



Special Report

THE 4TH GLOBAL INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK SYMPOSIUM: 10th -12th June 2025

THEME: “Consecrated Women in Africa Creating Global Impact Through Sustainable Development”

Nurturing the Soul, Mind, and Mission —Rethinking the Formation Journey of Catholic Sisters in Africa

When Sr. Bibiana Ngundo and Sr. Lucy Mwesa took the stage to present their research on the “*Formation Journey of a Sister*”, the audience were drawn into an honest and deeply reflective exploration of what it truly means to nurture the vocation of young religious women today. Their study, conducted across Kenya and Zambia, offers a rare glimpse into the lived experiences of 100 second-year novices from 17 congregations.

The study sought to answer a vital question: *How well do current formation processes prepare Catholic sisters for the realities of religious life and mission in the 21st century?* The findings, grounded in the four dimensions of formation; spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral painted a picture of both deep commitment and significant challenges that shape the future of consecrated life in Africa.

In their findings many shared how their daily rhythms, meditation, examination of conscience, daily Mass, confession, and spiritual direction had strengthened their love for God and their sense of calling. Monthly recollections and

annual retreats further deepened this commitment, allowing them to grow in self-knowledge and holiness.

The study also uncovered a growing concern: formators often doubled as spiritual directors, counsellors, and superiors. These overlaps blurred boundaries, limited confidentiality, and sometimes hindered the sisters’ personal spiritual growth.

“Formation is not just about discipline and devotion,” Sr. Ngundo and Sr. Lucy Mwesa emphasized. “It is about creating space for encounter with God, oneself, and others. When these spaces are compromised, growth becomes strained.

On the human dimension, there was cause for celebration. Novices reported increased self-awareness, openness to correction, and emotional maturity. Many had found healing from past

wounds through counselling and supportive community life. “We are learning to listen, to forgive, to serve,” one novice shared. “Formation is teaching



us that holiness grows through humanity.”

In community life, the spirit of sisterhood shone through. Structured activities fostered trust, accountability, and leadership. Senior sisters modelled service and humility, inspiring novices to embrace responsibility with joy.

The study calls for better infrastructure to ensure that each stage of formation is respected and supported in distinct environments.

The intellectual dimension revealed both strengths and weaknesses. Novices valued their theological and philosophical training, but the study found that many struggled with complex concepts due to limited specialization among formators. In many cases, one sister was responsible for teaching theology, scripture, Mariology, and Church documents — a heavy load that inevitably diluted the quality of learning.

Equally concerning was the limited integration of digital tools. In an era where communication and evangelization are increasingly digital, only 26% of novices in Kenya and 16% in Zambia felt adequately trained in media and technology. “The Church cannot afford digital illiteracy,” Sr. Mwesa warned. “Formation must embrace technology not as a threat, but as a tool for mission.”

Despite these gaps, one area radiated promise: pastoral formation. The novices demonstrated strong missionary zeal and deep satisfaction with their apostolic assignments. These experiences whether in schools, hospitals, or parishes allowed them to translate prayer into service and spirituality into action.

However, as with intellectual training, technology again emerged as a missing link. Many pastoral engagements lacked the digital tools necessary for evangelization in today’s interconnected world.

The study concluded with clear and actionable recommendations. Among them were the need to separate the roles of formator and spiritual director to ensure confidentiality and deeper guidance, and the importance of creating proper rest periods to prevent burnout. It also called for employing specialists in theology and philosophy, expanding counselling services, and improving infrastructure to ensure each stage of formation receives adequate support.

Perhaps most notably, Sr. Ngundo and Sr. Mwesa urged religious institutes to integrate digital literacy into formation equipping sisters not just for prayer and pastoral service, but for effective communication and evangelization in a digital world.

The “*Formation Journey of a Sister*” study is more than a research project — it is a mirror held up to the heart of consecrated life today. It reminds the Church that while prayer and sacrifice remain its pillars, formation must evolve to address modern realities: from emotional well-being to digital competence, from spiritual depth to professional excellence.

As Sr. Ngundo concluded, “Formation is the womb of vocation. If we nurture it well spiritually, intellectually, and humanly we will shape sisters who not only love God deeply but also serve the world effectively.”