



world council of churches

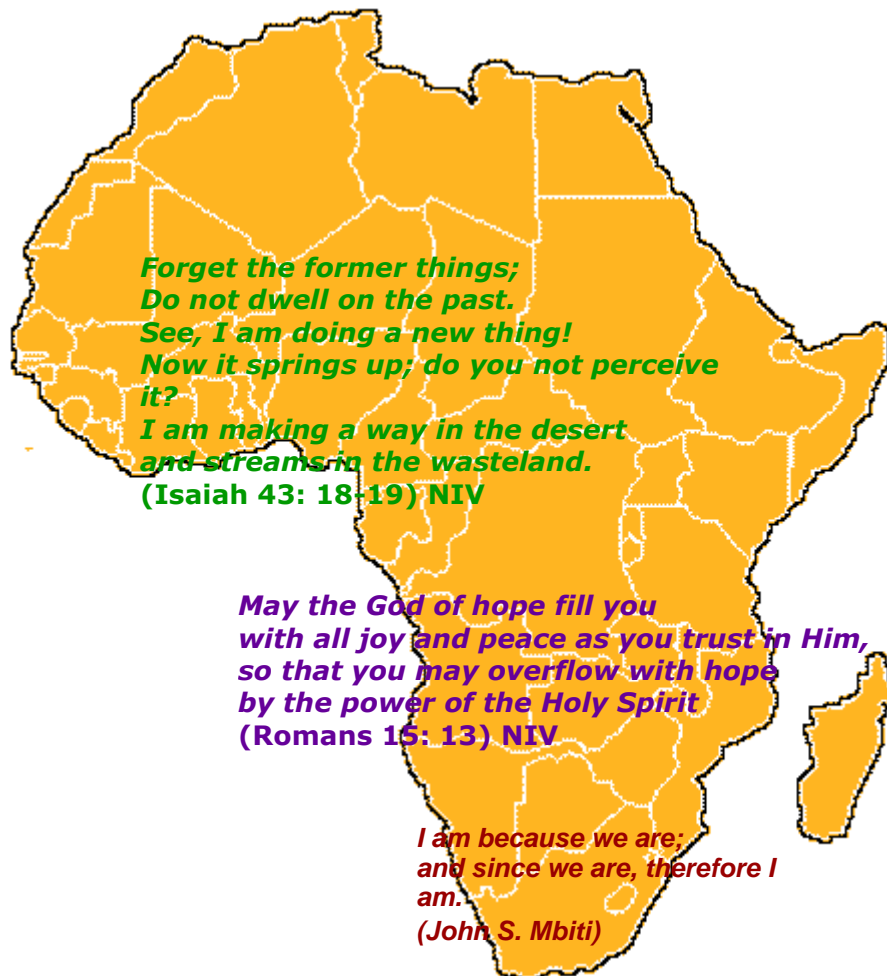


THE JOURNEY OF HOPE IN AFRICA

**CONFERENCE ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION
AND ECUMENICAL FORMATION**

PLAN OF ACTION

17 - 22 September 2002
Kempton Park, Lutheran Conference Centre
Gauteng Province
South Africa



PREAMBLE

Today, we are at the threshold of a new Africa. As a People of God, we recognize and acknowledge with deep gratitude that God has blessed Africa with rich human, cultural and natural resources. God has given us life by placing us in this beautiful continent of Africa and has promised us to experience life in its fullness. We acknowledge that God has given us a spirit of resilience to survive all kinds of dehumanising and death dealing forces—slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, exploitative capitalism, militarism, negative projection in western media and minds as one small country and the icon of all that is bad.

We have realized, however, that we have not been faithful stewards. We collaborate with our exploiters and citizens who devour their countries. Yet, in the face of horrendous and painful experiences on the continent, Africa shows signs of rejuvenation and renewal measured in terms of resilience and search for restoration.

We therefore celebrate and renew our faith in the Trinitarian God of love, grace and hope “in whom our future is safe and our grief is turned into great joy,” and share the vision of the journey of hope for Africa’s liberative reconstruction and sustainable development.

Our faith in the God of life and hope also compels us to share the common vision and pledge of African political leaders in the pressing duty to combat and eradicate poverty and the culture of death and decay as envisioned in the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (hereafter NEPAD) initiative. It is the Christian church’s mission in fulfilling Christ’s promise of meaningful and abundant life for all of Africa’s people that compels us to engage critically with NEPAD in a spirit of mutual responsibility and commitment to Africa’s reconstruction and development.

On this Journey of Hope in Africa, we have come to recognize that the areas of *Theological Education* and *Ecumenical Formation* are so vital. Theological education is one of the key ways in which the needed leadership will be developed to move forward with and fulfill the envisioned task. It is to this end that stakeholders from Africa, Europe and North America have come together to reflect together and critically evaluate theological education and ecumenical formation in Africa and, to formulate together strategies for action.

CONTEXT

This plan of action has therefore come about as a response to the decision taken by the staff in the World Council of Churches (WCC) Education and Ecumenical Formation Programme, Africa Desk and Council-wide Framework on Special Focus on Africa to initiate a critical evaluation of the theological education and ecumenical formation as part of the interactive process to embark on the Journey of Hope of African Churches and people to make a difference on the continent in the 21st century.

This Journey of Hope, which took a crucial step with the Harare Covenant of Africans both from the continent and the Diaspora at the WCC 8th (Jubilee) Assembly held in Harare, Zimbabwe in December 1998, called for “a new vision of life for our people in Africa and for the rest of the world.”

This vision was also an affirmation of the Johannesburg dream expressed by Africans in May 1997 which called for creative unity and solidarity among Africans; the elimination of all dividing walls and structures of enslavement; reconciliation and healing of human brokenness; and responsible management of human and natural resources in the spirit of Pan-Africanism.

This plan is the result of interactive process involving the teaching, training and capacity building instruments of the African Churches which culminated at a conference under the theme: “Journey of Hope in Africa Continued: A Critical Evaluation of Theological Education and Ecumenical Formation.”

WE participants in this conference have been drawn from a wide range of backgrounds consisting of Christian women and men from different churches and denominations, and from countries in Africa, Europe and North America. We also represent a wide range of cultures, languages and ethnic backgrounds. We are leaders, managers, educators, trainers, preachers, researchers, writers, communicators, policy makers and implementers who are leading churches, theological institutions and Theological Education by Extension (TEE) programmes, universities (theological/religious and adult literacy departments); lay training centres, capacity building institutions, libraries, publishing houses, confessional/inter-confessional ecumenical fellowships/conferences, Mission Boards and Christian/interfaith networks and Associations.

Having taken inspiration from the stories of resistance with courage and sacrifice of our forebears, we are empowered by the signs of hope on the continent such as increasing acceptance of democratic governance and the new political will of African leaders to pursue the path of growth and development. Furthermore, our people’s faith in and hunger for God, and the growing awareness of theologians to do a theology that addresses the real needs of our people:

WE are calling upon our organisations to journey with us as we *commit* ourselves to the following programme of action:

COMMITMENTS

CHURCHES AND ECUMENICAL BODIES

As National, Sub-regional, Regional Councils of Churches and Church Leaders,

We commit ourselves to:

- Encouraging Councils of Churches and Institutions to actively support the establishment of The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (<http://www.thecircle-cawt.org/>);
- Encouraging churches to strengthen their lay training centres and TEE Programmes; Seeking ways of eradicating poverty through sustained adult education as a life long process;
- Recognising the need for self-sustained ability and commit ourselves to the need to create a reserve fund for ministerial formation as well as pull our resources together for the common good of the communities;
- Reaffirming the vision of the Special Focus on Africa initiated by the churches in Harare in 1998 at the WCC 8th General Assembly;
- Disseminating NEPAD vision and information to the grassroots; Helping theological institutions to work together in their curricula design so as to prevent duplication and waste of resources;
- Recognising that information is power and, to fostering informed and prophetic churches by establishing and/or maintaining communication desk;
- More effective collaboration between WCC, All Africa Council of Churches (AACC), Sub-Regional Fellowships, National Council of Churches (NCCs) and Theological Institutions to enhance the process of the Journey of Hope.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND MINISTERIAL FORMATION

Constituencies of Theological Education

We commit ourselves to the contextualisation of Theological Education through:

- Mutual commitment by the three (3) constituencies, namely the Church, the Academy and the World;
- Endeavouring to take on board, concerns of our communities such as violence, HIV/AIDS and other killer diseases, gender issues, NEPAD and ecumenism;
- An in-depth analysis of our Theologies rooted in our Christian Faith, based on integrity and creativity;
- Addressing concerns of people with disabilities (who are physically challenged), such as incorporating sign languages subjects in our Theological curriculum;
- Constant dialogue between Church and Theological Institutions.

Methodologies

We commit ourselves to:

- Training students to respond to problems inductively and deductively, especially those problems of special concern to our specific communities and inculcate the spirit of mutual respect;
- Equipping our students with capacity to apply knowledge taught in their contexts i.e. Theological praxis and reflection, a transformation from being reservoirs of knowledge to becoming agents of change;
- Encouraging interactive dialogue and group work within the classroom process, incorporating traditional critical methods as applicable to our contexts using inclusive language in our teaching and

learning.

Accreditation and Standards

We commit ourselves to:

- Acknowledging that the issue of accreditation and academic standards is about equivalency; mutual recognition and harmonization of different programmes particularly distance education;
- Acknowledging the already existing relationships of accreditation and standardization between universities and theological institutions. We will seek ways of strengthening such links and encourage that every programme be accredited including distance education programme;
- Supporting and encouraging the networking of all TEE institutions in Africa in their efforts to sharing materials and standardizing their qualifications;
- Promoting the involvement of women theologians in the writing of TEE materials so that they act as role models for the empowerment of female students of TEE.

Ecumenism and Theological Education

We commit ourselves to ecumenical formation through exposure as well as curriculum transformation, ecumenism and dialogue between faiths.

Staffing

We commit ourselves to:

- Supporting the development of African staff “in case of South Africa, blacks”;
- Affirming a solid professional training of librarians and publishers.

Literature Development, Libraries and Training of Librarians

We commit ourselves to:

- The development of literature by African writers (both men and women)—books, journals and texts;
- Developing libraries as major resource units equipped with adequate components, especially Information Technology (IT);
- Establishing websites for our libraries including lists of publishing houses, texts, journals and to promote cluster sharing of library resources;
- Developing a website for African Theological Institutions that links existing individual websites where we will post:
 - °A list of all theological institutions in Africa,
 - °a list of all African Theological Publishing Houses,
 - °a bibliography of all books, articles, journals, theses, etc. published by Africans.

Fundraising/Sustainability/Viability

We commit ourselves to:>

- Embarking on income generating projects such as, poultry, fisheries, agriculture and any other related projects, to provide supplementary support for theological education;
- Encouraging the churches to increase their funding for theological education and ministerial formation.

Gender

We commit ourselves to revisiting the selective use of biblical texts, cultural traditions and theologies

that continue to be used to perpetrate and reinforce patriarchy in all its forms.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION/DISTANCE LEARNING

During the conference representatives of eight TEE programmes met several times to compare experiences and needs, and they discovered a common commitment to act on the following commitments, which they shared with the other participants. The potential impact of these proposals is evidenced by the fact that these eight programmes enrol a total of 18,000 students; it is estimated that there are 341 TEE programmes in Africa now.

Coordination and Exchange

We commit ourselves to:

- Circulating information about the TEE programme, study materials, tutor training, etc. The Eastern Africa TEE Association has a database, which can facilitate contacts with many TEE programmes. We recommend that this be expanded to the rest of Africa;
- Initiating a web page for TEE in Africa to be designed and maintained by TEE College, Southern Africa. The TEE participants in this conference further committed themselves to meeting the initial cost of designing the web page. This web page would be an important channel for the circulation of information.

Strengthening and Accreditation

We commit ourselves to:

- Exploring the possibility of establishing organic links with theological colleges and universities, if they have not already done so, in order to gain access to academic resources and to offer recognized certificates and diplomas;
- Recognising the need to sensitise churches and residential theological institutions on how they could integrate TEE into their residential programmes. This could be done through a series of workshops. We further request the Eastern African TEE Association to look into the logistics of implementation;
- Carrying out workshops for training managers, tutors and facilitators of TEE programmes in area of adult and distance learning methods. We request the collaboration of Eastern African TEE Association in this venture;
- Maintaining the integrity of all levels of study necessary for their constituencies and resist the tendency of valuing one level more than another, because all are important for the contextualization of the Gospel, theology, and ministry;
- Urging the WCC to consider giving scholarship for specialised training for TEE managers. This could be done through the University of South Africa (UNISA) and any other institution offering courses in the area of distance learning in Africa;
- Encouraging TEE programmes throughout the region to review their vision in terms of the struggle for fullness of life for all God's people, because of their potential for personal, ecclesial, and social transformation;
- Sensitising people through training on overcoming violence, HIV/AIDS, ecology, poverty, the role of women in church and society, primary health care and community development in addition to creating awareness in economic justice, gender and race/ethnicity in our TEE programmes taking into account the literate and non-literate members of our society;
- Exploring ways in which we can accompany Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa with similar experience, in reviving their TEE programmes. We request Education and Ecumenical Formation/WCC to support us in this venture.

LAY TRAINING CENTRES AND OTHER CAPACITY BUILDING INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA

We commit ourselves to:

1. Education and Capacity Building — by integrating education and training programmes that use

critical and transformative methodologies for all the people of God through reviewing our curricula and using Information Technology;
 2. Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) — by seriously promoting the DOV with a particular concern for gender justice, youth empowerment and eradicating unemployment;
 Focus on Africa and NEPAD — by engaging the visions of the Special Focus on Africa and NEPAD in our Journey of Hope;
 Stewardship and Sustainability — by promoting good stewardship of our resources and sustainability of our institutions and programmes;
 The Fight Against HIV/AIDS — by fully utilising our Lay Centres in the struggles against HIV/AIDS, focusing on the stigma and discrimination, gender, youth and poverty;
 Ecumenism — by reviving and promoting ecumenism;
 Gender and Youth — by empowering the youth, women and men to address gender inequality and discrimination.

PUBLISHING HOUSES

We commit ourselves to:

- Promoting cooperation between publishers and institutions represented here in the domain of publishing academic books. In that regard, to extend to anglophone and lusophone institutions, the initiative of Editions CLE with the French speaking;
 Publishing a minimum of three (3) books annually for academic purposes based on the African context;
- Encouraging scholars and experts from the various disciplines to work together or as individuals, from now onwards, to submit manuscripts by march 2003;
- Submitting texts translated in English, Portuguese, French and other African languages;
- Promoting the use of books published in Africa in teaching institutions;
- Resolving, as a matter of policy, that when a fund is given by an ecumenical organisation to publish a book, it is generally considered an indirect subsidy for the survival of our Christian publishing houses that have limited resources. But if the donor organisation needs to distribute copies of the book to its constituency free of charge, a half of the print run should be given to them. The funding organisation should cover the transport fees. Besides, as regards royalty, when the author has been paid a fixed amount for the research allocation, there should be an agreement between the three parties (authors, publishers and the donor organisation) as to whom the royalty should be paid.

RESPONSE FROM THE ECUMENICAL PARTNERS

It has been a great privilege for us, the ecumenical partners, to share your reflections on formulating strategies for action on the journey of hope in Africa. Each of us has learned a great deal from our time here, and we express our deep appreciation for the invitation to be in your midst. At the same time we would have liked greater clarity from the WCC regarding its expectations of each of us as partners, particularly in light of the conference's intention "[to] invite the world-wide ecumenical family to accompany us on our journey of hope for a better and meaningful life for the people of Africa."

Those of us who are members of the WCC made the commitment to the special focus on Africa at the general assembly in Harare, and our presence here is an expression of that commitment. Each of us, as theological educators and as representatives of churches and mission organizations, commit to continue the conversation by telling your story to each of our constituencies. When the action plan has been completed and distributed, we will receive it through the established channels, and actively seek ways to continue and increase our support of the journey of hope in Africa.

Our churches and organizations remain strongly committed to ecumenical partnerships. At the same time, many of our denominations find themselves facing serious internal tensions. We have heard you describe one of these tensions in your own contexts: the increasing emphasis on denominational or church-centered action rather than on ecumenical partnerships. Another tension is that, while our ecumenical policies have not changed, the reality on the ground is very complex. Congregations and schools in many denominations no longer engage in international mission and education through the national offices. Instead they make direct connections between churches or schools, often without notifying or involving the national offices. The locus of mission activity is shifting to local congregations, and denominations are finding themselves no longer gatekeepers for resources. While

national mission offices are developing ways to harness this new enthusiasm, this trend will continue to challenge us in our response to ecumenical partnerships.

Our accompaniment on the journey of hope in Africa is intentional, strong, and heartfelt, and will remain a significant part of our on-going work. We thank you again for inviting us to be among you, and for your warm expressions of Christian love and fellowship.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Who?

- Leaders, managers, educators, trainers, preachers, researchers, writers, communicators, policy makers and implementers who are leading churches, theological institutions and tee programmes, universities (theological/religious and adult literacy departments); lay training centres, capacity building institutions, libraries, publishing houses, confessional/inter-confessional ecumenical fellowships/conferences, mission boards and Christian/interfaith networks and associations.

How?

- Through human resource development, workshops, seminars and scholarships,
- producing contextual training materials,
- networking and partnerships,
- library development,
- living a non-violent lifestyle and promoting dialogue with and between all stakeholders,
- promote innovative fundraising,
- research, writing, publication.

Time frames

- this will be an ongoing process,
- we urge the Education and Ecumenical Formation Programme to monitor the process of change and share their findings with all the stakeholders through Ministerial Formation and Education and Ecumenical Formation Net,
- we request the Education and Ecumenical Formation Programme to offer the challenges to the churches through reports to the WCC central committee,
- in the next five years we want to see fruits of our labour.

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