indicators. The spirit of collaborative partnership to attain the specific goals continues to define ASEC's mode of operation. Please take the time to read our plan and think about your role in reaching these goals.

I am deeply grateful to ASEC's Strategic Plan 2028 Committee, Board of Directors, staff, partners, and stakeholders for the time and talents they invested in shaping this document.

With your support, I am committed to providing leadership to achieve ASEC's mission. However, the desire to bring the Strategic Plan 2028 to fruition and make ASEC flourish rests on the commitment of each individual on the Board and staff, as well as stakeholders and partners of ASEC.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Draru Mary Cecilia', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, PhD
ASEC Executive Director

ASEC

Background & History

The African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) is an international 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, headquartered in Scranton, Pennsylvania, with offices and programs operating in ten countries in Africa—Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

ASEC delivers educational programs to Catholic women religious in Africa in recognition of their unique needs and vital contributions to integral sustainable human development. 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 individuals, communities, and society in Africa. The majority of those served by ASEC, although in professional positions, lack the relevant higher education credentials, training, and/or resources they need. ASEC supports and learns from women religious in Africa by delivering and evaluating innovative academic preparation and professional development programs that enable them to achieve the fullest impact with their essential ministries and ensure the sustainability of their religious institutes.

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 was inaugurated in 1999 by the leaders of four institutes of women religious in Pennsylvania and the presidents of the colleges and universities founded by those institutes, for purposes of providing educational

opportunities for women religious in Africa. ASEC's corporate or founding institutes include—Sisters of Saint Joseph of Philadelphia and Chestnut Hill College, Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and Marywood University, Sisters of Saint Francis of Philadelphia and Neumann University, and the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and Rosemont College.

ASEC currently facilitates five core programs—Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI), Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA), the Scholarship Program, Service Learning, and the Research Initiative. Each program has been intentionally developed to meet the unique needs of Catholic women religious in Africa while raising awareness and collaboration among their U.S. partners.

To date, nearly 10,000 individuals, including sisters and lay people, have been directly served through ASEC programming and over 2.4 million people have benefited from the efforts of ASEC alumni. Graduates of ASEC's programs demonstrate that educating a sister results in rippling, far-reaching outcomes that are positively and dramatically impacting sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa. From improving healthcare and education, to building infrastructure, fighting human trafficking, 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 religious institutes and ministries, and mobilize resources to meet urgent human development needs.



Mission

The African Sisters Education Collaborative educates Catholic women religious in Africa to strengthen their leadership capacity to provide services that address local and global challenges.

Core Values

Transformation

The educational and professional development opportunities ASEC provides for Catholic women religious in Africa are designed to help them achieve their full human potential and become more influential in addressing local and global challenges, especially for those 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 and their collaborative approach to addressing the challenges of their ministries.

Leadership

ASEC enhances 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.

Vision

ASEC is an organization with a proven capacity to strengthen, through education and empowerment, the unique potential of Catholic women religious in Africa to fulfill Christ's mission, effectively promoting human development, spiritual growth, and transformation of the lives of the people they joyfully serve in accordance with the charisms of their institutes and the needs of their ministries.

Service

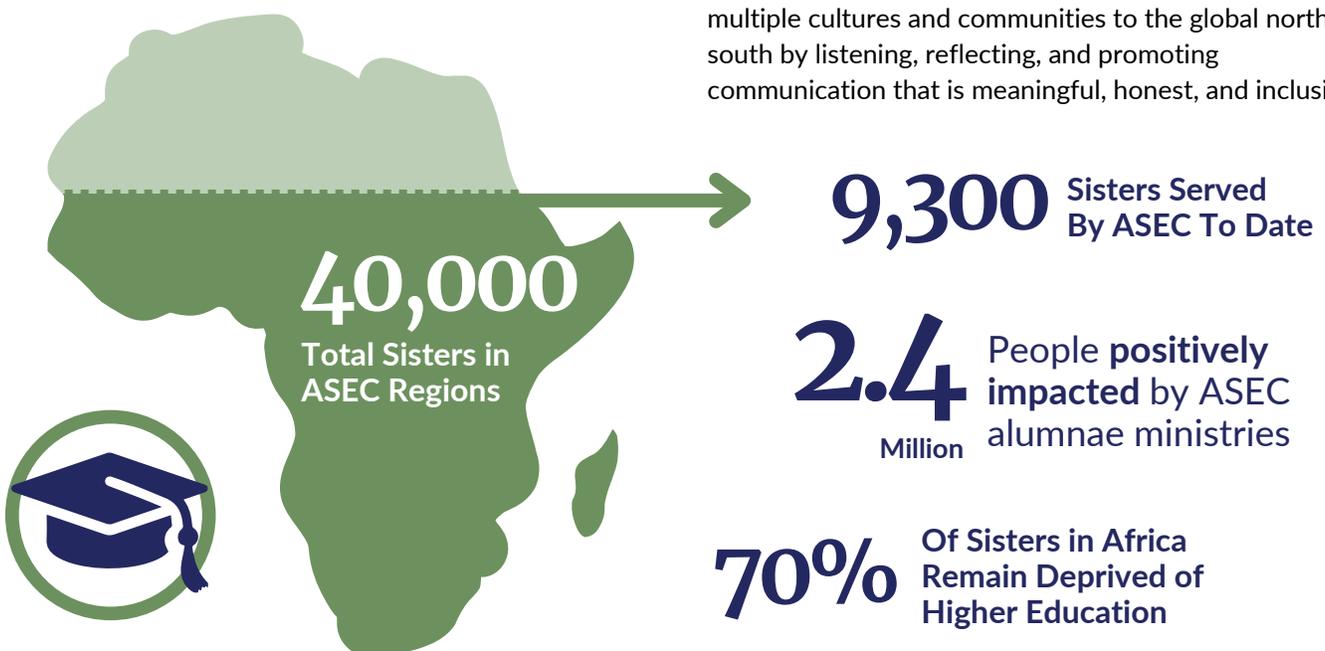
ASEC cultivates an environment of service among all its stakeholders by promoting social responsibility and community engagement to meet the needs of society. ASEC recognizes that women religious in Africa devote their lives to service in a spirit of compassion, humility, love, and protection for all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

Capacity Building

ASEC is committed to strengthening skills, competencies, and academic and professional credentials of women religious in Africa, by enhancing the capacity of experts through training to increase their 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 individual 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 appreciates the uniqueness of people and their worldviews. It extends services with empathy across multiple cultures and communities to the global north and south by listening, reflecting, and promoting communication that is meaningful, honest, and inclusive.



Reading the Statements of Strategic Direction

ASEC has developed five major strategic directions that comprise ASEC 2028. Each strategic direction is expressed in a Statement of Strategic Direction and each statement is presented in four 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.
- Success indicators align with each strategy and highlight what our experience will be when we move in the direction of change.





Strategic Direction 1

Deliver High Quality, Responsive Education Programs

ASEC will deliver high quality academic preparation and professional development programs that respond to the leadership and educational needs of Catholic sisters in Africa, strengthening their capacity to provide transformative services in their ministries that address local, regional, and global challenges.

What's the Big Idea?

ASEC delivers educational programs to women religious in Africa in recognition of their unique needs and central contributions to integral sustainable human development. 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 individuals, communities, and society in Africa. Many of them, although in professional positions, lack the relevant higher education credentials, training, and/or resources they need. ASEC will continue to support and learn from women religious in Africa by delivering and evaluating innovative academic preparation and professional development programs that enable them to have the greatest impact through their essential ministries and ensure the sustainability of their religious institutes.

Strategies

1. Innovate and implement programs of excellence in academic preparation and professional development, including Higher Education for Sisters in Africa, Sisters Leadership Development Initiative, Scholarship, Service Learning, and Research Initiative.
2. Collect, manage, and utilize data to inform strategic program implementation and development in order to ensure that programs are responding effectively to needs.
3. Provide greater opportunities to obtain graduate degrees to broaden the impact of sisters' ministries.
4. Explore opportunities to expand to additional religious institutes and countries.
5. Facilitate ongoing and new collaborative efforts among alumni.

Success Indicators

Alumni serve in their ministries with greater expertise, skill and confidence, and with enhanced capacity to act as change agents in addressing challenges related to poverty, health, education, human rights, among others. The result is an increased demand for their services and improved quality of life and vibrancy of the people and societies they serve.

Programs effectively meet the needs of those they serve and are adjusted as necessary in response to changing local and global challenges.

Sisters reach higher levels of leadership in their professional fields and institutions, increasing their capacity to address challenges at a higher level (e.g., policy creation, implementation, administration, and oversight).

Viability of expanded programmatic outreach to additional religious institutes, both within and beyond the existing ten ASEC countries.

High level of inter-regional, inter-country, and inter-congregational collaboration to utilize locally and globally their collective knowledge, experience, and expertise for innovative ministry.



Strategic Direction 2

Build a Funding Model for Growth & Continuity of Mission

With the active participation and support of all Board Members and Directors, ASEC will increase its financial portfolio and ensure its ongoing viability by restructuring its funding model, expanding its donor base, building reliable, varied and flexible funding resources, and strengthening its relationships with donors.

What's the Big Idea?

In order to remain resilient and thrive in a changing world, ASEC must create greater financial security and stability by significantly expanding its community of supporters and diversifying its sources of revenue to include an increased number of foundations, corporations, and individual donors. ASEC operates according to the highest standards of fiscal responsibility, transforming financial support into tangible and lasting impact, and faithfully stewarding funds to ensure continuity and expansion of programs, as well as investment in ASEC's internal infrastructure and operations.

Strategies

1. Design and build a renewed infrastructure of institutional support comprising corporate and foundation funders and individual donors.
2. Establish and implement a comprehensive development plan that includes a robust annual fund, securing major gifts, planned giving opportunities, and special events.
3. Implement ongoing processes to identify and develop new institutional and individual funders.
4. Continue to cultivate existing funders and donors through personal relationships, donor-funder events, and engagement in mission activities within the United States and globally.

Success Indicators

Institutional support infrastructure is developed and functioning.

Comprehensive development plan is implemented and yielding a high return.

Increased funding secured from existing and new institutional and individual donors.

Loyal and committed high propensity funders and donors developed and retained.



Strategic Direction 3 Tell a Compelling Story

ASEC will develop and implement a marketing and public relations strategy that promotes greater awareness, support, participation, and commitment among existing and potential constituents through the communication of a compelling story and establishment of a public presence utilizing multimedia platforms.

What's the Big Idea?

ASEC has a far-reaching and transformative impact on women religious in Africa and on the communities in which they work. Despite its impact and visibility among women religious in Africa, ASEC is not widely known among organizations, networks, and individuals outside of this context. To broaden its support network and diversify and expand its funding streams, it is vital for ASEC to become an organization that is known locally and globally for excellent programs. ASEC will achieve this by implementing a marketing and public relations strategy designed for varied audiences by investing in multimedia resources and developing a public presence through events and networking.

Strategies

1. Identify relevant and receptive audiences.
2. Craft a compelling story that reflects the impact of ASEC's work on the capacity of sisters to make positive, tangible differences in the communities and among the people they serve.
3. Develop and utilize robust multimedia marketing communications platforms.
4. Engage the entire organization in telling the story, adapting it for the varied audiences who will hear it.

Success Indicators

Strengthened support for ASEC through strategic outreach to audiences that share ASEC's interests and values.

Increased public visibility of ASEC and buy-in to its mission.

Use of a variety of outreach methods results in expanded local, national, and global support for ASEC.

All stakeholders are involved in communicating ASEC's story, which is tailored to the interests of their particular audiences, resulting in a significantly deeper connection to ASEC's mission among all stakeholders.



Strategic Direction 4

Enhance & Expand Collaboration, Partnership, & Networking

ASEC will deepen its collaboration with established partners and cultivate formal relationships with new partners among varied institutions, foundations, and individuals that share a commitment to and will support the implementation of its mission. ASEC will also actively engage in educational, governmental, nongovernmental, philanthropic, and other local, regional, and global networks that enrich and broaden its mission effectiveness by sharing best practices, cultivating mutual relationships, disseminating research, and contributing to dialogue in areas of shared interest.

What's the Big Idea?

Collaboration is core to ASEC's identity, operations, and history. As a grassroots organization facilitating education and professional development for women religious in Africa, ASEC works in partnership with foundations, organizations, individual donors and supporters, conferences of women religious, and individual religious institutes to fulfill its mission and strategy. Networking in relevant areas of interest strengthens ASEC's mission effectiveness, contributes to the fulfillment of ASEC's strategy, and positions ASEC as a leader among peer organizations. ASEC will continue to formally cultivate new partners and increase the level of commitment of current partners. ASEC will also actively engage in local, regional, and global networks that share its mission with the aim of sharing best practices and gaining knowledge, cultivating new partnerships, disseminating research, and contributing to conversations in areas of shared interest.

Strategies

1. Review and strengthen the framework and models for formalized institutional partnerships.
2. Identify and cultivate new partners, while nurturing mutual relationships with existing partners.
3. Actively participate in networks of organizations with complementary missions and shared interests to enrich mission effectiveness and delivery.
4. Explore and pursue opportunities for collaborative research on issues affecting ASEC's capacity to fulfill its mission.
5. Publish and share research findings.
6. Host and participate in national and international conferences.

Success Indicators

- Standard and adaptive frameworks and models for partnerships facilitate the establishment and management of new and existing partnerships with varied organizations.
- Expanded programmatic and funding partnerships. ASEC is sought out by other mission-aligned organizations as a partner.
- ASEC's mission and work is known to an increased number of local and global organizations and networks.
- Increased innovative research opportunities for researchers interested in Catholic sisters in Africa and their ministries.
- Knowledge about the work of Catholic sisters in Africa is generated by ASEC, further establishing ASEC as a thought leader.
- Increased networking and collaboration among groups with shared and/or similar interests.



Strategic Direction 5

Strengthen Organizational Infrastructure in Alignment with the Strategic Plan

ASEC will enhance its governance and operational infrastructure to provide human and financial resources appropriate for organizational needs and to achieve the implementation of its mission and strategy.

What's the Big Idea?

ASEC is a growing organization, evolving to meet the changing needs of women religious in Africa and the challenges they address. The development of structures for governance, human resources, finance, and program implementation is a priority for ASEC's mission fulfillment. ASEC will enhance infrastructure at the Board and administrative levels, creating and implementing structures to develop policies and procedures for board members, administrators, staff, partner institutions, funders, and program participants, as well as to establish clear expectations. This will include exploratory research on ASEC's growth and vitality beyond 2028 (5 years).

Strategies

1. Enrich the composition of the Board of Directors in the areas of professional expertise, philanthropy, and representation.
2. Clarify the role, responsibilities, and level of engagement required of the Board of Directors for implementation of this strategic plan.
3. Strengthen the mandate of the Advisory Board to contribute to mission implementation.
4. Ensure that adequate resources and systems of accountability are in place to achieve ASEC's mission and strategy.

Success Indicators

ASEC's Board of Directors has the appropriate composition to meet the needs of the organization and allow for fulfillment of its strategic plan.

ASEC's Board of Directors are committed to and engaged with their roles and responsibilities as stated in the Board of Directors Handbook.

Greater utilization of the expertise of ASEC's Advisory Board.

ASEC has the resources to successfully implement its strategic plan.



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 an adequate infrastructure, and suffer from harsh climates, war, natural disasters, disease, and violence. Catholic sisters courageously **seek out the often 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.

Programs of the African Sisters Education Collaborative, or ASEC, are always evolving; **molding to meet the specific needs of sisters** serving in the rural and poor communities of sub-Saharan Africa.

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 scholarships to complete secondary school or higher education credentials relevant to their ministries. Many of our scholarship recipients continue their education through the HESA program. Since 2012.

Service Learning

Students and sisters from ASEC corporate member 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.

**Made possible by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.*

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