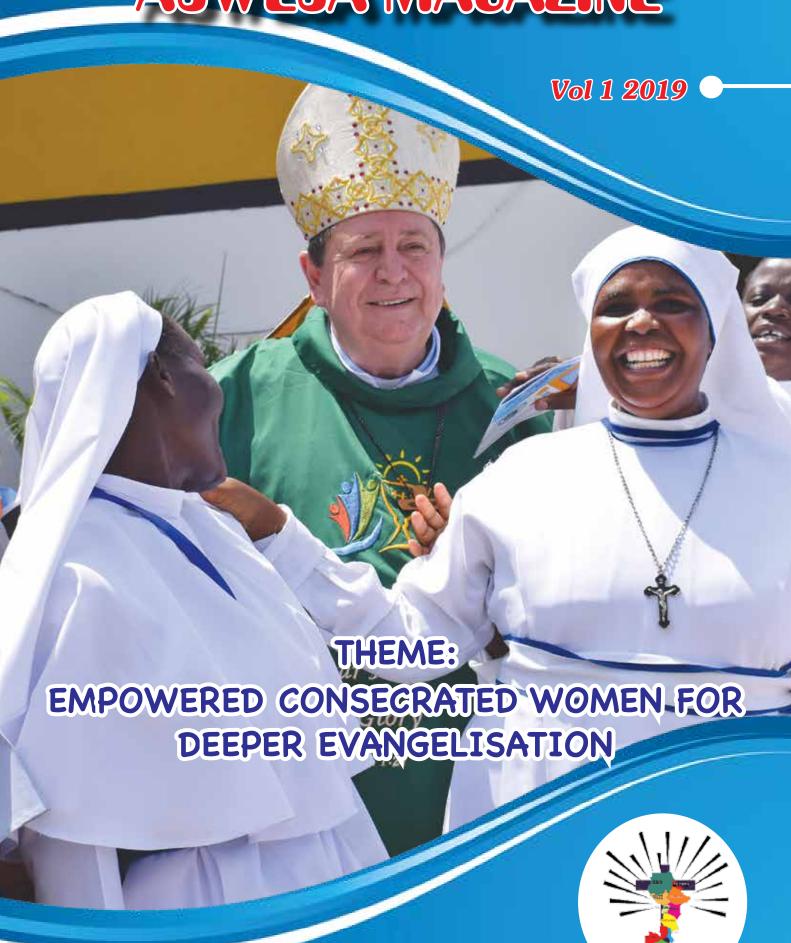
ABWEBA MAGAZINE



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EDITORIAL

ACWECA takes its advocacy and networking roles a step forward



he **Association** of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central (ACWECA) Africa, identifies improved networking and Communication as an important element organisational development. In line with this, the **Association** has

created a communication department to link it with its member associations, cooperating partners and other Church entities.

Hence, the publication in your hand is the first Edition of the ACWECA Magazine. In it you will

find the historical background of ACWECA from its foundation in 1974 to date, highlighting the key events that have taken place in the life of the Regional body. This is aimed at helping our readers to be abreast with the events in the life of ACWECA and the people who have made it possible for the organisation to move on.

Also important to note are the summaries of three plenary assemblies that have taken place in the recent past (2011, 2014 and

2017). The summaries highlight key issues/topics discussed during those plenary Assemblies, while proposing a way forward for the sisters in the Region.

So reading through the summaries will bring you up to date with the forthcoming 18th ACWECA Plenary Assembly. The ACWECA President, Sr. M. Cecilia Njeri in her convocation letter invited the Sisters in the region to continue reflecting on the importance of solidarity as a way of helping each other as consecrated women.

With the theme of the 18th Plenary Assembly: "RE-AWAKEN THE PROPHETIC ROLE: A CALL FOR RE-FORMATION TOWARDS HOLISTIC TRANSFORMATION IN ACWECA REGION TODAY." the president emphasised the need for re-formation of formation that leads to holistic

transformation.

The forthcoming Assembly will run from 22nd to 29th August 2020 and will be hosted by the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya, AOSK.

You will also find articles related to the Leadership for Mission, one of the key programmes ACWECA is implementing. Two articles covered in this edition highlight the benefits of the formation programme for Superiors and those to be trained in Chapter Facilitation in the region.

Another set of articles in this issue is on the SCORE ECD project coordinated by Catholic Relief Services, (CRS) with funding from Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. From the articles, it is clear that the project has not only benefited the targeted group but also the sister congregations that are implementing. The institutional strengthening

and the capacity building was helpful to the targeted group and sisters as well and it has put the sister congregations on the path of sustainability, which is a key concern of ACWECA.

And talking of sustainability, ACWECA in January 2018 launched the Sisters Blended Value Project, (SBVP). Through this project ACWECA presents to Women Religious Institutes an

opportunity of learning social entrepreneurship that will transform sisters' current social ministries that focus on charity into social enterprises.

With its core mission as "catalyzing sustainable and scalable solutions that alleviate poverty across the ACWECA Region," participating congregations will be expected to use business skills and strategies to serve the poor and protect the planet with the sole aim of sustaining religious life

And that said, we now invite you to go on and read this first Edition of the ACWECA Magazine. We wish to assure you that from now onwards, we will keep the links of communication open and highly welcome and value your comments on contributions towards leaving this link open.

"RE-AWAKEN THE

TODAY."



he President of the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA) Sr. Cecilia Njeri, LSOSF, has expressed immense gratitude to Religious Congregations from the ten Member countries for their strong commitment towards the course of the Association.

Evident through the membership financial contributions and full participation in the laid down programs of ACWECA, Sr. Njeri who is also the Superior General of the Congregation of Little Sisters of St. Francis testifies that their programs often come to realization because of the Sisters' commitments.

"We have had challenges for example with the funding for our programs. We only have a handful of funding partners who have been very supportive. This means that there are times when we would write project proposals and they don't go through. However, programs must go on as we have to still fulfil our mandate," Sr. Cecilia explained.

"In those cases, one thing that has helped us are the contributions from the Sisters through the membership fee. Sometimes when our project proposals fail to generate any income, the membership fee has kept us a floating and the programs running," she added.

Does that mean that all the sisters in the region have been committed to their membership mandates? How has ACWECA achieved this? The answer, according to Sr. Cecilia is affirmative, in that majority of the Sisters are committed to their membership obligations.

"What they usually do is that they give their money to the National Associations which in turn remits the collections to ACWECA Secretariat."

According to Sr. Adelina Muguna, NSA, the Chairperson of the Association of Sisterhood of Kenya, (AOSK) the membership for ACWECA is of the National Associations. She said every National

Association is therefore expected to pay an annual registration fee.

"It is upon the National Association to know how to get the money from the Religious Congregations within their jurisdiction. If, for instance, Kenya is mandated to give US \$ 5,000 as annual registration fee for AOSK, it is our obligation to remit that full amount to ACWECA within a specified period of time. We don't have to mind whether the individual member Congregations have paid or not: rather, we at AOSK must find a way to pay because we believe in the activities of ACWECA which are meant for our own good," Sr. Adelina explained.

And since the National Associations are never equal in terms of the number of member Religious Congregations as well as the economic, social and political situations of the member countries, the annual membership contributions vary.

"Since we are not of equal strength, different Conferences are given an amount reasonable according to their means," Sr. Adelina who is also the vice president of ACWECA explained.

However, ACWECA whose member currently stands at ten (namely Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe as an Associate Member) is not without challenges.

According to the ACWECA President, the Association is not so much visible yet as they would wish it to be. "Many Religious Sisters from our member countries still do not know about ACWECA. But we are making efforts to encourage National Associations to make ACWECA known, to talk about ACWECA to the young and the old nuns so that all of us know that this body is for us all; it is not only for the Secretariat but rather for us all and for our own benefits."

This article was originally published on the AMECEA Online News

ACWECA Building on the legacy of its founding members



Sr.Teressa Gachambi and Sr. Hellen Mwalye both founding members and former presidents

arly in the 1960s the Sacred Congregation for the Religious in Rome expressed the desire that, each country should have a Conference of Women Religious Superiors.

And when the bishops of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) region had their plenary assembly in 1973, they invited some representatives of Consecrated women in the region to attend. The sisters attended the plenary but they couldn't make any contribution because they went in as observers.

This experience further ignited their desire to have their own meetings where they could discuss issues that are relevant to their consecrated life and their role in evangelisation. It was during this AMECEA Plenary that the sisters agreed to meet independently for the first time.

The representatives were from four (4) Conferences of Women Religious Superiors from Eastern and Central African countries that already had established National Conferences. These included the Association of Sisterhoods of

Kenya (AOSK), the Tanzania Catholic Association of Sisters (TCAS), the Zambia Association of Sisterhoods (ZAS) and the Association of Religious Institutes in Malawi (ARIMA) by then, now Association of Women in Religious Institutes of Malawi (AWRIM).

At this meeting in Nairobi, it was recommended that a regional meeting of religious women be convened to discuss their common concerns and aspirations and to deepen their religious commitments.

UISG call bolsters resolve to start Association

And about that same year, a call from Rome asked AOSK then chaired by Sr. Marie Therese Gacambi to organize the Sisterhoods of Eastern Africa as a follow up of the International Union of Superiors General, (UISG) meeting she had attended in Rome. The UISG is a worldwide, canonically approved organization of superiors general of institutes of Catholic women religious. The purpose of UISG is to promote an understanding of religious life.

Sister Gacambi at that time had attended the UISG meeting in her capacity as the then superior general of the Assumption Sisters of Nairobi, (ASN).

Consequently in the same year, she together with three other sisters – Sr. Edel Bahati, Sr. Cecilia Nibyobyonka, and Sr. Stephen Nkoitoi, independently met to plan for what would become the 1st Assembly in the history of Consecrated Women from this part of Africa. The Conference with the theme: "The Role of the Religious Women in Evangelisation." took place in Limuru, Kenya in 1974, and it drew delegates from Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. At this conference, the sisters gave themselves the name "The AMECEA Sisters."

And over the years the study conference took place either annually or after every other year though from the recent past to date, it now takes place after every three years.

From AMECEA Sisters to SEASC, then ACWECA

It was in 1978 that a decision was made to establish a Secretariat for the AMECEA Sisters for proper coordination of their activities and programmes. And in 1980, they adopted for themselves the name "Sisters of East Africa Study Conference," (SEASC) from its original name "the AMECEA Sisters."

In the years that followed, the Sisters continued their journey of faith and focused on formative influence of community through conferences with various themes relevant to their service in the Church. More than anything else, most of the conferences put emphasis on leadership and formation and the impact of sisters' role in evangelisation.

Thus, through these study conferences the aims and objectives of SEASC became clearer. These aims and objectives were articulated in the guidelines of the SEASC, which later on became the Statutes.

In 1983, the Eritrean, Ethiopian and Sudanese Institutes of Women Consecrated Life became members of the SEASC while retaining their national memberships in the Joint National Associations (Men and Women). But all this time SEASC was operating under the umbrella of AOSK.

It was in 2002 that delegates to the 12th Plenary Assembly changed the name to the "Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA)." This according to members would take care of the increasing

membership demands from other countries that had been brought on board. At this time the Association had a membership of eight (8) national associations of sisterhoods.

But following the 2010 secession of South Sudan from Sudan, the South Sudan Sisters' Association, (SSSA) was recognised as an independent member of ACWECA in May 2013.

And in 2017 the Council of Delegates to the 17th ACWECA Plenary Assembly unanimously accepted, Zimbabwe as an Associate Member following a request from the Conference of Major Religious Superiors of Zimbabwe.

Today, ACWECA comprises women institutes of consecrated life from ten (10) English speaking countries of Eastern and Central Africa namely Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

First full time secretary general

For the first 28 years of its foundation, ACWECA operated under the umbrella of AOSK. As such, all the ACWECA Secretary Generals within that period with the exception of 1983-1986, were from AOSK and they worked on part time basis.

It was however in 2002 that ACWECA got its first full time Secretary General, Sr. Romina Nyemera from the Association of Religious in Uganda, (ARU). She registered ACWECA under the Society's Act of the Republic of Kenya in 2004. It was also during her term as Secretary General (2002 – 2005) that ACWECA's first draft constitution was developed.

And in the year 2005, ACWECA made a request to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) for official recognition.

Construction of the Regional Secretariat

Then from 2005 – 2014, Sr. Catherine Okari from AOSK served as the Secretary General of the regional body. It was during her term that ACWECA initiated a fundraising drive for the construction of a secretariat. The building which took three years to complete now has office space and accommodation for the secretariat staff in Ongata Rongai area in Ngong Diocese.

Another key activity within this period was the development of the 2011 – 2016 Strategic Plan whose implementation led to some notable achievements such as the construction of the regional Secretariat, review of the ACWECA Constitution, development of finance, human

resource and procurement policies. Other achievements included capacity building programmes and scholarships for sisters in the region and a research on the African Culture and Religious women, whose findings were published into a book.

The 2017 - 2022 Strategic Plan

Meanwhile Sr. Eneless Chimbali, the Secretary General that took over in 2014 with her new team organised the development of the 2017 -2022 Strategic plan that came up with four thematic areas, namely;

- Formation and Mission
- Family and youth
- Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
- Organisational development,

With the above strategic directions, the Regional body focussed on its Vision & Mission to help it continue the legacy of the founding members "to discuss their common concerns and aspirations and to deepen their religious commitments."

Thus the Vision: "Empowered Consecrated Women for Deeper Evangelization," coupled with its Mission: "To promote the spirit of collaboration

and sharing of spiritual, human andeconomic resources among member national associations in order to enhance religious formation and strengthen leadership capacity for deeper evangelization," were the driving force behind the new ACWECA Administration's work at the Secretariat.

At the closure of the 17th ACWECA Plenary Assembly, the Council of Delegates mandated the ACWECA management to implement the activities outlined in the Strategic plan. This accordingly led to the design of various formation programmes, key among them the Leadership for Mission and Chapter celebration which have seen close to 100 superiors benefit.

And it is important to note that most of these formation programmes have taken place at the Secretariat. This was made possible after restructuring of the rooms at the Secretariat that created more rooms for accommodation.

Another key activity that ACWECA has is the country programme in which they collaborate with sisters with expertise on different topics to facilitate these formation programmes. And according to the coordinator, over 360 sisters from across the region have benefited.

ACWECA's formation Program prepares women religious superiors for leadership roles



ACWECA Secretary General, Sr. Eneless Chimbali, awards certificate of completion to Sr. Noelina

Namusoke

eadership for mission is one of the key formation programmes of ACWECA. Through this programme, consecrated women in the Region are empowered for effective leadership and formation.

This was in response to the call of Pope Francis: "Keep watch", which in itself is an invitation to renewal for religious life – an invitation to put "new wine in new wineskins" - the style of Jesus. Guided by Christ as the giver of life, ACWECA embraces this mission to give life to the Congregations. Thus, Leadership for Mission Program aspires to have Religious Institutes that promote effective leadership, strengthen formation and sustain the patrimony.

The program objectives are to train sisters on relevant issues on leadership through;

- » Effective Chapter celebration and implementation of chapter resolutions
- » Building their capacity for self-sustenance, governance and administration of temporal goods

- » Empowering superiors for effective transition, and
- » Strengthening initial and on-going Formation.

The program was launched in November 2017 and to date 88 Superiors have benefited from the three modules, 26 sisters from Chapter Facilitation Training and 360 sisters from Country programs.

From their sharing and expressions, the sisters have treasured the training through presentation of different topics that have helped them to discharge their duties in a productive way.

For the superiors the programmes comes in three modules. The first Module

Module I: Exercising the power received from God through the ministry of the Church in a spirit of service. This is for the newly elected superiors. Module II: Administration of temporal goods and

sustainability plan.

Module III: Gracefully handing over the custodian of the patrimony of the institute. This module is for superiors who are finishing their mandate as leaders in their institutes. The training prepares the out-going Superiors on how to cope with the transition period.

Other than the superiors training, ACWECA also trains Chapter facilitators. This training has two sessions which take a period of six weeks. The training is open to all religious who are perpetually professed.

In line with our Vision "To promote the spirit of collaboration and sharing of spiritual, human and economic resources among member Associations to enhance religious formation and strengthen leadership capacity for deeper evangelisation," ACWECA offers country consultancy programs based on each member countries' needs.

ACWECA LM PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES FOR 2019-2020

TIME FRAME	COUNTRY PROGRAM ACTIVITY	WHERE
1 st – 6 th October 2019	Regional Formation Directory Meeting	ACWECA Secretariat
25th -30th October 2019	Psychological Assessment	Eritrea
10 th -16 th November 2019	Workshop for newly elected major superiors Exercising Power Received from God through the Ministry of the Church in a Spirit of Service	ACWECA Secretariat
15 th – 21 st March 2020	Country program	South Sudan
22 nd – 28 th March 2020	Country program	Sudan
9 th - 13 th April 2020	EASTER BREAK	
19 th April – 30 th May 2020	Chapter Facilitation Training	ACWECA Secretariat
7 th – 13 th June 2020	Country program	Ethiopia
14 th – 20 th June 2020	Country program	Zimbabwe
14 th – 20 th June 2020	Superiors' workshop: Module III	ACWECA Secretariat
12 th - 18 th July 2020	Superiors' Workshop: Module II	ACWECA Secretariat
22 nd August – 29 th August 2020	18th ACWECA Plenary Assembly	ACWECA Secretariat
20 th – 26 th September 2020	Country program	Tanzania
4 th – 10 th October 2020	Country program	Malawi
4 th – 10 th October 2020	Country program	Uganda
11 th – 17 th October 2020	Country program	Zambia
18 th – 24 th October 2020	Country program	ACWECA Secretariat
24 th – 31 st October 2020	Country program	Eritrea
8 th – 14 th November 2020	Superiors' Workshop: Module 1	ACWECA Secretariat



s the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa, (ACWECA) moves towards the third year of implementing its formation programme for congregational leaders in the Region, superiors are calling for more sisters on the leadership team to participate.

This call was contained in the ACWECA Secretary General, Sr. Eneless Chimbali's report to Fritz Zuger, a consultant on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (USCCB) Subcommittee on the Church in Africa. Fritz who was on a tour of Bishops conferences that USCCB supports in August made a courtesy call to the Association's Secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya

"ACWECA appreciates the support of USCCB which has enabled her to empower the sisters in the region through training and workshops," Sr. Chimbali said.

The Secretary General said the funding had kept the Leadership for Mission, (LM) under which the formation programme falls to be awake and alive in responding to realized needs of the sisters in the Region.

"The grants we have been receiving from USCCB has helped us to come up with this structure of the programmes and it has given ACWECA an identity," she said. The Secretary General was however concerned that they were not able to make a follow up on how the superiors are using the knowledge and skills they have acquired.

But she was quick to note that the participants who have benefited from the training have consistently expressed their gratitude to the donors and ACWECA for creating these capacity building opportunities.

"The sisters treasure the training that are offered through the presentation of different topics and they have shared how it has helped them to discharge their duties in a productive way," Sr. Chimbali went on to explain further.

Since the launch of the programme nearly two years ago, several workshops and trainings have been organised for congregational leaders in the region. To date 65 superiors from across the region have participated in the training, with the first and second groups having completed their three module training of one week each.

Besides the formation programme for congregational leaders, the LM programme also offers a six weeks' training in chapter celebration. The training which is divided into two modules of three weeks each has so far trained two groups with a total of 23 sisters having received certificates of participation in the programme. The training particularly offers sessions on effective chapter celebration and the implementation of Chapter Acts.

According to the ACWECA Secretary General, the development of the Leadership for Mission, (LM) programme was ACWECA's response to a felt need.



"Through LM programme, ACWECA is responding to its need of supporting sisters especially in promoting effective leadership and formation in the Region, National Associations and in the Institutes," Sr. Chimbali said. She said this was based on the significance of formation and effective leadership in the life of religious congregations.

The Malawian nun further explained that the ACWECA Leadership and Administration in its 2017 - 2022 Strategic plan, identified the need for more support in promoting effective Leadership in religious institutes in the Region. As such, the Association's Strategic plan sought to develop a formation programme, geared towards addressing this felt need.

Meanwhile, the LM Coordinator, Sr. Christine Wairimu Mwangi in a briefing to Fritz Zuger explained that the programme is aimed at bridging gaps in areas of Chapter celebration, formation, governance and sustainability and the administration of temporal goods. "It is focused on strengthening leadership and formation in the region," she said.

The Coordinator further explained that the programme has specifically targeted superior generals, provincial superiors, superior delegates and regional superiors because of the roles they play in their congregations. "This is the group responsible for leading, planning, organizing, coordinating and protecting the patrimony of the institutes they lead," she said.

She said the first two modules for newly elected superiors cover pertinent issues related to service of authority as exercised in religious institutes, sustainability planning and administration of temporal goods. So along this line, topics covered include implementation of chapter mandates, good governance and Church Laws. Other topics covered are on sustainability, social enterprise, financial management, formation and administration, among others.

And as superiors prepare to handover the leadership of their congregations, the third module focuses on Leadership transition. Sr. Wairimu says the topics for this module helps superiors to prepare to gracefully handover the leadership of their congregations.

The Secretary General explained that module III on leadership transition was more spiritual. She said in this module the superiors have time to pray and reflect on the period they have been in leadership.

"We help superiors to understand that when they are leaving office, they are not going outside the congregation but are leaving to let others come in to bring something new," she said. The week therefore is more spiritual with a lot of discernment and prayer.

Another key component of the LM is the country programme, which has become popular with some of the countries in the region. According to the Coordinator, member conferences have benefited as more sisters are able to participate in the program. But she explained that countries were expected to choose their own topics which are in line with ACWECA's vision and mission and then invite ACWECA to facilitate.

Chapter Facilitation training - a time of deep, rich and shared experiences

hen we were asked to come for the course at the Secretariat of the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern Africa, (ACWECA), we had mixed feelings. Some of us were scared of the demands of the programme, while others felt enthusiastic and privileged to receive insights on chapter facilitation.

Thus, on the 5th May 2019, all roads from the North, South, East and West led to the **ACWECA Secretariat in Ongata** Rongai in Nairobi - Kenya. It was timeto report for Module Il of the chapter facilitation training. The organizers heartily welcomed us, and especially Christine Wairimu, the Coordinator of the programme who had to wait for some of us to the wee hours of the morning. Thank you one and all for your support and the service you are rendering.

On the morning of 6th May 2019, fifteen participants from 5 different countries (Kenya,

Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) eagerly awaited the beginning of the workshop amidst an exchange of joyous greetings, after the long break. Among the participants were two new members who were unable to complete the Module II of their training in 2018. These too were taken in and within a short time were part of

The facilitators of Module II were new to all of us except the two new members who joined our group of thirteen. The two facilitators, Sr. Margaret Uraa and Sr. Jacqueline Githire had given the inputs of the first Chapter Facilitation training of 2018 in which our two new colleagues had participated.

the group.

The facilitators skilfully merged the content from where the previous facilitators left and moved with all participants to the satisfaction of all members. It showed their creativity and effectiveness at an early stage. We were soon to see more of their competence as they took us through the whole workshop. We applaud you our facilitators, Asante sana, Mwebale, Zikomo kwambili, — a word of 'Thank you' in some of the languages spoken in the region. You set the pace for us on how Chapter facilitation and more

Chapter facilitation and more so co-facilitation should be handled. You prepared well, presented well, coordinated with each other well and you kept your spirits undaunted as you kept us on track. Thank you once again!

Having expressed our Hopes and concerns, we set our group values and the corresponding behaviours were to be our guiding principle as we chose two or three values to follow closely each day. Among other values, confidentiality was top on the list since it is a very important element in General Chapters and the expected behaviour of facilitators.

The Aim of the workshop – "To enable participants to facilitate General Chapters in a creative and effective way" became our maxim.



The processes used to achieve this were practiced and instilled in us.

All participants were schooled in the functions of a General Chapter, and the process from pre-chapter preparations to the final stage of the chapter where the delegates are sent to bring the Chapter Acts home.

The call to discern in all activities was emphasized as well as the role of the facilitator being that of a 'midwife'. The facilitator directs the process while the congregation has the content. The need for good planning and preparation was imperative.

Looking at the six weeks programme that was divided into two modules of three weeks each, we must acknowledge that it has been an enriching moment in our lives and we felt blessed. We were in an environment with sisters from different nationalities in the ACWECA Region.

It was a time of deep, rich and shared experiences which led to our bonding together. We were also blessed to have gifted facilitators who were able to share with us their God given wisdom and deep spirituality. They are a special gift to their institutes and the Church as a whole.

It has also been a moment to deepen our understanding of our own congregational documents in line with our charisms, spirituality and mission, and how to fit these into the wider context. And more so, it has been a moment of learning different facilitation skills and everything that has to do with facilitation in general and Chapter facilitation in particular.

We recommend that many congregations appreciate and embrace this chapter



facilitation programme so that we can enrich our chapter celebrations. It is a course that is an eye opener to the realities of our chapters for the growth of our Religious Institutes, as well as sending a strong sense of hope and newness in the future chapters.

It is a course that invites us to make our own General Chapters life-giving, as the highest authority in a religious institute, when in session and, its after effects.

The knowledge that we have received will deepen our personal lives as well as the lives of our members and those of other institutes. It will help us to support our leadership teams in preparing for the chapter celebrations. Apart from the knowledge gained, the Chapter facilitation training has been a journey of faith that has to continue beyond the time we have spent together for the training.

The whole course was very informative and the participants were given the baton to pass on as well as share the knowledge and skills gained in communities and in congregations where need be.

We extend our thanks to the support staff as they contributed to our well being, Rev. Fr. Edward Etengu, OSB, for coming to celebrate the sacrifice of the Eucharist for us and with us, despite the wet roads that become almost impassable due to the constant rains.

We sincerely thank the Board and management of the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa, (ACWECA) for organizing this programme. We believe it is a response to a felt need in our Religious Institutes to make our Chapter celebrations lifegiving.

We also thank the Leadership teams of our Religious Institutes and the donors who have supported ACWECA to enable us benefit from this training. May our Mother Mary who is our model intercede for us to live lives worthy of our calling!

Article contributed by the Participants of the chapter facilitation group 2019

Catholic Relief Service's SCORE ECD program turns couple's life around

By St. Cross Conclin, MSMMC



young couple in Siaya County in Western Kenya has had their life turned around after fully embracing Early Childhood Development, (ECD) interventions.

Erick Omondi Otieno and Emma Adhiambo who are beneficiaries of the programme are parents to two beautiful six month old twin girls – Samantha and Natalie and three year old Tony Blair Graham.

Through the (CRS) coordinated Strengthening the Capacity of Women Religious in Early Childhood Development, (SCORE ECD) programme, sisters help families understand the importance of nutrition, breastfeeding and communicating early and effectively with their children.

According to the CRS Regional SCORE ECD Coordinator, Sr. Pauline Silver Acayo, the project is being implemented with funding from Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. She said CRS is implementing the project through the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA) and three national Associations of Sisters within the ACWECA region.

"Catholic Relief Services works in partnership with 18 congregations in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia with the aim of helping children under two to thrive in a sustainable culture of care and support," she further explained.

The Franciscan Sisters of St. Ann, (FSSA) at Lwak in Siaya County where the couple lives are part of a nine Sister congregations implementing the SCORE ECD project in Kenya.

"The sisters together with community health volunteers educate women on the importance of responsive care giving," the CRS SCORE ECD Regional Coordinator said.

She explained that the training was aimed at giving the women knowledge and skills in nutrition, early stimulation, positive parenting, exclusive breastfeeding, antenatal and postnatal care and hygiene.

And as well, the women are encouraged to play and communicate with their children to enable them reach their

developmental milestone and provide them early learning opportunity.

At the couple's neatly kept spacious compound which also houses Otieno's parents' home, the children have the opportunity of playing with their grandparents. In fact as the reporter interviewed Otieno, Graham and another little boy sat with their grandmother in another part of the compound to draw pictures from a picture chart.

And Otieno who is himself a primary school teacher also in his free time helps the little boy to learn using picture charts to stimulate his cognition.

Since Emma joined the neighbour women group for the Integrated Mothers and Babies Course and ECD programme about a year ago, a lot has changed for the couple. "Today, hygiene in our home is of high standard," Otieno observed.

And the father of three is particularly impressed with the keenness with which his wife now handles issues of hygiene. "Hygiene in our home was moderately low and the children's soiled clothes took long before being washed," he said. But after becoming part of the ECD programme, he noted that his wife became a promoter of ECD interventions in the family and the neighbourhood. "Personally I have been won over and I have no problem helping with some

of the house chores," he said, adding that he can now fry eggs and prepare a simple meal for the children.

Further on, Otieno says he often uses his free time to play with children, bathe them or simply look after them when his wife is tired or busy with other chores.

Otieno who is now contented with the positive change in his family and the respect that this has commanded in the community said his peers see him as a point of reference.

"We have a lot of friends and we gladly share with them the importance of responsive care giving, personal hygiene, nutrition, play and communication and, a good number of them have changed," he said.

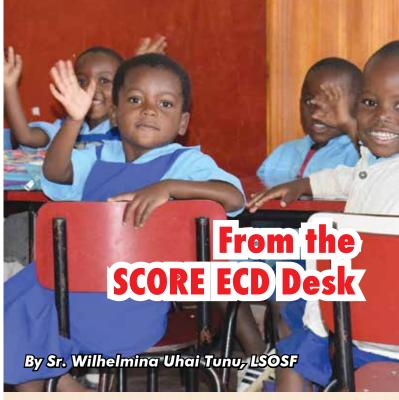
But what surprised him most was when his wife told him that one could communicate with an unborn baby in the mother's womb. "You know I am a stubborn man and I couldn't simply accept that unborn children are able to respond to any communication directed at them in their mothers' womb," he recalled.

So for a while Otieno refused to communicate with his unborn babies. But after some convincing from his wife, he reluctantly began touching his wife's womb whenever he returned from school. He made the same sound whenever he stroked his wife's womb, and was surprised that the unborn babies responded by kicking their mother's womb.

And when the babies were born, Otieno was shocked to note that they instantly recognised his voice when he made that sound. From then on, Otieno became very keen on the wellbeing of his children. He plays, bathes and feeds the children whenever his wife is busy or they simply feed or bathe the babies together.

He said the parental involvement has created a strong bond between them and their children. Not surprisingly, the couple's relationship has greatly improved. "We are able to understand each other and if there are problems, we resolve them amicably," he said.

More so, the family's diet has also improved greatly. "We have a kitchen garden and are able to provide a balanced diet for our family and this has greatly impacted the mother's diet helping with the production of breast milk for the babies. "Now our children rarely fall sick – they are alert, healthy and eager to play and communicate with us," he said.



he Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA) in collaboration with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) coordinates the Strengthening the Capacity of the Religious Women in Early Childhood Development, (SCORE ECD).

This project funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation is implemented in partnership with national Associations of Catholic Women Religious in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a comprehensive approach to policies and programs for children from birth to eight years of age, their parents and caregivers. It is basically an essential support a young child needs to survive and thrive in life, and the support a family and community needs to promote children's development...in order to realise their potential and play an active role in their families and later in their communities, as stated by Bernard van Leer Foundation.

The goal of SCORE ECD program is therefore to improve the technical and institutional capacity of sisters' organizational sustainability. By strengthening their capacity, sisters are able to assist mothers and caregivers to bring up and help vulnerable children attain age - appropriate developmental milestones.

The project has been implemented in two phases. Phase one of the project ran from October 2014 to September 2017, targeting children from 0 to 5 years. The second phase that began from

October 2017 will run up to September 2021, and caters for pregnant and lactating mothers and their children from 0 - 2 years to thrive in a sustainable culture of care and support.

Thus, the specific objectives are to:

- » Enhance Sisters' technical capacity in Early Childhood Development (ECD) for increased impact on the lives of young children aged 0-5 and their families,
- » Increase sisters' organizational sustainability to better position them to continue and expand quality ECD interventions,
- » Enhance Sisters' networking and learning around ECD to influence ECD policy and practice (within and outside the Church, including governments).

So along that line, ACWECA coordinates various capacity building programs in the region among them is the SCORE ECD. As actors on ECD, sisters are convinced that children are for the community and their wellbeing is the wellbeing of the community.

As such, the project activities demonstrate their genuine care and concern for the children. It creates an environment of positive care where the dignities of children is promoted and are reliant on living a life of ethical guidance that nurtures the common good. It also provides good health to mothers/fathers and children, responsive care giving, opportunity for early learning, adequate nutrition and safety.

As Psalm 127:3 puts it "sons are a bounty from Yahweh, he rewards with descendants." And Ephesians 6:4 states: "Fathers do not provoke your children to anger; rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord."

With that in mind, we therefore want to see a world where children live and thrive with the ability to think, to love, care, share, lead, communicate, encourage and transform others.

The project has a great contribution towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as listed below:

SOME OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS THAT ARE IN LINE WITH SCORE ECD



Sisters lead the way! Social entrepreneurship is pro-woman economic development



bout a year ago the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa, (ACWECA) invited Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship create a partnership the "Sisters and Blended Value" project. Miller Center is

part of Santa Clara University, a Jesuit Catholic university based in California, USA.

We were impressed by the vision and determination of the Sisters, and even the title they chose -- "blended value" -- greatly appealed to us, because it describes an ideal of social entrepreneurship.

Social entrepreneurship is an inherently prowoman form of economic development, and thus highly appropriate for Sisters. The initiative uses business skills and strategies to serve the poor and protect the planet.

Unlike traditional development which is dependent upon external grants, social entrepreneurship draws from the "start-up" approach common to Silicon Valley. This "new" approach draws on the power and innovation of business, but focuses its creativity on helping the poor exit out of poverty.

The traditional development has the unfortunate flaw of cultivating a "dependency mentality," meaning that local people feel that they cannot move forward until a grant is received. In contrast, startup enterprises focus on learning new ways of serving customers with innovative ideas.

The primary focus is on 'learn what works, what the customer needs, and how an enterprise can provide a good or service that meets those needs.' Social entrepreneurship follows a learning journey, a journey of discovery and innovation. Over a one or two year period, a new enterprise learns how its innovation plus some modest investment can change the local conditions so that its customers are better off, and the host organization is able to sustain itself.

The entrepreneurial activities of the Sisters Blended Value Project will create social value (social benefit) with economic opportunities for poor neighbors, but also benefit the congregations by generating some modest revenues.

Since ACWECA represents some 300 congregations, we saw that, if the first few congregations could figure out how to acquire social entrepreneurship strategies, this could have broad impact on Eastern and Central Africa.

Most conventional development strategies end up benefitting men, whether rich businessmen or poor, local men. Of course, corruption bleeds out unimaginable resources intended for the poor, but even well-run development projects often focus on men.

Many studies have shown that when men have more cash, they spend it on tobacco, alcohol, gambling and prostitutes. How does social entrepreneurship overcome this? It does so by placing women and children at the center of initiatives. By helping women serve their children, the entire family is uplifted.

Social entrepreneurship provides opportunities for women to access goods and services for their families, or for women to work, and thus bring in income which they spend on their children. Social entrepreneurship focuses on community development and economic empowerment for women. Since Catholic Sisters have historically had this preferential option for poor women and children, it is now time for them to embrace social entrepreneurship.

Over the past 15 years, Miller Center has accompanied more than one thousand social enterprises. We provide acceleration services to these enterprises, which means an adult learning process that helps organizations focus on their mission, create social value for their "customers," and sustain the economic health of their own organization.

We present key concepts and ideas, and some examples, and then provide practical homework exercises that members of the organization would complete. We review this homework, and provide critical and constructive feedback on how to improve. The first set of exercises addresses who do you want to serve, how will you serve them, and how will your service improve their lives?

These homework assignments are designed to help the organization write their own business plan, reflecting their own identity and mission. Business plans describe what goods or services the enterprise will provide to its target market, its funding strategy, and its human and material resource strategy.

These accelerator programs are typically about six months, and as part of their "graduation," enterprises have focused their plans and are prepared to proceed to the next stage, which often includes additional funding. Miller Center does not provide funding itself, but helps entrepreneurial organizations write strong business plans, which can be used to secure external funding. This funding would go to the organization, to help it serve more local people.

The Sisters Blended Value Project will adapt this adult learning model to address the needs of congregations. The first, and most fundamental discernment is whether the congregation is ready to engage in an intensive community learning process. A team of three Sisters would compose the project team, and be responsible for launching the social enterprise and completing all the acceleration learning activities.

But the entire congregation has to be behind such a new venture! The three Sisters have to be freed up to be dedicated to learning to develop basic business skills, to start up a social enterprise, to determine the right target market, and to manage the finances. These Sisters need to be dedicated to consistent communication with ACWECA and Miller Center, and to completing the homework activities in a timely fashion.

More than that, however, they have to be committed to a learning journey of at least two years, because that is how long it takes for a social enterprise to succeed. The congregation has to provide the initial (modest) funds to test out the preliminary ideas, but also to learn from the project team, by looking over their shoulders, and by celebrating their successes in terms of helping local women. This project is not for every Sister or congregation.

Social entrepreneurship is a lot of study and a lot of work! And not every congregation may be in a position to commit itself and its Sisters to such a learning process.

When I first received the request for collaboration from ACWECA, I thought that each congregation could launch its own startup social enterprise, consistent with its own mission and charism. Over this past July, I had the privilege of spending two weeks with Sr. Eneless Chimbali of ACWECA visiting many of the Sisters.

During those visits, I heard Sr. Eneless express a bolder vision. She began describing the opportunity before the Sisters as transforming their congregations into social enterprises. The same skills and tools that Miller Center teaches social enterprises, when adopted by congregations, become a pathway for renewal.

Ultimately, social entrepreneurship empowers us all to create an economy that works for everyone, including Mother Earth, as Pope Francis has invited. Now that is renewal for the Sisters, for Miller Center, and the world!

by Bro. Keith Warner, Miller Centre



Pictorials

































CAPTIONS

- 1. Cooperating parners from Kindermissionwerk, Germany visit ACWECA Secretariat at different times
- 2. Sr. Jane Wakahiu, LSOSF (in the centre) with her team from the Hilton Foundation addresses some ACWECA Board and management staff (not in picture) at Chemichemi during familiarisation tour.
- 3. Fritz Zuger, a consultant with the USCCB Africa desk with ACWECA Secretary General Sr. Eneless Chimbali during a visit in July 2019.
- 4. Mr. John Ottoboni, Bro. Keith Warner and the team from Miller Centre of Santa Clara University, USA. The Miller Centre team came to facilitate training for 11 congregations participating in the SBVP in Nairobi, Kenya.
- 5. Team Missionary Benedictines Sisters, one of the congregations participating in the SBVP make a pitch at the SBVP training in March 2018 at SUBIACO, Karen.
- Fr Emmanuel Chimombo, the AMECEA pastoral coordinator after a courtesy call to ACWECA Secretariat in March 2018.
- 7. Sr Joyce Meyer and CRS Zambia Country Director give solidarity message during ZAS Diamond Jubilee celebrations at Roma Catholic Church in Lusaka, Zambia.
- 8. The Catholic Relief Services Country Director, Zambia gives solidarity message during celebrations to mark the Diamond Jubilee of ZAS in November 2018.
- 9. Representatives of Religious congregations that have served at the ZAS leadership receive shields of honor in appreciation for their service to the Association.
- 10. Sisters from the Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CMRS) Zimbabwe take some time off to relax during their annual general meeting in January 2018.
- 11. Members of Sudan Sisters Association, (SSA) pose for a group photo with the Archbishop of Khartoum, Michael Didi Adgum, during ACWECA's Leadership for Mission country programme in the Sudan in March 2018.
- 12. Joao Cardinal de Aviz prepares to cut the Golden Jubilee cake of the Association of Religious in Uganda, as they celebrate 50 years of the Association.
- 13. Sr. Nyemera Romina, OLGC receives a medal of honor from Joao Cardinal de Aviz during the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Association of Religious in Uganda. Looking on is Archbishop Cyprian Kizito Lwanga.



he Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa, (ACWEC) is on the path to transforming Religious Sisters' social ministries in to social enterprises.

Through the project dubbed the Sisters Blended Value Project, (SBVP), ACWECA presents to Women Religious Institutes an opportunity of learning social entrepreneurship that will transform sisters' current social ministries that focus on charity into social enterprises.

The Regional body (ACWECA) in collaboration with the Miller Centre for Social Entrepreneurship developed the approach of this project and shared it with congregations that were ready to accelerate successful and promising social enterprises within their ministry. The project links the objectives of ACWECA to that of congregations striving to enhance the sustainability of their charism, ministry and wellbeing.

The project was initiated after learning from the current realities which revealed that most of the sisters' ministries in the region rely on donor funding. This is despite the fact that donor funding is shrinking day by day, thus leaving the question of sustainability unaddressed.

In view of this, ACWECA developed a pilot project in collaboration with the Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship at Santa Clara University in the USA, and launched a major initiative to expand its global reach and impact. The SBVP of ACWECA will anchor the social enterprise movement in the Region and more broadly across Africa.

The initiative is aimed at strengthening collaboration and networking with likeminded institutions within the Region and beyond to support Catholic Sisters to build up their vision, ministry, infrastructure and committed personnel. This will help to enhance their ability in social entrepreneurship while strengthening their organizational sustainability and profile among the people they serve.

Through this Project, sisters will improve their technical capacity in social entrepreneurship that will lead to increased institutional ministry stability and enhanced capital investment. Participating congregations will work as a team with the support and guidance of ACWECA and Miller Centre at all levels.

In this way, they shall share their knowledge, skills and resources in line with the Mission of ACWECA: "to promote the spirit of collaboration and sharing of spiritual, human and economic resources among member conferences to enhance religious formation, strengthen leadership capacity for deeper evangelization."

In this collaboration too, ACWECA is focused on developing the capacity of the sisters and support their social enterprises to positively impact hundreds of thousands of lives within the Region. This has been done through adapting and translating Miller Center's methodologies to address the unique challenges faced by sisters in the Region.

The SBVP's core mission is to "catalyze sustainable and scalable solutions that alleviate poverty

across the ACWECA Region." The Project will help to distinguish between charity and social entrepreneurship and significantly expand the influence and global reach with methodologies that will enable sisters to grow their businesses and positively impact many more lives in the Region.

The project was formally launched in January, 2019, after ACWECA entered a partnership with Miller Centre in August 2018. At the launch, the sisters from Kenya and Uganda through learning visits were exposed to social enterprises within their countries. This was to help them draw from the practical examples of these enterprises so as to build their own social enterprises.

But it is important to note that ACWECA strives to ensure that whatever enterprise the sisters wish to venture into must be in line with their charism, vision and mission. "Social enterprises are always mission driven".

The Learning visits were then followed by a workshop in March, 2019. Miller Centre developed the curriculum in consultation with ACWECA, which they later adapted to better address the needs of the Sisters. The workshop was designed to help the Sisters grow in their understanding of social entrepreneurship, distinguish social enterprise from charity approach, and learn how to develop their own entrepreneurial initiatives.

The workshop addressed topics such as theories of change, social value creation, value chains, and partnership strategies, among others.

Together as sisters we shall align our initiatives – ministries into the SDG's to bring the change and transformation the world is looking for.

Talitha Kum Assembly for new Strategies to Combat Human Trafficking

Sr. Mary Lilly Driciru MSMMC-ARU

Catholic Religious men and women to combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP) has celebrated its 10th anniversary marked with its first annual assembly in Rome from 21-27th September 2019.

The Religious in this fight are motivated by the support of Pope Francis who says: "trafficking of persons is an open wound on the body of contemporary society," and urges all to welcome the victims, protect, promote and integrate them.

The assembly is out to set priorities for 2020-2025, give direction for future activities and strengthen the networks for collaborative work.

The Assembly attracted 86 delegates from 48 different nations within 52 networks. The participants displayed products associated with activities sisters

undertake in different countries and networks.

A special award was given to 10 sisters who in recent years made distinction in their commitment to the cause and have been instrumental in supporting antitrafficking networks in different countries.

TalithaKum as we know is a project of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), in collaboration with the Union of Superiors General (USG).

Africa was represented by 17 delegates from both English and French speaking regions of Africa.

From Kenya, Religious Against Human Trafficking (RAHT), a National Association of the Catholic Consecrated Men and Women reported on a training of trainers' workshop they held in partnership with Talitha Kum International in Nairobi. The workshop on the theme: "Together we can end Human Trafficking!" ran from 1-3 July, 2019.

With a vision to uphold the dignity of the human person, making the world free, the Association organized training that attracted religious, volunteers and facilitators from all over Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Sudan. Ghana, Egypt, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Zambia, Italy and Philippines. The diverse topics all pointed to the modern slavery where members shared success stories, heart breaking experiences and images that appeals for further mobilization towards this noble course.

The participants were also motivated by the African Proverb: "...alone you move fast but together go far."

Hence members were urged to collaborate in TIP prevention, rescue, protection and prosecutions in partnership with governments, NGOs, and the Church.

Members were called to intensify prayers to the intercession of St. Bakhita, Patron of Trafficked Persons and mark 8th February, the world day of prayer against TIP.

Human trafficking was traced in African States in the precolonial times when Africa lost many of her gallant sons and daughters through the bloody slave trade with outlets in the South African Cost, East Africa and West African Coasts. This left a big impact to date at Goree, the "Door of no return" in Senegal that attracted the visit of Presidents: Bush, Obama and Mandela.

Today victims of human trafficking in Africa are found in DR-Congo where illegal mining takes place with African Children who are denied their right to education. Cobalt deposit in Congo is the second largest in the world after Chile. On the 27th June this year, several victims were buried when the mines collapsed.

The training offered a platform for the sisters and volunteers to share experiences and celebrate achievements. Among others: Sr. Gabriella Bottani who has been honored as TIP report Hero. Sr. Jeannette Alfi Soueiha who is Justice and Peace champion and Coordinator in Egypt, and now enjoys good relationship with the President who has created the Ministry for Women.

She was honored as Ambassador of peace because she enjoys collaboration with other faiths like Islam. "We have shared common problems and shaken hands with Muslims who entered in our Church in this noble ministry!" Sr. Jeannette narrated.

International Labour Organization (ILO) 2017 statistics show that "At any given time in 2016, an estimated 40.3 million people are in modern slavery, including 24.9 million in forced labour. It means there are 5.4 victims of modern slavery for every 1,000 people in the world. One of four victims of modern slavery are children.

And out of the 24.9 million people trapped in forced labour, 16 million exploited in the private sector such as domestic work, construction or agriculture; Women and girls are disproportionately affected by forced labour, accounting for 99% of victims in the commercial sex industry, and 58% in other sectors." Accordingly, out of the 40.3 million victims, 9.2 millions are from Africa.



On the way to the 18th ACWECA Plenary Assembly

s ACWECA prepares for its 18th Plenary Assembly slated for 22nd – 29th August 2020, we bring you key highlights of what transpired in the past three plenary assemblies.

The 15th ACWECA Plenary Assembly in Uganda

The 15th Plenary Assembly of the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA) was held in Kampala, Uganda from 16th – 26th August 2011. The triennial event brought together 100 major superiors from the nine (9) member countries. The delegates were joined by representatives from our cooperating partners and collaborators.

The theme "Called to an identity of Rootedness in the person of Jesus Christ as consecrated Women: A Challenge for mission and formation today," was Pope Benedict XVI's invitation to religious to "go to our roots and reflect on our beginnings and identify what our founders/foundresses wanted us to give to the global Church. It is a specific call to superiors to see if they are faithful to that which was left in our custody."

Sr. Ceciliah Mkhonto and Sr. Veronica Openibo from South Africa and Nigeria/Rome respectively were on hand to expound on the theme of the Assembly. Sr. Mkhonto explained what it means to be rooted in Christ and linked it to the general situation of the world and what rootedness implies. Meanwhile Sr. Openibo explained the meaning of rootedness in relation to mission, thus explaining the different ways in which to identify those who are rooted in Christ and those who are not.

Another key presentation on Traditional African Beliefs and Practices and their impact on Religious Formation was done by Prof. Clement Majawa of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. Among the topics that were presented in relation to theme, this particular topic necessitated ACWECA to carry out a research whose findings were published in

a book titled "African Culture and Religious Women in East and Central Africa." Professor Majawa expounded on the topic of African traditional beliefs and practices and their impact on religious formation and life, thus concluding his presentation with a way forward on how to approach the issue.

Meanwhile, a joint presentation by Sr. Cecilia Nibyobyonka and Sr. Therese Gacambi, both founding members of ACWECA took the Assembly back to its roots. The presentation on "Intergenerational responsibility to impart the vision and mission of ACWECA, despite the challenges of modernity/post modernity of today," was meant to impart the Vision and Mission of ACWECA to the younger generation. The presenters examined the importance of religious formation and the role of major superiors in passing on the vision and mission of ACWECA to their incoming leaders.

A final presentation at the 15th Plenary Assembly on sustainability and resource mobilization by Dr. John Chikati focused on strategies aimed at strengthening the capacity of non-profit organizations in resource mobilization. The presentation then went on to propose ways on how to overcome challenges faced in resource mobilization, especially in religious congregations.

The 16th ACWECA Plenary Assembly in Zambia

This Assembly which was held from 16th – 29th August 2014 in Lusaka, Zambia brought together 93 delegates from the nine (9) member countries. The delegates were joined by representatives from our cooperating partner organizations and collaborators.

With the topic: "Our Contemporary journey in the footsteps of Pope Francis," the ACWECA Chairperson, Sr. Margaret Aringo expounded on the theme of the Assembly, "Go, Do not be Afraid and Serve." She said the Executive observed that congregations are compromised by lack of capacity in leadership and resource development.

On the sub-topic "Pope Francis and the contemporary living of Religious life," she said the Pontiff invited the religious to witness and to "wake up the world." She noted that Pope Francis was very categorical when he invited the religious to witness — "they must be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting and living." In this way, the religious proclaims the prophetic mission of the Church and the building if its kingdom in the world.

Another topic that was presented was on Church and Civil law where the presenters took delegates through key areas related administration in religious institutes.

The other presentation was about Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAI), a tool designed by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to assist organizations to conduct a self- analysis of their strengths and challenges.

Other topics on religious dialogue, poverty, human trafficking and the research findings on Traditional African Beliefs and Practices and their impact on Religious Formation were also presented.

Meanwhile the Delegates to the 16th Plenary Assembly also took some time off to celebrate forty (40) years of the Association since its foundation in 1974 with a membership of five countries – Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The 17th ACWECA Plenary Assembly

This Assembly took place at the Tanzania Episcopal Conference's Kurasini Centre in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from 26th August to 2nd September 2017. It brought together 150 delegates from the nine (9) Member Countries. Key among the participants were the council of delegates comprising superiors general, country delegates, provincial superiors and regional superiors with voting powers. The delegates were joined by representatives from our cooperating partner organizations and collaborators.

With the theme: "Revitalize our Solidarity for deeper Evangelization in today's complex

reality within the region," the keynote address from His Eminence João Braz Cardinal de Aviz called on women religious in the region to collaborate, bear witness and be in solidarity with one another and with people they serve.

The Cardinal attended the Assembly in his capacity as the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, (CICLSAL).

Sr. Romina Nyemera and Sr. Hellen Mwalye expounded on this theme. Sr. Romina explained what it means to be in solidarity within the ACWECA region, while Sr. Mwalye explained the complex realities facing our region in relation to the mission of ACWECA.

Another key top that was presented in relation to the theme was Sisters: Champions of sustainable development Goals (SDGs), by Sr. Jane Wakahiu, LSOSF of Hilton Foundation.

During the assembly, ACWECA presented two key documents that the Council of Delegates endorsed – the Statutes of ACWECA, which was proposed to be submitted to CICLSAL for recognition and the 2017 -2022 Strategic plan with four thematic areas:

- Formation and Mission,
- · Family and Youth,
- Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation,
- Organizational development and growth

At the end of the Plenary Assembly, the Council of Delegates mandated ACWECA to implement the 2017 – 2022 Strategic Plan.

It was also at this Assembly that the President presented a request from the Conference of Major Religious Superiors, (CMRS) Zimbabwe to join ACWECA as one of the members. The Council of Delegates unanimously accepted them as an Associate member because they don't fall within the AMECEA Region.

The 18th ACWECA Plenary Assembly

As we look towards the 18th ACWECA Plenary Assembly, Sr. Cecilia Njeri, LSOSF the ACWECA President in her convocation



reflecting on the theme of the 17th ACWECA Plenary Assembly that called us to "Revitalize our Solidarity for deeper evangelisation in today's complex reality within the Region." Through this theme we were reminded on the importance of solidarity in addressing complex realities in our society as consecrated persons. We were challenged to move away from our comfort zones and reach out to those who need us most - the vulnerable groups of society and to reach out to each other in our various communities, especially those who are in difficult areas. This was to be done in line with the mission of ACWECA that invites us "to promote the spirit of collaboration and sharing of spiritual, human and economic resources among member National Associations in order to enhance religious formation and strengthen leadership capacity for deeper evangelization."

letter invites Sisters in the region to continue

Therefore, looking at the world today which has become a complex reality, we saw the need to re-awaken our prophetic role as religious women within the ACWECA Region in order to strengthen and deepen our evangelization. There is a great need for re-formation of formation that will bring out the holistic transformation we all desire. As ambassadors for Jesus Christ, we are consecrated in truth to make a difference amidst the challenges of the world and to remain steadfast as prophets of today, John 17:16-18.

Hence, for the 18th ACWECA Plenary Assembly, we chose the theme: "REAWAKEN THE PROPHETIC ROLE: A CALL FOR RE-FORMATION TOWARDS HOLISTIC TRANSFORMATION IN ACWECA REGION TODAY."

As you all remember, at the 17th Plenary Assembly, the council of Delegates mandated the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya, (AOSK) to host the 2020 Plenary Assembly scheduled to take place from 22nd – 29th August 2020. Thus, Sr. Adelina Muguna, the ACWECA Vice President who is also the Chairperson of AOSK welcomes all to this auspicious occasion.



"We have tried to implement the Resolutions of the 17th ACWECA Plenary Assembly," says Association's President

By Pamela Adinda, AMEGEA Online News

s the 18th Plenary Assembly of the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA) draws close, the President of the Association Sr. Cecilia Njeri, LSOSF, is confident that they have implemented most of what was mandated to them during their 17th Plenary Assembly held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in August 2017.

According to Sr. Cecilia, the 17th ACWECA Plenary Assembly saw the launch of a six year Strategic Plan (2017-2022) which mandated the Secretariat in collaboration with the National Associations of Sisters from the ACWECA member countries to focus on four thematic areas: Formation and Mission, Family and Youth Ministry, Justice, Peace and Integration of Creation and Organizational Development.

"As ACWECA, we felt that formation in the leadership of Religious Congregations is vital. We have therefore developed modules for leadership empowerment program where we build skills and knowledge of the leaders to enable them work more effectively," Sr. Cecilia explained, adding that in Religious Life, nuns who lack skills and technical know-how often find themselves appointed into leadership positions, hence the need to build their capacity.

Since the program started, ACWECA Secretariat has been bringing two groups annually for capacity building: one for the newly elected leaders to various offices in their congregations coming for three modules, and the other for those who are leaving office so that they may exit gracefully. And according to Sr. Cecilia, the initiative is quite appreciated by congregational leaders in the region.

Still on Formation and Mission, ACWECA Secretariat has also been having a program on preparation for Chapter facilitation. This



is a six weeks' program which according to Sr. Cecilia who is also Superior General of her Congregation, Little Sisters of St. Francis, has also been successful and is much appreciated by the Congregations.

"We have had Sisters coming for three weeks, then they go back and return for another three weeks, in total six weeks. We felt that we need to prepare the Sisters who can facilitate Chapters within the Region in the different Congregations. Somehow, we are encouraging teamwork. Therefore, each year we have Chapter facilitation modules," she said.

ACWECA Secretariat is also helping the leaders with skills on financial self-sustenance and they have developed a new program dubbed Sisters Blended Value Project where they are encouraging the superiors to utilize resources available at their disposals and also to explore innovative ways of doing things in order to become more self-reliant.

"We feel that we need to know how we can sustain Religious life in Africa, using the resources we have. So I think in terms of leadership formation programs, whatever we laid out to do is also on the right track," Sr. Cecilia said.

In relation to the mandate for Family and Youth Ministry, ACWECA has been working closely with the National Associations and encouraging them to have programs for family and youth.

"We encourage Sisters to visit families in their localities so that they get to know the challenges and problems that families often encounter. We have Sisters who are social workers and our mandate is to empower them so that they can organize seminars and workshops for families. As for the youth, we encourage Sisters to get involved in youth ministry through schools run by the Catholic Church."

ACWECA has also managed to organize trainings for Sisters on justice, peace and integrity of creation, an initiative that Sr. Cecilia said is greatly appreciated.

"Gone are the days when Sisters didn't get involved with justice and peace issues. We are encouraging Sisters to take the front stage in promoting justice, peace and integrity of Creation. And for their effectiveness, capacity building is also key. The Holy Father Pope Francis, through his encyclical Laudato Si, asks us to care for our environment. As a result, we are encouraging

Sisters to plant trees to take care of Mother Earth. This initiative has also picked well in almost all the Congregations."

Finally, concerning the fourth mandate of the ACWECA 17th Plenary Assembly which is organizational development, the Association's president says, "First we had to renovate the whole ACWECA Secretariat in order to maximise the use of the facilities that we have here. Having done that, we are now able to hold all our activities, including some of the trainings here at the Secretariat and this helps us to save on costs," she explained.

Secondly ACWECA has worked on operational structures and policies which, according to Sr. Cecilia, have helped the Association to grow and develop into an organization that is trustworthy.

"We have our Statutes, an Operational Management Manual, Procurement Manual, Financial Policies and Procedures. All these have helped us to build confidence, create transparency and make ACWECA trustworthy. In a nutshell, we can say that we made some efforts to implement the mandate given to us by the 17th Plenary Assembly and we are happy."

This article was originally published in the AMECEA Online News





Zambian nun involved in the Catholic Relief Services' coordinated Strengthening the Capacity of Women Religious in Early Childhood Development, (SCORE ECD) project has an inexhaustible passion for the welfare of children and the community she works in.

According to CRS Zambia SCORE ECD project manager Ms. Bertha Mpepo, Sr. Ruth Kuyumba is a self-motivated nun who goes beyond her expected responsibilities.

"Sister Kuyumba's implementation style, commitment to the project and passion for ECD brings reassurance that positive change is taking place in the target communities," Ms. Mpepo said during an online interview.

She explained that the Sisters of Mercy, the congregation to which Sr. Kuyumba belongs is one of the 18 congregations implementing the project. The project which is being implemented with funding from Conrad N. Hilton

Foundation and coordinated by CRS is implemented through the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA).

CRS SCORE ECD The regional coordinator Sr. **Pauline** in Silver Acayo Nairobi further explained that the sisters through families the project help understand the importance nutrition, breastfeeding and communicating early and effectively with their children.

"The sisters together with community health volunteers, (CHVs) educate women on the importance of responsive care giving," Sr. Pauline said.

But before taking up roles as master trainers, the sisters are trained to enable them give the women knowledge and skills in nutrition, early stimulation, positive parenting, exclusive breastfeeding, antenatal and postnatal care and general hygiene.

In order to bring positive change in the community's attitude around child development and care, Sr. Kuyumba makes weekly visits to project beneficiary households.

"The community leaders now recognize Sister as an ECD champion as she is constantly engaging them in meetings aimed at increasing chances of realizing the goals of the project in Kasaba community," Ms Mpepo said.

And more so, the area has the highest number of men participating in sessions. This has resulted into high number of households being able to show physical WASH outputs such as making of tippy taps, building of toilets and construction of plate drying racks, among others.

The CRS SCORE ECD Project Manager further explained that Sr. Kuyumba implements every lesson or skill she acquires. She said the nun adopted some ideas from her counter parts in Kenya during a learning visit in April 2019 and has rolled out some of these ideas in Kasaba.

"We have introduced table

banking commonly known as 'merry go round' in our area, which I first introduced to the Community Group Volunteers, (CGVs) - i.e. lead mothers before rolling it out to the households," Sr. Kuyumba said of the initiative. The nun further explained in a recent phone interview that the amount to be contributed was decided by the mothers themselves based on their income level. She said this was done once a month as they come for their monthly group sessions. "Each mother brings K20 and since each group has ten members, the amount comes to K200 (about US\$ 15) that is then shared to two members," she said.

"I am happy to mention that many mothers have started some small businesses because of that and they are able to support their families as well as help other beneficiaries," she noted with satisfaction.

She said the initiative had also reached the households in Kasaba. But unlike in the group of the CGVs, the women in the households bring together foodstuffs on monthly basis and share it to their members. She said the food items they contribute include groundnuts, maize flour, sugar, salt, and maize, among others.

The CRS SCORE ECD project manager who works closely

with implementing sister congregations said their assessment of the initiative shows that mothers in the neighborhood have welcomed it and are very happy with the idea of providing internal support to group members.

Meanwhile the nun who is so keen to see the progress of the neighborhood group has also introduced kitchen gardens, another initiative she learnt from her colleagues in Kenya. She said they have taken to gardening to fight off malnutrition in the area.

"I identified a piece of land that we have cultivated and planted some maize. The maize has been harvested and we will partly use it for income generation and partly for cooking demonstrations," she confidently said.

What the soft-spoken nun however values most about her group is their time and commitment. "The mothers contribute a lot to this project. Their time and commitment to the project is

invaluable," she said, adding that they really love the project and have welcomed it into their communities.

The CRS SCORE ECD Project manager said they were impressed with Sr. Kuyumba's efforts. She said the nun has been able to promote the projects' benefits effectively.

"Kasaba is the area with the least requests for tangible goods from beneficiaries," she said. adding that the site reached the largest number of beneficiaries in the quarter under review.

And unlike in other greas where beneficiaries expect handouts, she said the concern of beneficiaries in Kasamba is how to remain part of the project after their children graduate. She said many mothers want to be retained on the project to continue benefiting from the lessons even after the children turn 2 years of age.

"Sister Kuyumba's

implementation style,

commitment to the project

and passion for ECD

brings reassurance that

positive change is taking

place in the target

communities."

Another **CRS** thing appreciates about Sr. Kuyumba is that her reporting is always on time and that she never hesitates to ask for clarifications whenever something is not

"I believe Sister's attitude towards her work is a general reminder of Sisters' call to serve children and the vulnerable in the community. Moreover, her effort highlights the value

of working with young passionate sisters that can be molded into experts of a particular field," she said.

clear.

Sr. Ruth Kuyumba is a master trainer from Zambia

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Youth and religions what roles can families, Christian communities play?

By Sr. Grace Candiru, MSMMC

anet Wambui (not real names) is a twenty three year old university student. Although Janet comes from a good practicing Roman Catholic family, her knowledge and idea of God is quite basic. Apart from going to Sunday mass, she still relies heavily on the catechesis she received while preparing for the sacraments of Eucharist and confirmation. She confesses that when she joined the university, she realised that she had a lot of catch-ups to do and she is glad that the Catholic chaplaincy at the university has been helpful.

And James Njoroge, 26, on the other hand, has had a better chance of deepening his knowledge and love of God. "From a very early age, our parents taught us what they believed and why they believed it. They taught us all manner of prayers, the sacraments and what it meant to be of service to the Church and to the others. They (our parents) created ample opportunities for us to practice what we learned from their teaching and examples."

And he went onto explain further: "My parents prayed for us; they lived the faith fully. All of us are involved in church more than just going to church and this has helped us a lot."

Through his parents who were great models of the faith, James and his siblings grew close to the Church both in words and in deeds. They are not simply Sunday church goers but are active members. Each of their family members is active in one Church association or the other. Thus, James confessed that his family and friends who are devout Catholics have given him a model and accountability system.

From the above examples, it is clear that today more than ever, religion needs to offer young people something that will keep them wishing to know more or else they will look for alternatives. And if that were the case, the question that immediately comes to mind is, are our churches, temples, mosques and other places of worship and institutions that exist to support and manage the practice of each of these religious beliefs playing their role?

It's not uncommon that many of our parish or chapel communities lack activities and programmes to engage Christians, let alone the youth outside of mass or church service time. Yet, experience has shown that there is beauty and strength to be found within the Christian Community. And parishes and Christian communities that engage their Christians in various association activities are more vibrant than where the Christians are simply Sunday church goers. Not surprisingly, vibrant church communities tend to grow and develop faster.

One clear example of a vibrant Christian community is Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Charles Lwanga, Parish Nkoroi in Ngong Catholic Diocese, Kenya. The Parish has a strong and vibrant Christian Community with different associations ranging from Catholic Men's Association and Young Christian Workers to Pontifical Missionary Society. There is even a strong and active youth group in the Parish.

The Parish which is run by the Order of Carmelites was founded 10 years ago and today it has three masses that are fully packed, with the second mass being animated by the youth choir.

And if there is any celebration in the Parish that requires catering services, it is often handled by the youth group and the funds are used to run the youth activities.

But most importantly, the parish offers the youth various services like retreats and other formation programmes. They also participate in exchange visits to other youth groups both within and outside the country, all of which have kept them active in church activities.

And what about the parents – do they have the time and the opportunity to instil the love of God in their children? With today's hustle and bustle, one wonders if parents are able to create time to sit down and share with their children. Whereas it's praiseworthy for parents to financially sustain their families, I dare say it is equally important for them to create quality time to be with their children.

Catholic Relief Services' reforms broaden Sisters' horizon towards sustainability

Sisters at Ulongwe in Malawi, the institutional capacity strengthening reforms proposed by Catholic Relief Services, (CRS) came as an eye opener.

The CRS Coordinated Strengthening the Capacity of Women Religious in Early Childhood Development, (SCORE ECD) reforms which preceded the implementation of (ECD) initiatives in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia sought to build the sisters capacities in certain areas of management.

The project focused on building Sisters' capacity among others in development of some key policy documents, proposal writing and human resource management, among others.

According to Sr. Hellen Matchado, her members acquired new management skills and were able to develop some key documents necessary for organizational management. "Among other things, the sisters developed human resource manual and finance policies, which have been very helpful to us," the nun said.

"We used to depend on our staff to inquire from among their relatives and acquaintances when recruiting workers," Sr. Matchado went onto explain.

This recruitment procedure however landed the sisters into litigation from some disgruntled staffs who were dismissed for some reason or the other.

"Some staffs have taken us to the Labour Office and we have lost considerable amount of money because of that," the nun who is also the Coordinator of her Congregation in Malawi said.

New way of doing things

Today, staffs undergo interview process and are employed based on competence. Moreover, each staff now has a file and is contracted for a period of time, at the end of which their contracts can either be renewed or they are discontinued if found unfit for the job.

The sisters also underwent financial management training and now record every financial transaction they make. And according

to Sr. Matchado, the sisters who have undergone the training are able to share the knowledge with others, thus creating a multiplier effect in the Congregation.

"We have started a new way of doing things and there is a great improvement," she confidently said, adding that whatever new knowledge they acquire, they practice and where necessary, they consult with CRS.

On the issue of sustainability, she said every now and then, they are trying to find ways of sustaining this project outside of the life-span of CRS sponsorship. "Before taking on SCORE ECD, we depended on our salaries and support from the General administration but now we think of income generating activities," she said.

The sisters have swung to action and have put the proposal writing and financial management skills they acquired to good use.

The Sisters have incorporated poultry and piggery farming as a way of earning income to sustain the project with the money they received from a project they wrote. They rear both local and highbred chickens. With the waste from the poultry and piggery they started a small scale organic farming where they grow vegetables, bananas and fruits for home consumption and sale.

ECD spreads its wings, sisters create linkages

Meanwhile, the nursery school that initially ran like charity has been transformed into a social enterprise. The school sought to offer value for money for which they asked the parents to pay a little more than they initially did.

The nun recalled that the immediate reaction of many of the parents was to remove their children from the school. The number of children dropped from 120 to 60.

This however, did not scare the sisters. Instead, they integrated ECD messages into the children's leaning, which many parents came to appreciate. Today the number of children stands at 105, up from 60.

For successful ECD implementation, the sisters realized that they had to network with others

so as to bring the benefits of the project to the intended beneficiaries. They had to go to the villages and meet the people in their communities.

"At first it was not easy to relate with the villagers," she said. But later on, they had to go through the chiefs. They sensitized the chiefs about the benefits of the project to the community and the chiefs in return sensitized the people and encouraged them to come to the sisters. The women were the first to come to the sisters.

The sisters taught them general hygiene and how to look after their home. But most importantly, they taught the women how to prepare nutritious meals for their families using local foods through cooking demonstrations.

After the first cooking demonstration, word went round because the women who participated eventually became ambassadors to the wider community. They shared the knowledge with the others who didn't attend.

Later, the sisters identified some cluster leaders (Community Health Volunteers), most of whom were already working with the government or other organizations operational in the area. They trained the CHVs on ECD messages and these further helped to spread the message about the project to the people.

Networking and advocacy

Additionally, Sr. Matchado has been using Radio Maria and a local Television station in the area to pass on the message about ECD. Today, the

nun attends meetings at the District where she freely shares about ECD.

The Sacramentine Sisters have also gone on to share the information about SCORE ECD to other religious congregations in their diocese. This is especially done during Association of Women Religious Institutes in Malawi, (AWRIM) diocesan meetings.

In fact, non-participating congregations now feel short charged as participating congregations seem to benefit a lot from the capacity building reforms. "The progress we have made has heightened the desire of non-participating congregations to want to participate in the project," she said.

Even in the surrounding community, the project has had a positive impact. This has resulted into people knowing more about SCORE ECD, while others have come to see for themselves what the sisters do at the ECD Centre at St. Gertrude Nursery School in Ulongwe. She explained that most of the children at the nursery were from the ECD participating homes.

As such, the Sisters' ECD Centre has now become a point of reference for officials of the Ministry of Social Welfare as well as officials from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development. They often refer to the role Sisters have played in promoting the welfare of the child and community development in general.

Some of the key ECD messages that she consistently passes onto care givers is that children must be cared for right from the moment of conception.





Neighbourhood women under the Sacrementines Sisters meet for ECD sessions in Ulongwe



Documentation as a project management tool

By Sr. Grace Candiru, MSMMC

Before discussing the importance of documentation as an effective project management tool, I wish to start by sharing definition of the word "Documentation." The Oxford dictionary defines it as, "The material that provides official information or evidence or that serves as a record.

Additionally, the word Documentation could also refer to the process of classifying and taking note of some important information.

So that being the case, we could then say documentation is a set of an official written, maintained or recorded material with information or evidence.

That being said, it is important to note that documentation is part and parcel of any project management. This is because project documentation helps to track project progress and performance for purposes of informed decision making. This therefore calls for the need to understand the significance of good documentation throughout a project cycle.

project managers can Thus, significantly enhance their communications skills and project success by using and telling stories of their project. These stories can be used to bridge stakeholder differences, to develop win-win solutions, develop long profitable relationships, improve and sustain their personal, business and project success.

On the basis of the above, it is important to note that inadequate or no documentation in project

management and sharing of best practices increases the chances of project failure. Also, inadequate documentation can lead to issues related to support in a project.

Nevertheless, I would wish to limit this presentation to documentation of best practices, which I believe is possible through story telling. Story telling can be a powerful tool for change and can be done through publications both online and hardcopy (newsletters, newspapers, magazines), photos, video clips etc.

As David Smith succinctly put it: "If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a story is worth a

thousand pictures," alluding to the composition of a great story. Such stories must be able to capture the context, meaning and emotion of those involved.

And one might wonder "Why tell the story of your project to the world? In project implementation, there are high chances that you will be working with other partners. It is therefore imperative that you will need to get stakeholder feedback on your project and make people out there to be interested in your project. This will earn you the support of your sponsors/donors to give you money for future expansion of the project, or as may be the case, impress your superiors in case they may wish to entrust you with the management of another project in the future.

But one might be tempted to ask: "How do I tell the story of your project?" To begin with, it is worth noting that personal success stories related to the project have the power to stick to people's minds. This is because for most people, stories are easier to relate to – and recall – than statistics

> or data summaries. Stories have the ability to bring the message of the project home.

> Additionally, personal stories have the added impact of authenticity and can help to quickly establish trust. A well-crafted story, if appropriate to the purpose and the message of the project, has the advantage of recognition by the audience. Moreover, knowledge gained from interviews with stakeholders can be of great value for the implementation of the project.

But most importantly, stories can also be used to obtain funding for the project. Stories can help persuade and sell the benefits of a project by humanising the project (i.e. putting a human face to the project). Stories sell "what is in it" for the funders of the project.

Thus, your role is to tell compelling stories – ones that will connect your project with the audience. And not only the right stories but ones that deliver the key messages or call to action on issues related with your project.

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PRAYER FOR THE 18TH ACWECA PLENARY ASSEMBLY

Holy Trinity,

One God, we thank you for the gift of Consecrated Women in the ACWECA Region. We praise you for calling us to solidarity as a means to deeper evangelization in the world of complex realities. As we look forward to celebrate the 18th ACWECA Plenary Assembly, you are reminding us of the gift of prophecy bestowed on us through the Sacrament of Baptism. On our journey of discernment, you are calling us to Re-awaken the prophetic role so that we can be agents of renewal through informative and transformative consecrated life.

As we prepare for the 18th Plenary Assembly, we ask you to anoint us with newness of life. Help us to recognize what is expected of us so that we can respond faithfully and fruitfully to the mission of our religious Institutes and to the mysteries of the Church. Guide us in our discussions and instil in us a prophetic voice which will help us to rebuild our lives as consecrated women. May our coming together as ACWECA Family bring about transformation in the lives of women religious for the future of Religious life in Africa.

Bless and inspire the delegates of the Assembly. May their deliberations bring good and lasting fruits for the good of the mission of ACWECA. Bless and reward our friends, partners and benefactors, May they find joy and fulfilment in their mission.

Mary Mother of the Church, help Consecrated Women in our Region to embrace the prophetic role by doing what Jesus, your Son is telling us. Guided by you as our model, may we be agents of change for a better tomorrow.

