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Rapid Growth and Expanding Education Opportunities to Reach the World

Between 2015 and 2020, the East-Central African Division of Seventh-day Adventists (ECD) experienced phenomenal growth in membership because of major Total Member Involvement (TMI) evangelistic campaigns. This significant and unprecedented thrust was responsible for the baptisms of more than one million new members. The current church membership in the division is more than 4.4 million, making ECD the largest division in the Adventist world church.

The ECD territory encompasses 11 countries: Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, United Republic of Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo). The entire region of East-Central Africa has a population of more than 400 million.

The ECD runs the largest network of Adventist schools in the global church. The division has approximately 2,586 schools and 640,000 students. Between 2010 and 2020, the division sought to increase the number of Adventist colleges and universities from seven to 14.

During this past quinquennium, the rallying call in the division was: “Mission Priority. It Is Harvest Time.” And the theme for the ECD Department of Education has been: “Every Adventist teacher an evangelist; and every Adventist school, a house of God and the gate of heaven.” A lot of energy and focus has gone into in-reach and outreach evangelism in all Adventist schools in the spirit of TMI. This initiative has brought teachers and students on board in evangelism and mission endeavors. These efforts led to the baptism of about 150,000 new members. These new converts are non-Ad-

ventist students and some members of the neighboring school communities who have received the Adventist message through student-driven outreach evangelism.

The 2015-2020 quinquennium highlights and accomplishments are as follows:

2016 Education Advisory. The quinquennium started with an advisory in early 2016 attended by all stakeholders, especially representatives of the Adventist universities in ECD and union directors of education, to chart plans and education work in the new quinquennium. Under the guidance and leadership of Mike Lekic, associate director of education at the General Conference and ECD liaison, the advisory set the pace for the quinquennium.

Development of new education institutions. During this past quinquennium, ECD built and established approximately 500 new Adventist primary and secondary schools, including three new tertiary institutions, three proposed universities, and one constituent institution. The new institutions are all in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Adventist University of Goma (AUGO) in Goma; Philip Lemon University (PLU) in Lubumbashi; and Adventist University of Congo (AUCO) in Kinshasa. There are also three proposed institutions of higher education: Burundi Adventist University (BAU) in Bujumbura, Burundi; Adventist University of South Sudan (AUSS) in Juba, South Sudan; Kamagambo Adventist University of Technology in Migori, Kenya; and a proposed constituent College of the University of Arusha in Dar Es Salaam in Southern Tanzania.¹

Inauguration of Adventist School of Medicine (ASOME) at Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) in Kigali, Rwanda. This is a US\$25 million

project that will train and prepare medical doctors and evangelists in ECD, other parts of Africa, and many other countries. The graduates will extend the healing ministry of Jesus Christ across the division and worldwide.

Launching of Adventist teacher-certification program by Adventist University of Africa (AUA). Many of our Adventist teachers in ECD did not attend Adventist schools. For this reason, ECD provides training about the Adventist philosophy of education and ethos to improve Adventist identity among teachers and students in our schools. In 2017, more than 30 Adventist teachers from West Kenya Union Conference (WKUC) graduated from this program. And in 2019, another 60 Adventist teachers working in Ethiopia Union Mission graduated from this program in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Organization of regular and yearly ECD higher education consultation meetings. Between 2015 and 2020, consultation meetings were held at various universities in ECD. These meetings were well attended and very useful for facilitating training, collaboration, and cooperation among all the institutions of higher learning in ECD.

2018 ECD Faith and Science Teachers Conference. The more-than-800 Adventist teachers who attended this 10-day conference received training in issues of faith and science that will enable them to share the information with their learners and local churches. Participants were also involved as organizers and speakers

for the 2019 Creation Sabbath across the division.

Student enrollment campaigns. The goal for the 2015-2020 quinquennium was to increase ECD's Adventist school enrollment by 39 percent to a total of one million students. During that time, we increased our enrollment by 25 percent to about 640,000.

Adventist textbook project. With the support of SAFELIZ Publishing House for this project, Adventist textbooks for teaching Christian Religious Education (CRE) in East Africa were developed for primary and secondary schools (K-12). Inaugurated in Kenya in 2017, these books follow and incorporate the government curriculum and Adventist philosophy of education. Plans are in place to develop Adventist textbooks for science and other subjects.

ECD human-resource development. The division has provided more than 500 bursaries worth US\$1.7 million to support the development of leaders, church workers, and teachers. Many recipients are already serving at various levels of the church, including administration. This number includes more than 200 graduates sponsored for a Master's degree in theology and leadership at the Adventist University of Africa (AUA) in Nairobi, Kenya.

Challenges and Opportunities for Adventist Education in ECD. Adventist schools in ECD continue to face financial challenges; many are poorly funded and lack financial investments to support school infrastruc-



East-Central Africa Division President Blasious Ruguri (front row, fourth from right in gray suit) and General Conference Associate Director of Education Mike Lekic (back row, center) at higher education consultation meeting with the union, college, and university leaders of the ECD. Photo courtesy of the ECD Education Department.

ture. This has created a challenge for our schools, many of which face stiff competition from well-funded government schools that offer free universal education. There is also some lack of awareness and a failure to promote Adventist education among the newly baptized Adventist members. The lack of well-trained teachers in Adventist schools, along with misplaced priorities and competing interests, have fostered a culture of dependency on financial assistance from outside and disengagement within Adventist education.

Yet, amidst the challenges, we are excited to identify strengths and opportunities. The East-Central Africa Division is strong and rapidly growing and expanding. The church in ECD is young, vibrant, and 4.4 million strong. An unprecedented focus on evangelism has bolstered not only church membership but also enrollment in our schools. There is, however, a need to create some awareness and active promotion of Adventist education at all levels, elementary through tertiary. Emerging economies and increased prosperity within the region have enabled more members to pay for Adventist education. And enrollment in Adventist schools that have a good reputation and perform well in government exams continues to increase.

There are also many opportunities for continued

growth and expansion. Seventy percent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa is less than 25 years of age,² and many of these families and young people are looking for quality Christian education. In addition, Adventist members who are doing well economically and can afford value-based education are looking for an education that promotes character development and strong academic values—a reputation many of our schools hold. Adventist schools in the ECD have also become strong centers of evangelism. These factors are opportunities that will enable Adventist education in the ECD to continue to grow.

Plans for the Current Quinquennium (2020-2025).

Goals for the current quinquennium include the following:

1. Aggressive promotion of Adventist education and recruitment of new students to reach a total of one million students by 2025;
2. Construction of new tertiary institutions in every union;
3. Establishment of a pre-elementary or kindergarten program in each church district and model elementary and secondary schools in each station and local conference;



Eight hundred teachers and administrators attended the Faith and Science Teachers Conference organized by the East-Central Africa Division and international partners at Gahogo Adventist Academy in Muhanga, Rwanda, in December 2018. Photo courtesy of the ECD Education Department.

4. Establishment of a fund to support Adventist education by each level of the church organization, especially local conferences and unions;

5. Provision by each church of not only verbal encouragement but also much-needed financial support and sponsorship to students, especially those from impoverished backgrounds, to enroll in Adventist schools;

6. Education-week campaigns conducted by each local conference and church district to promote Adventist education and encourage members to enroll their children in church-operated schools;

11. Encouraging regular seminars and workshops for teachers on the integration of faith and learning;

12. Reaching out to the families of Djibouti to provide them with Adventist education. This includes the construction of the first Adventist school in this country, which has a very minimal Adventist presence.³ The proposed school will be called Djibouti International Primary School, and we are sourcing construction funds from potential donors.

East-Central Africa Division will continue developing and strengthening Adventist education throughout our region of the world church. With growing economies and an increasingly young population, opportunities to reach the world in ECD are limitless. With prayer and planning, we will continue to provide educational opportunities for children, young adults, and all who wish to learn more about living in this world while preparing for eternity. This will continue to be our commitment and focus in the current quinquennium. ✍️

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Students at the Tanzania Adventist Secondary School in Arusha, Tanzania.
Photo courtesy of the ECD Education Department.

7. Production of high-quality, regular TV and radio programs by each union and conference to promote and advocate for Adventist education and to encourage Seventh-day Adventist families to send their children and youth to our schools;

8. Investment by each union and conference in the training of local church education secretaries, as well as the development of a database of potential Adventist students in every local church;

9. Development of Seventh-day Adventist textbooks;

10. Ensuring that at least 70 percent of teachers are Seventh-day Adventists and denominationally trained and certified;

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The existing seven Adventist universities in ECD are government-chartered and institutions accredited by the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities, namely: Adventist University of Africa (AUA) in Kenya; University of Eastern Africa, Baraton (UEAB) in Kenya; Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) in Rwanda; University of Arusha (UoA) in Tanzania; Adventist University of Lukanga (UNILUK) in Democratic Republic of the Congo; Ethiopia Adventist College (EAC) in Ethiopia; and Bugema University (BU) in Uganda.

2. Brookings Institute, “Africa’s Changing Demographics” (2019): <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2019/01/18/charts-of-the-week-africas-changing-demographics/>.

3. It is estimated that 99 percent of the citizens of Djibouti are Muslims. The country currently hosts many refugees from Yemen and Somalia who could access the Adventist education and message.