



# Special Report

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

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

## Faith, Research, and Hope: Sr. Dr. Candida Mukundi Opening Speech at 4<sup>th</sup> Global International Research Network Symposium



Director of the Center for Research in Religious Life and Apostolate in Africa (CERRA-AFRICA), Sr. Candida Mukundi reflected on a journey that had begun years earlier in

prayer and persistence as the Center marked its 4<sup>th</sup> international symposium. Though the event has since concluded, the meaning of her message continues to echo across the continent: “faith and research are not parallel paths but a single pilgrimage toward transformation”.

### CERRA-

AFRICA’s story began in 2020, amid the uncertainties of a changing world. Born of collaboration between the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya (AOSK), the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), and Tangaza University (TU) with the foundational support of the Hilton Foundation—the Center was envisioned as a hub for faith-based action research.

Its mission was clear: to strengthen religious life and apostolic ministry through evidence, reflection, and service. From its modest beginnings, it has grown into a continental platform that unites religious communities with scholars and pastoral agents, helping the Church make informed, sustainable decisions.

In her address, Sr. Mukundi recalled how the Centre’s birth was not only an institutional

*Centre for Research in Religious Life and Apostolate (CERRA-AFRICA)*

achievement but a spiritual journey. “When I look at you, I see people who have journeyed with us, and I see God who has journeyed with us,” she said, recognizing that CERRA-AFRICA’s evolution was as much about divine accompaniment as it was about human dedication.

Over the years, CERRA-AFRICA has transformed the landscape of religious research in Africa. With more than 18 major projects implemented across six countries—Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, and Ghana—the Center has tackled issues that cut to the heart of religious life.

It has studied the care of elderly and unwell Sisters, assessed leadership and governance in congregations, explored the formation of young religious, and developed interventions in pastoral care and institutional management. But perhaps most significant is its approach—what Sr. Mukundi calls “*applied research for impact.*”

“We are committed to support evangelization so that we can make decisions that are based on data and evidence,” she noted. For her, research is not about collecting statistics but about listening to lived experience, translating knowledge into compassion, and using findings to build stronger, more sustainable communities of faith.



At the heart of CERRA-AFRICAS's work are values that bridge the spiritual and the practical: Stewardship, Confidentiality, Faith-driven Service, Collaboration, and Innovation for Sustainability. These principles, Sr. Mukundi explained, ensures that research remains ethical and transformative, grounded in both Gospel values and academic integrity.

Though deeply rooted in African soil, CERRA's vision is global. Through partnerships with research centers in India, Mexico, the United States, and Cameroon, the Center participates in a global network of Catholic scholars and institutions who are redefining the role of consecrated life in the 21st century. "Consecrated women in Africa are not only shaping their congregations," she said with conviction, "but also contributing to global sustainable development."



One of the most memorable aspects of Sr. Mukundi's reflections was her insistence on the harmony between spirituality and science. Drawing inspiration from the symposium's opening Mass, she observed that there is no real divide between prayer and practical service.

"After listening to the homily," she said, "you can now tie the two things together—the

spiritual as well as the way in which we serve the people," a reminder that religious research is not a detached exercise in analysis—it is an expression of love for God's people, guided by faith and enlightened by reason.

She placed the symposium within what she called the "Year of Hope," describing it as a time for renewal, courage, and shared dreaming. "Hope does not disappoint," she affirmed.

Several insights continue to guide CERRA-Africa's ongoing mission. Sr. Mukundi emphasized the need to *listen*—to let ministry begin with the real stories and struggles of people. She urged *ongoing formation* for both religious and lay leaders, calling it essential for leadership in a rapidly changing Church.

She spoke passionately about *honouring elderly religious*, whose wisdom and sacrifices sustain the present generation. "Their wisdom is a treasure for our communities," she said. And she issued a practical invitation to congregations across Africa: "*Please give us one Sister interested in research.*"

That simple appeal was more than logistical—it was symbolic. It represented CERRA's desire to weave a web of collaboration across the continent, ensuring that every congregation has a voice and access to the tools needed for evidence-based decision-making.

For Sr. Dr. Mukundi, the Center is not simply a research institute—it is "a movement".

"May our discussions bear fruit for the Church and for all humanity," she concluded, inviting all to walk forward in unity and shared responsibility informed by applied research.

