

The CHALLENGES JHE face in Africa and Madagascar

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Abstract

Due to particular African situations and to particular situation of Jesuit higher education in this region, Jesuit higher education faces in Africa and Madagascar some particular challenges.

We describe first these particular situations of Africa and Madagascar (great diversity, context of war and regional and ethnic division, need for good leadership, need for good quality institutions of education, and a great desire to go to the University) and of Jesuit higher education in this region. Then we point out the challenges that come from this context: High quality education, good students, human and financial resources and collaboration.

Many of the challenges Jesuit higher education face in Africa and Madagascar are globally the same as in other regions of the World. There is nevertheless a particular emphasis on some of these common challenges. There are also some particular challenges stemming from particular African situations as well as from the particular situation of Jesuit higher education in this region. Let us then start by presenting a broad picture of the Region, in addition to what other presenters from Africa & Madagascar will say, as the background for the challenges that we will bring forth. Anytime we speak of Africa, we mean also Madagascar, our Great Island.

A. The African Context

As far as higher education is concerned, the following characteristics of Africa can be outlined as its unique challenges:

1. A great diversity: The continent shows a great diversity among its countries and among the regions and the populations within each country. The socio political and economic situation may be very different between two regions in the same country, like in the Democratic Republic of Congo where the province of Kivu at the East has been ragged by war for years, whereas the Western provinces are quite in peace.

2. Context of war and regional and ethnic division: Although, as John Paul II put it (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*), “a Catholic university should help the Church and the countries respond to the need of reconciliation in a context of wars and division”, this same context makes it difficult for countries in wars to have common institutions, such as common universities, where students from any country would feel at home. Here is the place to mention the efforts being made in the Society of Jesus to move from the traditional Province owned formation houses towards common works, such as the Philosophy School in Harare, the two Schools of theology in Nairobi and Abidjan, and the Peace Studies Institute and International Relations in Nairobi.

3. Need for good leadership: In most countries, there is a lack of a leadership fully devoted to the good of the people, with high morality and unselfishness. That brings leaders to stick to power even though they are making their country go astray. They weaken the political institutions which become ineffective and unable to stop them in their ill doing. They even corrupt or kill their opponents so that nobody can topple them from power. In order to remain in power, they are ready to rely on the culture of death that we are observing in a fragmented and broken world, with people being displaced due to poverty, oppression, armed violence, ethnic differences, and other factors that come from this culture of death. The traditional culture and worship of life seem dead, but our people are still longing for the fullness of life.

4. Need for good quality institutions of education: Many African nations, exploited by outside actors and plagued inside by war, AIDS, and corruption, have become more and more marginalized. As a result, the education is very poor and not competitive at all, to the extent that students from these countries cannot pretend to study abroad. There is a great need for good quality institutions of higher education. Many of the existing public and

private institutions are of low standards. In RD Congo, for example, the Minister of Higher education closed down, a month ago, many institutions which, he said, were not viable.

5. A great desire: A high proportion of the population is made of young people seeking very much to learn and to go to the universities. This gives a number incredibly high of students going to the existing universities and an unlimited number of students to be who would join the universities if they had the means for.

B. Jesuit Higher Education in Africa and Madagascar

The Provinces and Regions of the Society of Jesus show a great diversity, in terms of the number of the countries covered, which ranges from one to ten, the number of Jesuits that goes from 10 to over 300, and the small number of higher education institutions, which goes from none to 4 by Province and Region, as shown in the following list:

Jesuit institutions of Higher Education in Africa and Madagascar

City	Country	INSTITUTION
1. Abidjan	Côte d'ivoire	Institut de Théologie de la Compagnie de Jésus
2. Abidjan	Côte d'ivoire	CERAP
3. Nairobi	Kenya	Hekima College (Jesuit School of Theology & Peace Studies Institute and International Relations)
4. Antananarivo	Madagascar	SAMIS-ESIC (communication) & ETS (fabrication mécanique)
5. Antananarivo	Madagascar	Scolasticat Saint Paul (Juvénat et Philosophat)
6. Bevalala	Madagascar	EPSA de Bevalala
7. Fianarantsoa	Madagascar	Institut Supérieur Technique de Fianarantsoa
8. Kimwenza	R. D. Congo	ISAV, Institut Supérieur Agro-Vétérinaire-
9. Kimwenza	R. D. Congo	Faculté de philosophie St Pierre Canisius
10. Chikuni	Zambia	Charles Lwanga Teachers College
11. Harare	Zimbabwe	School of Social Work
12. Harare, Mount Pleasant	Zimbabwe	Arrupe College

There are also different kinds of Jesuits' commitment in higher education, with the following main patterns: First, we run Church owned institutions, belonging to dioceses or national Episcopal conferences. That is the case with the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Catholic University of West Africa in Cameroon and a Major Seminary in South Soudan. Secondly, we run the 12 higher education institutions of our own.

In a Region big as several times the size of Europe and of its population, the Society of Jesus does not have a single University. Our higher education institutions share the following common characteristics:

1. They are few in number and very young, ranging from two to around ten years. The Faculty of Philosophy St Pierre Canisius in Kimwenza (D.R. Congo), which is over 50 years old, is the eldest. Most of the others are much younger, the youngest being the Peace Studies Institute and International Relations that opened some years ago in Nairobi.

2. They have a weak financial basis, with no endowments or reserves, which make it difficult to recruit poor students.

3. They lack human resources, with only two or three Jesuits, who are usually the Director and his assistant. They have few or no teachers of their own and must rely on visiting lecturers from other universities. Consequently, they suffer economically and educationally in terms of the moral standards to enforce.

4. They have students unable to meet the expenses of their education, which adds to the financial weakness of the institutions.

Nevertheless, our institutions of higher education are much renowned and their standards are high. Meeting the standards of viability set by the Minister of Higher education that we mentioned earlier, our two institutions (ISAV and the Faculty of philosophy) in R.D. Congo held the top of the list.

C. The Challenges of Jesuit Higher Education in Africa and Madagascar

1. High quality education: The first challenge is to achieve; in our institutions, a high quality and effective education of young men and women who will serve their respective countries and the society in an effective intellectual work. This includes improving the educational standards of our institutions, training for citizenship, for professional values and for justice. The present leaders of our countries are former students of our high schools, and still corruption and lack of a real leadership are observed everywhere. This entails the promotion of human values in a context of wide spread focus on the utilitarian and the search for useful human resources rather than the formation of the whole person. It goes also with the setting up of appropriate programs and the formation of teachers who can understand Ignatian spirituality and values and who are able to implement these programs in a context where the crisis of education in general makes this resource rare.

2. Good students: To recruit and select good students is another challenge in a context where many of them are not able to meet the expenses of their education and where the standards of education have fallen low in primary and secondary schools.

Human and financial resources: To commit our Provinces to make available Jesuit personnel and to gather financial resources that are necessary to fund our institutions is a real challenge. On its achievement will rely our ability to offer good education, to recruit good teachers and to facilitate the access of Jesuit institutions for good students coming from the low income and impoverished sectors.

3. Collaboration: To foster and/or develop regional and international collaboration and partnership with other higher education institutions is a challenge in the globalized world as opposed to wars and divisions being observed in our countries. The challenge of collaboration concerns also the Jesuits among themselves as well as between their institutions. Equally challenging is collegiality among the various constituencies of our

institutions: Jesuits and lay faculty, the students community, Jesuit superiors and community. Pooling of staff with specific expertise among Jesuit Universities across the globe is part of this challenge.

Conclusion

Jesuit higher education in Africa and Madagascar is an effort to meet the challenges that we pointed out, taking into account the situation that we described. At one time, it was very strongly felt that we needed to set up a Jesuit University of some kind in this region. But, as the Moderator of the Association of Jesuit Major Superiors (JESAM) put it, we are not ready yet. We are not able at this moment, to continue to entertain the project of beginning a Jesuit University within the Assistancy of Africa and Madagascar. We have instead to sustain and reinforce the institutions we already have, and to work towards coordinating these institutions and their future development within a common JESAM policy. About the dream of a Jesuit University of Africa and Madagascar, let's say, like the Moderator of JESAM, that a tree has been planted which will blossom someday.