



Special Report

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

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

Sr. Dr. Mary Simiyu and Sr. Dr. Lucy Mwesa; “*Education Journey of a Sister,*”; Empowering Mission Through Education

In a compelling joint presentation at the recent 4th Global Research Network Symposium, Sr. Dr. Mary Simiyu and Sr. Dr. Lucy Mwesa shared insights from their longitudinal study titled “*Education Journey of a Sister.*” Their research examined how higher education has shaped the personal growth, leadership, and apostolic impact of Catholic sisters in Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia over the past decade.

Supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation through the Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) and Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) programs of African Sisters Education in Africa (ASEC), the study followed 150 sisters from the 2013, 2019, and 2022 cohorts. Through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, it explored the profound ways formal education has influenced the sisters’ spiritual lives, professional competence, and community involvement.

“The education of a sister is not just a personal achievement—it’s a communal transformation,” they emphasized. The study found that college education enhances leadership capacity, fosters professional excellence, and strengthens sisters’ ability to contribute meaningfully to their congregations and the broader society.



According to this study, over “90% of the sisters” studied locally and continue to serve in their home countries. This local dedication has translated into vibrant ministries in education, administration, healthcare, pastoral work, and finance. Uganda and Zambia stand out for their high levels of leadership engagement among educated sisters.

Beyond personal and professional growth, the impact of higher education has rippled into the communities where sisters minister. The study highlighted that sisters with university-level education are at the forefront of community-based development initiatives—from anti-human trafficking campaigns and environmental conservation projects to advocacy for human rights and social justice.

Uganda emerged as a beacon of applied education, where sisters’ learning is actively translated into tangible community transformation. “Our data show that Ugandan sisters have leveraged education not just for personal advancement but as a tool for grassroots empowerment,”

However, the study also revealed challenges. In Kenya, for example, some misalignments between academic training and ministry placement were noted. This disconnects, they explained, often stems from communication gaps within congregations and

inadequate pre-assignment consultations, factors that can hinder the full utilization of a sister's skills and education.

Bridging the Gaps: Aligning Formation and Mission

The researchers called for intentional strategies to ensure that education and apostolic assignments are better aligned. They proposed a series of key actions, beginning with structured dialogue between sisters and superiors before ministry assignments, a move that would help align educational qualifications with pastoral needs.

They further urged congregations to develop context-specific mentorship programs, sustain in-service training, and create localized support systems to preserve educational gains over time. "Education must not be a one-time event," the duo stressed. "It should be a lifelong process that is nurtured and contextualized within the realities of each congregation and region."

Expanding Horizons through Collaboration

The study also underscored the need of strengthening partnerships between the Church, government agencies, and civil society. Sisters are increasingly becoming key players in advocacy, health, and sustainable development, areas that require collaborative approaches.

The Way Forward: Educating for Mission and Impact

The findings culminated in a resounding conclusion: college education profoundly transforms the life and mission of a Catholic sister. It deepens spiritual maturity, sharpens professional expertise, and expands the reach of the Gospel through action. Yet, for this transformation to be fully realized, congregations must ensure that education is strategically planned, mission-oriented, and equitably accessible.

The presenters called upon religious leaders and stakeholders to expand access to higher education, strengthen scholarship programs, and prioritize academic opportunities for younger sisters. They also encouraged ongoing evaluation to monitor how academic achievements are applied within ministries.

Key Quotes

"Sisters with education are catalysts for social transformation in our communities."

"Through HESA, I gained skills and confidence—I can now lead a health facility with competence."

"Education has opened our eyes—we no longer fear taking up leadership roles."