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SERVANT LEADERSHIP & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ASEC'S IMPACT

Qualitative Evaluation Report



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On the Cover: Uganda SLDI Administration I Workshop participants complete a field visit to Bishop Asili Hospital Projects in May 2018.



@ASECSLDIHESA

Introduction

The central goal of this qualitative evaluation report is to present the stories and perspectives of alumnae from the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC)'s two major programs: the Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) and Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA). In addition, this report will highlight a case study of a sister who has transitioned through both the SLDI and HESA programs. This case study will provide understanding in how a single sister may transform through participation in two of ASEC's programs.

This report is ASEC's first to focus exclusively on the vast amount of qualitative data that has been collected from program participants via written responses, focus groups, individual interviews and site visits. With the addition of this report, ASEC aims to provide a complete picture of the outcomes and impact of ASEC's programs.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report is organized according to ASEC's theory of change and each program's outcomes framework, which indicates that impacts on individual program participants will lead to larger changes at the organizational and societal levels. The first section discusses the levels and dimensions of impact in congruence with the servant leadership model. This is followed by an overview of the impact levels for both SLDI and the HESA program. The final section is a detailed case study of one sister who participated in both programs.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Convenience sampling was used to identify which program participants' qualitative data would be used for analysis. Only participants who had completed the required data points for each program were considered. Required data points included being interviewed in-person (individually or in a focus group), completing at least one ASEC Alumnae Survey, and completing all identified key program specific evaluation forms. Through this selection process, a sample of 14 SLDI participants and 17 HESA participants were selected for analysis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions for this report stemmed from each program's long-term desired impact for its current Phase. The central research question was how have SLDI/HESA participants applied the knowledge, skills and resources they gained to strengthen the sustainability and systems of their congregations and to positively impact human development through their various ministries? This question was then broken down into sub-questions by level of impact. Individual: What specific knowledge, skills and/or resources has the participant gained from participating in SLDI/HESA?

Organizational: How have participants applied what they learned in SLDI/HESA to strengthen the sustainability and systems of their ministries/congregations?

Societal: How have participants applied what they learned in SLDI/HESA to positively impact human development through their various ministries?

LIMITATIONS

As with any qualitative research, this evaluation is limited to the scope of this report and cannot be generalized to the larger population of ASEC's program participants. Given the sisters' and evaluators' travel limitations, the findings of this report are restricted to alumnae working in Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Servant Leadership & Its Impact

The concept of servant leadership provided the theoretical foundation of ASEC's largest and longest running program, SLDI. Development of servant leadership characteristics, although not part of its original theoretical framework, has also recently been discovered as an outcome of the HESA program¹. Given the significance of servant leadership in ASEC's programs, this qualitative study uses servant leadership dimensions to guide analysis. Servant leadership dimensions are also analyzed to determine if they emerge at the individual, organizational (which in this analysis includes interpersonal, congregational, and ministry), and/or societal level of impact.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Servant leadership is defined as "an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community." According to the Servant Leadership Scale there are eight dimensions of servant leadership, each are defined below³

Empowerment: Leader's ability to assist others in realizing their full potential.

Accountability: Holding self and others responsible for actions within their control.

Standing Back: Followers have priority, receive credit for their work.

Humility: Place self in perspective, admit when they need assistance.

Authenticity: True to oneself, being genuine professionally, publicly and privately.

Courage: Taking risks, being innovative, overcoming fears.

Interpersonal Acceptance: Understand others' perspectives and experiences.

Stewardship: Practicing service, taking responsibility for the larger institution.

LEVELS OF IMPACT

When examining the dimensions of servant leadership, it is useful to consider the levels of impact at which different dimensions manifest. This report uses impact levels delineated in Barbuto & Wheeler's² article on construct clarification of servant leadership, which coincide with levels of impact assessed through program evaluation. Levels of impact are described below.

Individual: Expressing a desire to serve and feeling personally capable to serve.

Interpersonal: The leader acts in service of others, and seeks to understand and empathize with others.

Organizational (Congregation/Group): The leader seeks to meet members needs and act in the best interest of the congregation.

Organizational (Ministry): The leader works to ensure the institution or organization serves the community.

Societal: The leader leaves a positive imprint on society, i.e., human development.

¹Lopatofsky, T. (2019, March). The Perceived Impact of a Post-Secondary Education Program on Kenyan Catholic Sisters' Understanding of their Lives as Women Religious: A case study (Doctoral dissertation, Marywood University)

²Barbuto, J.E. & Wheeler, D.W. (2006). Scale development and construct clarification of servant leadership. Faculty Publications: Agricultural Leadership, Education & Communication Department. 51.

³Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., Dierendonck, D. V., & Liden, R. C. (2019). Servant leadership: A systematic review and call for future research. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 30(1), 111-132. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004

An alumna illustrates the concept of Catholic servant leadership: "I am an ambassador of Christ and an agent of change to myself, congregation and the society. I am a steward who is accountable to God."

SLDI: Individual Impacts

Through the SLDI program, individual sisters increase their leadership, administrative, financial and technology skills and embark on a journey of lifelong learning, educating and leading. As sisters develop skills in areas relevant to their ministries and congregations, they build their capacity to act as servant leaders and role models. Some sisters report experiencing a transformation after participation in SLDI, which often includes heightened self-awareness, confidence, and self-efficacy, in addition to, or in some cases related to, skill gains. Analysis of servant leadership dimensions at the individual impact level showed that courage, authenticity, and stewardship were the most common themes.

COURAGE

Sisters reported that the SLDI program helped them to build confidence in themselves and their ability to carry out their responsibilities in their congregations and ministries. Alumnae were able to overcome fears related to learning a specific skill (e.g., finance management) and gained knowledge in areas that were essential to their work, but were previously underdeveloped. Sisters felt empowered to take on leadership roles, face failures, share their skill with others, and implement innovative changes in their congregations and ministries, even if those changes were met with resistance.

“ Personally I see I have really changed in terms of my confidence in the work. I can be able to do a number of things without fear...I've learned to accept failure as part of life and to see that through failing or through challenges I get to succeed.

AUTHENTICITY

Sisters were able to access new aspects of themselves including their talents, leadership styles and skills through participation in SLDI. They expressed feeling more at ease with themselves and their work, more true to who they wanted to be, and strongly identified as leaders.

“ [I] was able to unlock the qualities that I never thought I had.

STEWARDSHIP

Interestingly, stewardship emerged as a servant leadership dimension at the individual level. Responses coded as stewardship spoke to sisters' desire and newfound ability to serve as role models and leaders. They also described how they would utilize their individual skill achievements and personal growth as a means to strengthen their congregation and/or ministry. Some alumnae had been given leadership positions or greater responsibilities in their ministries and they expressed a sense of responsibility to the congregation or ministry because they were selected to receive the training through SLDI.

“ It was very opportune moment for me to study hard and really I did so well because I knew in the future it will help me, although I was not expected that I would become the superior here...but now because of the skills I have they are helping me so much to lead the community with the congregation and also to work with the superiors.

Alumnae described feeling more competent and were eager to share their new competencies with others through their leadership and mentorship roles.

SLDI: Organizational Impacts

The SLDI program seeks to equip sisters with skills and capacities that empower them to enhance and sustain their congregations and ministries. Sisters report personal transformations, which can subsequently translate into strengthened and sustainable institutions that serve the best interests of society. With 9 years of data on alumnae, sisters have demonstrated their ability to create impact at the organizational level, which in this analysis includes the interpersonal, congregational, and ministerial levels.

Interpersonal

EMPOWERMENT

Alumnae sought out opportunities to empower others with the skills they learned, enabling others to become more self-sufficient, particularly in the area of finance. There was also a reported sense of empowerment through the sharing of experiences, successes and challenges between fellow alumnae.

STANDING BACK

Alumnae prioritize and proactively engage in the development of others, providing recognition when others achieve success.

“ When we meet we...discover our success stories, what has helped us, what we are able to use through this program. Its always marvelous and amazing to see...each sister coming from her ministry...to share...some kind of joy she has been able to do.

Congregational

STEWARDSHIP

A willingness and ability to use skills in service of the congregation's mission and charism was frequently expressed. Through leadership roles, resource mobilization and improved strategic and financial planning, sisters took on greater responsibility for their institutions.

“ I have made sure that the local resources we have as a congregation are being well utilized so as to generate more income and we have succeeded in that.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The improvement of internal systems and practices, increased leadership positions, and the development of others through skill sharing and delegating responsibilities were ways alumnae demonstrated an increased sense of accountability to their congregations.

“ I am...given a position in my congregation as general bursar as a result I am in a position to train all community bursar on how to keep proper books of accounting.

Ministerial

STEWARDSHIP + ACCOUNTABILITY

Stewardship and accountability emerged as the most common themes at the ministerial level as they did at the congregational level. However at the ministerial level, alumnae focused more on their ability to create sustainability in their ministries, source funds through grant proposal writing, and improve financial practices. Sisters also discussed increased accountability in terms of improved human resources management.

“ My greatest success after completing SLDI I managed to solicitate [sic] funds from donors which has helped me in running the project.

SLDI: Societal Impacts

The ultimate goal of the SLDI program, in service of ASEC's organizational mission, is to enhance and expand the human development services sisters provide through their congregations and ministries. SLDI program evaluation outcomes demonstrate that alumnae make significant contributions to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, a global agenda to eradicate poverty, injustice, and social ills. Alumnae are using their administrative, financial and leadership skills for the betterment of society, which emerged most prominently through the servant leadership dimensions of stewardship and standing back.

STEWARDSHIP

While alumnae most frequently discussed their impact at the organizational level (including interpersonal, congregational and ministerial levels) they did recognize the ways in which their ability to impact society improved through participation in SLDI. Alumnae most commonly described their societal impact through the theme of stewardship, indicating a sense of social responsibility for the people they serve. Sisters spoke of their ability to identify human development needs and source funds to sustainably meet those needs. Alumnae mentioned funds they secured to improve education, health, livelihoods and agriculture.

“ I will be able to use the skills gained to analyze the needs of the society and...I assist the uplifting of their living standards.



Sr. Irene Oparku, SLDI Alumna and School Headmistress, wrote successful grant proposals, improving education for students at the Infant Jesus Preparatory School in Ghana.

STANDING BACK

Alumnae discussed their prioritization of others and increased capacity to meet the needs of others, particularly those who are vulnerable and / or marginalized. Sisters conceptualize their roles within the context of meeting local and regional needs, and serving the individuals, families and communities affected by numerous social issues. "Meeting people where they are" and working at the grassroots level while embracing new and more effective organizational practices were approaches sisters used to make an impact on society.

“ For 12 years I have been teaching in a community school where you find the vulnerable children. They are...coming from well to do families but they are vulnerable and...I put more effort to helping them to educating [sic] them and reach that standard which will be good for their future.

“ As a sister I am expected to mix with different groups of people from low middle high but for me I feel it [SLDI]...helped me really to go...be with the poor, feel with them and reach out to them in any way that I can and I feel that has moved me to work with those people.

“ I'm happy doing what I'm doing [and] to see the impact of the the work we are doing as an institution...doing something in a different way, being able to reach out to people and becoming innovative in our society.

HESA: Individual Impacts

The long-term impact goals of HESA are to (1) provide sisters the opportunity to acquire higher education including diplomas, bachelor's degrees and master's degrees; and to (2) have HESA participants apply the knowledge, skills, and resources they gained to strengthen the sustainability and systems of their congregations and to positively impact human development through their various ministries. Analyzing the qualitative data on an individual level, this report assessed the specific knowledge, skills and/or resources each participant gained from participating in HESA. Several impact themes emerged at this level including increased authenticity, courage, and accountability.

AUTHENTICITY

HESA alumnae reported that participation in the program allowed them to be more authentic and live their lives as women religious with integrity. The sisters stated that with increased skills they were better able to represent themselves, sisters and their congregations. This elevation of authenticity was linked to growth in academic abilities, professional skills, and self-regulation. Increases in these areas allowed sisters to better align their internal states with their outward actions.

“ Having been a beneficiary of HESA program, I can say it has had a lot of impact on me because going through the university system you are able to get new skills to be able to get grounded as a person.

ACCOUNTABILITY

HESA alumnae also reported that the program increased their personal accountability. They described this in terms of a heightened sense of responsibility to utilize the education they have received. Improved time management, goal setting and personal planning were often mentioned under this theme.

“ HESA program has helped me to be a responsible sister after I have learnt time management and other lessons during workshops.

COURAGE

The most common theme for individual impact of the HESA program was that of courage development. This theme included references to increased self-confidence, the ability to take risks, implementation of innovative changes and/or skills learned, and the strength to be an advocate. In addition, courage in regards to public speaking was specifically cited as an important impact on the individual level.

“ HESA program gave me the courage at least to be before people, to have that courage to teach...it was very easy for me when I went in the field because of that connection to do well in my teaching practice.

“ Participating in HESA was very empowering... Going through the HESA program and getting higher levels of education we're able to get the skills that measure to the expectations of the people we are serving and the standard that other people are also doing it. So you don't find yourself doing things in fear or working in fear but as a professional, so it gave me the background and the strength of working professionally.



HESA student at her graduation ceremony at Veritas University, Nigeria.

HESA: Organizational Impacts

The organizational impact level aims to assess how HESA participants have applied what they have learned in the program to strengthen the sustainability and systems of their ministry / congregation. Given these parameters and taking into account the servant leadership model, there are three categories that fall within the organizational impact level, interpersonal, congregational, and ministerial. Emerging themes at the organizational level will be presented according to these categories.

Interpersonal

INTERPERSONAL ACCEPTANCE

Interpersonal acceptance was the most commonly cited theme among all impact levels. Sisters frequently stated that the program improved their ability to understand others' perspectives. Sisters explained this was most likely an outcome of having the opportunity to engage with diverse populations throughout the program. These skills were related to

collaboration, teamwork, networking, and sharing.

“ I was able to meet people with different experiences which has helped me to learn more things and make more friends.

“ The opportunity to meet and make connections with people during my college years. These are networks which have been enriching even after I graduated from the university.

Congregational

HUMILITY

Sisters discussed their relationships with their congregations in terms of great humility. They recognized the role their congregation had in their participation in HESA. They viewed their congregation as a source of support, which allowed them to place their education in proper perspective.

“ I acknowledge all the support I have gained or I have received as a person.

STEWARDSHIP

In relation to their congregations, sisters reported having a stronger sense of stewardship. They often took on higher levels of responsibility within their congregations after completing the program such as becoming a general superior, mentoring others in the congregation, and making it their responsibility to uphold the congregation's mission and charism.

Ministerial

EMPOWERMENT

HESA alumnae often stated that they were sharing the knowledge they gained from the program with those whom they serve. This sharing was meant to enable others to reach their full potential and become empowered themselves.

“ I gained confidence in handling issues, even to a point to influencing others (those whom I work with) in exercising their potentials.

STEWARDSHIP

Increases in stewardship were also seen in sisters' ministries. Sisters often said that the program allowed them to engage in project, business, strategic and financial planning within their ministries. In addition, sisters stated they have been able to engage in fundraising, grant writing and mobilization of resources to assist in developing the sustainability of their ministries.

HESA: Societal Impacts

According to Barbuto and Wheeler, societal impacts are those in which a servant leader "leaves a positive legacy for the betterment of society"¹. Although this was less frequently mentioned by the HESA alumnae in comparison to the other impact levels, perhaps in accordance with the theme of standing back, evidence of societal impact was evident during analysis. Overall, it was also apparent that HESA participants, in their various ministries, are working towards the achievement of a broad range of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

STANDING BACK

The servant leadership dimension of standing back was exemplified in how HESA alumnae described the societal impacts of the program. Through service in their ministries and congregations, HESA participants expressed their desire to improve the conditions of their communities and ultimately society. HESA alumnae report standing back, or placing the interests of others above their own, and supporting those they serve.



SERVANT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the sisters' descriptions of the program's impact, the development of servant leadership characteristics can be observed. The sisters' growth within each of these dimensions continually solidifies their roles as servant leaders in their ministries, congregations and communities. Barbuto and Wheeler¹ posit that servant leaders do have a positive impact at the societal level. The HESA participants included in this report's sample have only just recently graduated. Therefore, continued monitoring at the societal impact level is necessary to determine the full potential of HESA alumnae.

“

We are hoping to go out, the world is waiting for us, there are many things they need from us. So am very grateful and I hope the skills, the education, and also the interaction I have experienced here, it will help me to go and appreciate even if they are in a bad situation, I will be able to remove them from that hole to somewhere, to be somebody in the society.

“

I really value the culture of being a positive change agent that was insisted on me. The knowledge and skills acquired on academic writing, research, hospitality, quality health care delivery, interpretations skills, or running sustainable projects/institutions as well as the unique aspect of adding quality to all services...I am confident that I have a mandatory role to improve in healthcare delivery by sisters.

“

It gives people confidence in seeking our services. That we are not just worthless, for me that is one of the things, that I feel so proud to be a sister. People are able to give us our dignity and respect because they know we are not guessing what we are doing or we should not be there.



HESA students gather at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya in January 2018.

¹Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006). Scale development and construct clarification of servant leadership. *Group & Organization Management*, 31(3), 300-326. doi:10.1177/1059601106287091

Participant Case Study

SR. RUTH NASIMIYU MAKONGE, MCESM

Newly professed in 2007 as sister of the Missionary Congregation of the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary (MCESM), Sr. Ruth was given the role of Administrator for the congregation's Nursery School. She worked in this role for five years, but says she lacked skills to perform her role effectively. She recalls, "I had no skills of being an administrator but I was only working on the guidance of my superiors and the sisters. I found there they were telling me what to do because I did not have any skill. Not until 2012 is when I joined the SLDI. I was sent to work then the very year I joined SLDI. So during that time is when I got empowerment that time is when my capacity was built as an administrator." After gaining skills through SLDI, she became a Secondary School Administrator. She then went on to participate in HESA, graduating from Tangaza University in Kenya with a diploma in Leadership and Resource Management. She was appointed her congregation's superior and created a strategic plan to direct her congregation's long-term goals.



“ This program first of all has changed me from just a leader to a servant leader. It has let me know who I am... It has taught me to help others to do what they want to do so that all can be productive and useful.

Analysis of Sr. Ruth's interview and open-ended survey responses revealed strong themes of **stewardship, accountability and interpersonal acceptance**. Sr. Ruth expressed her willingness and capacity to assume greater responsibility on an organizational level within her congregation and ministry. Acquiring skills in leadership, resource mobilization, and strategic planning improved her ability to serve as a role model and a steward of the institution. She also described a sense of accountability on interpersonal and congregational levels, mentioning her desire to empower fellow sisters with skills and effectively lead the 45 sisters she is responsible for as a Superior. Sr. Ruth identified growth in the area of interpersonal acceptance as well. Through interactions with fellow SLDI & HESA participants, she gained a deeper understanding and respect for the differences among individuals, as well as skills in effective communication and conflict management.

“ My perception changed from negative to positive that I am now not just a leader but a professional leader with a lot of potentials and ability that I gained from HESA and SLDI.

AFRICAN SISTERS EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE (ASEC)

The mission of ASEC is to facilitate access to education for women religious in Africa that leads to the enhancement and expansion of the education, health, economic, social, environmental, and spiritual services they provide. Established in 1999, ASEC was built on a foundation of solidarity and global sisterhood developed between Catholic sisters in the USA and Africa. The organization continues to forge partnerships that enable ASEC to grow, and, in turn, benefit sisters and the people they serve.

ASEC's vision is to be a sustainable organization with a proven capacity to collaborate, develop and deliver educational programs that strengthen the capacity of women religious in Africa. In order to accomplish this, ASEC operates under auspices of six core values: transformation, collaboration, leadership, service, capacity building and reverence.

