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# A critical engagement with theological education in Africa

*A South African perspective*



Edited by

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# Excellence and renewal of theological education in Africa: The case of ACTEA

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## ■ Abstract

This chapter describes the contributions of the ACTEA to the advancement of quality theological education in Africa. ACTEA is a project of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) and a founding member of The International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), a global partner within the World Evangelical Alliance.<sup>7</sup> ACTEA, a trusted continent-wide theological

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7. The International Council for Evangelical Theological Education's (ICETE) core members are the eight regional accrediting associations (Africa: ACTEA; Asia: Asia Theological Association (ATA); Caribbean: Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association (CETA); Europe: European Council for Theological Education (ECTE); Eurasia: Euro-Asian Accrediting Association (E-AAA); Latin America: Association for Evangelical Theological Education in Latin America (AETAL); Middle East and North Africa: Middle East-North Africa Association for Theological Education (MENATE); North America: Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE).

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association, functions in various roles highlighted below. A short history of ACTEA begins the chapter and gives prominence to the roles played by Dr. Byang Kato, the first African General Secretary of the AEA. Examination of the threefold work of ACTEA, that is, accreditation, networking and support services, follows. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the current challenges and opportunities for theological education in Africa and ACTEA's strategy to ensure the flourishing of theological institutions.

## ■ Introduction

Professor Andrew Walls observes that 'it is Africans and Asians and Latin Americans who will be the representative Christians, those who represent the Christian norm, the Christian mainstream, of the 21st and 22nd centuries' (Walls 2001:47). If Walls' sentiments are true, and evidence shows that they are, then the African church needs to worry about the quality of the Christian faith in Africa. Two dimensions of Andrew Wall's sentiments may be deduced. The first is African theology. The heartlands of Christianity have shifted to Africa, Latin America and some parts of Asia. Consequently, non-Western theologies are or at least should be the predominant theology in the world. Non-Western theologies, African theology included, should set the pace for world Christianity. Consequently, we need to worry about the quality of African theology. It is Africa's theological institutions that set the pace for quality African theology. The second is the church's public witness. What is the quality of the church's public witness in Africa? It is Africa's theological institutions that set the pace for quality African churches. Theological education is a key player in the quality of the African church as well as the health and wellbeing of the African society.

Quality matters if the church in Africa is to 'represent the Christian norm, the Christian mainstream, of the 21st and 22nd centuries' as Walls mentioned above. Unfortunately, the African church has not represented the Christian faith well. How can it do that when the majority of pastors are insufficiently trained? How can it do that when the church does not know how to address contextual challenges like nominalism, syncretism, corruption and compromise of the biblical faith? But is the problem with the church or theological institutions? What kind of graduates are Africa's theological institutions sending to the church? Are they sufficiently trained to meet the challenges facing African society?

Although this chapter does not address these pertinent questions, it explores the roles played by ACTEA, a quality assurance agency in ensuring quality theological education in Africa to help build a healthier church able to represent the Christian faith to the world in the 21st century. The next section provides a brief history of ACTEA.

## ■ A brief history of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa

Association of Evangelicals in Africa established ACTEA in 1976 as a project of its Theological Education Commission under the impetus of the General Secretary from Nigeria, Dr. Byang Kato. Kato assumed his role with a grand vision for theological education and the renewal of the church in Africa. He believed that rigorous evangelical theological education would most incontrovertibly cure African Christianity's 'theological anemia', which he understood as the compromise of evangelical faith in the face of 'syncretism, universalism, and Christo-paganism' (Kato 1985:11). Kato envisaged for the church in Africa: (1) the establishment of an accrediting agency for theological institutions; (2) the establishment of graduate-level theological institutions, one to serve the Francophone region and another to serve the Anglophone region; (3) publications by evangelical African scholars; and (4) an establishment of an African academic journal akin to *Christianity Today* (Kato 1974:6-7).

Unfortunately, Kato did not live long enough to see his vision fulfilled. He died tragically in a drowning accident in 1975 at the age of 39 years. The crucial loss of Kato compelled the AEA Executive Committee to convene on 15-19 March 1976. Paul Bowers (2016), who had served with ACTEA since its formation, noted that the initial decision of this strategic meeting included:

[E]stablishment of an accrediting service for evangelical theological schools in Africa, appointment of a Council to direct this new initiative, designation of a coordinator to implement the project, and placement of the whole under the oversight of the AEA Theological Commission. (n.p.)

Thus, in fulfilment of Kato's vision, ACTEA became the first AEA project. The following year of 1977 saw the formation of Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de Bangui (FATEB) located in the Central Africa Republic, offering graduate-level theological programmes in the French language. In 1981, Christian Learning Materials Centre was established in Nairobi to produce African Christian education materials especially for children. The Anglophone region gained its graduate-level theological institution in 1983 with the establishment of Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, which is now named Africa International University. The *Africa Journal for Evangelical Theology* produced by Scott Christian University (formerly Scott Theological College in Kenya), one of ACTEA's first institutions, fulfils Kato's vision of seeing more publications by African scholars.

All of these AEA projects and many other AEA initiatives have preserved Kato's memory (Bowers 2009:4). Noll and Nystrom (2011) extended this tribute to Byang Kato and his enduring legacy:

Death at the age of thirty-nine could have meant a premature end to Kato's vision. Yet the strength of his personality, the breadth of his influence, the intensity of his learning, the passion of his faith, the resources of his networking and the persistence of his many friends sustained the vision he inspired. The four goals that he outlined in a dusty construction site in Jos, Nigeria, continued with hundreds of hands and minds and donations (both Western and African) to make it happen. Today evangelical theological higher education is alive and well in Africa. [...] The legacy of Byang Kato continues to expand. (p. 94)

Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) has overcome nearly insurmountable odds to fulfil its vision of enriching and renewing theological education in Africa. Bowers (2016) described the conditions that could have hampered the progress of the initial ACTEA office:

When ACTEA was launched in 1976 there were no personal computers, no printers, no photocopiers, no fax, no email, no web, no mobile phones, no text-messaging. All documents were typed by hand on manual typewriters. [...] All documents were reproduced by mimeograph. (p. 14)

In our contemporary world, technology has facilitated immediate communication. Yet the ACTEA office still serves Sub-Saharan Africa with limited resources, staff and facilities, surely a testimony of God's grace. Furthermore, God's providence established ACTEA in a permanent office in Nairobi in 2014 with an official registration as a non-profit society. ACTEA recently purchased office space at the newly constructed and impressively designed AEA Plaza in the Upper Hill section of Nairobi. From here, ACTEA will continue to serve Africa's theological institutions with its recognised and appreciated services.

## ■ Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa as a 'full-service petrol station'

Paul Bowers uses the analogy of a 'full-service petrol station' to capture the current work of ACTEA. He asserts that ACTEA is not an antiquated one-service station but a contemporary full-service station that provides a wide range of services to its clientele. He writes (Bowers 2015):

When ACTEA was founded almost 40 years ago, it was founded initially, so to speak, with a single pump - but with the definite intention to develop ways to provide that fuel as part of a full-service station for evangelical theological education in Africa. Not because that is a good marketing strategy. It is. But the intention was guided by a much deeper motive, namely that the needs of its constituency were for much more than just accreditation. Academic validation and recognition, or accreditation, was definitely felt as a vital urgent need right across the continent at that time. So ACTEA was birthed to meet a clearly felt need. But to serve its intended community well, ACTEA needed to attempt as best it could to embed an effective accreditation service within a broader range of practical community services, in order to sustain

and to bond its community together with identity and voice and commitment, to facilitate body-life amongst the growing number of these institutions across the continent, so crucial to the effective grounding and maturation of the rapidly growing Christian communities across Africa. (pp. 1-2)

Thus, from its formation, ACTEA intended to extend its services beyond the validation of academic programmes. Not only did ACTEA serve as a validating agency but also as a forum for sharing ideas, a connector of resources and an avenue for capacity-building of theological institutions in Africa. Writing about the key contribution of ACTEA to the flourishing of Africa's theological institutions, Tiéno (1990) noted:

I myself see the greatest strength of ACTEA in the fact that it can be a catalyst for cooperation and excellence in theological education in our continent. If there is one word that summarises for me what the future of ACTEA is, it is the word cooperation among all of us for assuring excellence in theological education in our continent. [...] In brief, in my estimation ACTEA's major contribution is to provide a framework for continental networking and collaboration among us as evangelical theological educators. (pp. 2-3)

Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa has had to change its name in line with this comprehensive mandate. The original name ACTEA, not comprehensive enough to capture the full services that ACTEA offered Africa's theological institutions, was updated in 2014. The mission statement of ACTEA also required recasting, 'to strengthen member institutions in offering quality theological programmes through accreditation, networking, and support services'. Although ACTEA is known historically for accreditation, ACTEA provides a range of holistic support services for theological institutions in Africa. The three comprehensive ministrations that ACTEA performs are examined below.

## ■ Accreditation

Accreditation ensures accountability and improvement of theological institutions (Ott 2017:191). It is through accreditation that institutions measure up to accepted standards of quality. The credentials earned from accredited programmes allow students to transfer credits or to do advanced level study, both within Africa and within the international educational community, given that ACTEA's standards are in line with ICETE's standards. ACTEA accreditation has allowed students to study in places like South Africa, India, Australia, Europe, the United States and Canada. In other words, ACTEA's recognition or accreditation is not simply an affirmation of quality. Because of ACTEA being a part of ICETE, it is an international recognition that allows the international network to acknowledge that quality. *The ACTEA Standards and Guide to Self-Evaluation* notes the following about accreditation (ACTEA 2011):

Accreditation is a process with at least two basic functions. (1) The accreditation process is designed to enable an educational institution to come to a clear analysis

of itself in relation to commonly accepted standards of quality, and in that light to plan and execute for itself an orderly programme of improvement. (2) The accreditation process is also designed to enable such an institution to demonstrate its achievements in relation to commonly accepted standards of quality in such a way that the soundness of its operation can be recognised and appreciated externally and its credibility thus secured within the wider community. (p. 3)

Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa facilitates academic recognition of theological programmes at three levels: post-secondary diploma, post-secondary degree (bachelors), postgraduate (masters) and doctoral (academic or professional). Thus, ACTEA offers programmatic accreditation instead of institutional accreditation. The accreditation is offered in three stages. The first stage is the Affiliate Status wherein an interested institution applies to become an affiliate member with ACTEA with the approval of the institution's governing council. The Affiliate Status is granted when an institution can meet three core academic standards relating to admissions, teaching staff qualifications and length of programme, that is, graduation requirements. The second stage is candidate status. It is granted once an institution shows that it is capable of meeting five core ACTEA standards within a 4-year period. The standards encompass:

1. *Administration* - including governance of the institution, compilation of student outcome-based institutional objectives and mission statement, institutional stability with respect to personnel and finances, organisational review policies and practices;
2. *Teaching staff* - including academic, professional and character qualifications of faculty, Africanisation and faculty welfare policies;
3. *Facilities* - including suitability of site, well-managed library with sufficient contemporary resources, adequacy of office equipment and furnishings;
4. *Educational programmes* - including quality curriculum that is contextual, balanced and relevant, recognised admission standards and globally accepted graduation requirements and length of programme;
5. *Students* - including quality of community life, spiritual formation activities, student policies and services and regular assessment of student fees.

During candidacy status, institutions engage in a rigorous self-evaluation process and submit a self-evaluation report (SER) in accordance with the stipulated guidelines of the *ACTEA Standards and Guide to Self-Evaluation*. The third stage culminates in Accredited Status, which is granted after review of the institution's SER and confirmation by the ACTEA visitation team and an anonymous review panel of theologians, familiar with ACTEA Standards, that the institution and its programmes comply with accreditation standards. The period of accreditation lasts 8-10 years. In response to current trends in the educational sector of Africa, ACTEA also offers accreditation to institutions that hold some other form of academic recognition such as a government charter. ACTEA's accreditation validates the evangelical ethos of such

institutions, which might be necessary for their constituency. This Associate Status accreditation with ACTEA modifies the review process of submission of an application, SER and hosting a visitation team. ACTEA also offers non-accreditation services to institutions that are not yet ready for the formal process of accreditation under Correspondent Status.

## ■ Networking

Whilst the challenges facing theological education in Africa and around the world are at times great, these challenges can be overcome or at least reduced through networking, mutual exchange and pooling of resources. It is through networking that scholars, institutions and Christian networks can share ideas for mutual benefits. Networks open doors for research, writing, publishing, the latest trends in a particular field, fundraising opportunities and many other dividends. The *ICETE Manifesto* reinforces the place of collaboration in theological education (ICETE 2002):

Our programmes of theological education must pursue contact and collaboration among themselves for mutual support, encouragement, edification and cross-fertilisation. We are at fault that so often in evangelical theological education we attend merely to our own assignments under God. Others in the same calling need us, and we need them. The biblical notion of mutuality needs to be much more visibly expressed and pragmatically pursued among our theological programmes. Too long we have acquiesced in an isolation of effort that denies the larger body of Christ, thus failing both ourselves and Christ's body. The times in which we serve, no less than biblical expectations, demand of each of us active ongoing initiatives in cooperation. This we must accomplish, by God's grace. (n.p.)

Consequently, networking has compelled ACTEA's promotion of continental and inter-continental partnerships. ACTEA facilitates the networking of theological institutions for sharing vital resources, networks and programmes so as to strengthen the capacity, vision and mission of theological institutions. ACTEA encourages theological educators, faculty members and students from different African institutions to collaborate in theological endeavours and invites member institutions to participate in the triennial global ICETE consultations. ACTEA also shares pertinent information that enriches and builds institutions whenever it becomes available.

## ■ Support services

Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa provides manifold supporting services to enrich Africa's evangelical theological institutions. ACTEA offers periodic news, information and resources through various avenues, such as the *ACTEA Bulletin* distributed in print for many years but now offered electronically as *ACTEA eNews*. The ACTEA Tools and Resources and ACTEA Forum sections of the ACTEA website make accessible archives of still useful resources that have benefited institutions formerly. A visit to the

ACTEA website reveals that past editions of the eNews are readily available under the News/Notices section, as well as an ACTEA Directory of Theological Schools in Africa, and ACTEA Tools & Studies, ACTEA Lectureships, ACTEA TEE Services, ACTEA Islamics Network, ACTEA Librarians Fellowship and ACTEA Continental Consultations. Whilst some of these programmes were discontinued because of unsustainable costs, nonetheless, ACTEA continues to offer diverse capacity-building programmes in partnership with like-minded organisations, enumerated below:

- Global Associates for Transformational Education (GATE). GATE, administered by ACTEA throughout Africa, is an innovative programme designed by world renowned theological educators to cultivate truly transformative theological education.
- ICETE Programme for Academic Leadership (IPAL). This programme trains, resources and facilitates the networking and collaboration of academic administrative leaders, such as academic deans and presidents (principals) of theological colleges, who lack formal training for their current administrative roles and responsibilities. The first year of the three-year IPAL programme examines the person and roles of an academic dean; the second year focuses on the role of academic leadership in curriculum development and the final year focuses on the role of academic leadership in the development of a teaching team. The excellent work of Fritz Deininger, a key IPAL curriculum developer, distinguishes the significant roles of the president and deans to advance the renewal and excellence of theological institutions (Deininger 2017:129-148).
- Overseas Council's Institute for Excellence (OCI) held annually in rotating regions of Africa. OCI and ACTEA recruit theological educators and administrators to address pertinent topics in Africa, including 'Extending Online Theological Education throughout Southern and Eastern Africa' and 'Training for Effective Ministry in Africa through Contextual Research', amongst others.
- White Horse Inn's Global Theological Initiative (GTI). GTI brings together African theologians and scholars, holders of doctoral degrees or candidates, for a three-day conference on foundational theological issues. Hence, the forum is an excellent opportunity for renewal, networking and development.
- Vital sustainability initiative (VSI). ACTEA's strategic planning to develop institutional capacity and sustainability in Africa's theological institutions has merged fruitfully with the VSI project of ScholarLeaders International. Through VSI, ScholarLeaders empower theological institutions in the Majority World to clarify their vision and mission to create strategic plans for sustainability and to develop administrative competencies.

The above partnership arrangements exemplify the support services that ACTEA offers its member institutions. ACTEA actively searches for further collaborative endeavours and partnerships to enrich, resource and enhance

quality theological education in Africa. Moreover, ACTEA has helped to create and encourage networking amongst theological institutions within Africa. This has happened through various channels like joint workshops, collaboration between theological institutions in helping each other with quality assurance needs, sharing of faculty members and librarian's networks.

## ■ **The shape of theological education in Africa and opportunities for Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa**

Historically, Africa was a continent receiving the gospel and its movements. Missionaries came to the continent to plant churches and later to establish Bible training schools and theological institutions. Presently, the gospel is rooted in Africa. Even though expatriate missionaries still come to Africa, Africa also sends indigenous missionaries. It is not uncommon, for instance, for a Nigerian pastor, locally trained at a Bible school, to plant churches on a different continent. The accelerated growth of the African church demands trained Christian workers such as pastors. Africa's churches need equipped pastors to help nourish, encourage, build and direct the church in the midst of overwhelming contemporary challenges, such as ethno-political conflict, poverty, health issues like Ebola and COVID-19, ethno-religious violence and property destruction, corruption in every sector of society, neglected infrastructure of society, falling educational standards and many others. That Christian workers are mostly trained and nurtured in theological institutions amplifies the urgent call for theological education in Africa.

Consequently, Africa needs more theological institutions, not fewer. But these institutions need to be of excellence. Trusted accrediting agencies like ACTEA are positioned to empower theological institutions in their quest for quality. Quality theological education is a multifaceted endeavour. Hardy (2017), a seasoned educational consultant and ACTEA advisor, explicated 11 key factors that contribute to quality theological training:

- (1) clarity of purpose, (2) a leadership team that understands leadership, (3) a coherent and comprehensive strategic plan, (4) responsiveness to the context, (5) the right students, (6) quality teachers, (7) solid administrative support, (8) adequate facilities, (9) structured input by owners, (10) stability and (11) commitment to reflection and change. (pp. 83-84)

Every institution embarks on the journey of excellence to manifest truly these factors in their institutions.

The insistence upon excellence in theological education is crucial because of an influx of institutions that have little to no interest in quality. Often their concern is producing men and women for ministry as quickly as possible. Some are ill-equipped training centres conducted inside the church or the pastor's house. Others lack library resources and curriculums, importing

materials wholesale from the West. Some are merely diploma or degree mills, resisting accountability to quality assurance bodies like ACTEA. Yet, some are honestly seeking to produce servants for the church but must consider quality measures and collaborative engagements with other theological institutions and accrediting bodies. They question the effectiveness of traditional models of theological education and the obsession with academics at the expense of ministerial and spiritual formation. At the same time, they must understand that quality theological education need not compromise ministerial formation and spiritual commitments (Botha 2010:151), for commitment to rigorous intellectual engagement is not in conflict with passionate commitment for spiritual and ministerial formation. ACTEA Standards, for example, affirm the necessity of the integration of both. As Bernhard Ott observes, church-related accrediting agencies, like ACTEA, assist institutions to fulfil their 'desired outcome qualities for ministries in church and mission' (Ott 2017:208).

Africa is home to great intellectual theological engagements. The continent has produced distinguished theologians for several generations. Accomplished publications in diverse theological fields attest to this reality. However, greater collaboration between African theological scholars and those from other continents may accelerate Africa's achievements. Where the ideology of difference and independence hinders Africa's global interactions, interdependence and collaborative engagements must prevail. Africa belongs to the global body of Christ, which is enriched through collaboration and the exchange of ideas. Furthermore, if Africa's theological institutions are to thrive in the global arena, they must learn to collaborate with each other and with those outside the continent. The most innovative institutions will equip students and faculty to function fruitfully in the global community. As ACTEA institutions originate from different faith traditions, contexts and languages, they already are practiced in sharing variegated ideas, resources and materials. Fulfilment of ACTEA's mission to foster networking amongst institutions will reap the level of collaboration that yields excellence in theological education.

Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa recognises that theological institutions and their scholars exist to serve the church. Therefore, there is a need for a 'trialogue' amongst the theological scholar, the church and the academy. The evangelical theological scholar must find ways of constantly being in touch with the church and letting his or her scholarship impact the church's worship, theology and ministry. ACTEA standards direct institutions to maintain relevancy in their theological education programmes through ministry partnership with the local church in the task of training leaders and theologians. Without this strong partnership, theological institutions may succumb to the charge of irrelevancy. The *Lausanne Cape Town Commitment* clearly articulates the missional nature of theological education (The Lausanne Movement 2011):

The mission of the Church on earth is to serve the mission of God, and the mission of theological education is to strengthen and accompany the mission

of the Church. Theological education serves first to train those who lead the Church as pastor-teachers, equipping them to teach the truth of God's Word with faithfulness, relevance and clarity; and second, to equip all God's people for the missional task of understanding and relevantly communicating God's truth in every cultural context. (pp. 2-6)

The format of theological education once offered strictly face-to-face at a residential seminary has expanded with manifold non-traditional means. Many more people are embracing online or blended modes of learning. Whilst some prefer intensive, short-term programmes, some students find only evening or weekends formats suitable to their schedules. Many full-time students increasingly are interested in education that do not require uprooting from their families and local communities and the familiarity of workplaces and churches. However, many churches resist these formats of theological education, even though their Bible schools have declining enrolments. Churches fear, sometimes legitimately, that these formats of learning are not rigorous enough. Thus, institutions embracing these non-traditional models of learning ought to think about quality measures. Accreditation standards guide institutions in the process of designing, developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating open, distance and technology-enhanced education for purposes of excellence in theological education and/or Christian HE.

ICETE's *Standards and Guidelines for Global Evangelical Theological Education* referred to as SG-GETE, 2019, also updated in 2021, provides a template for such accreditation standards for distance and online programmes (ICETE 2019). The ACTEA council recently approved accreditation standards for Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) programmes as well as guidelines for virtual accreditation site visits. These new standards help institutions in their quest for quality in these alternative means of theological education. ACTEA is currently working on standards for non-formal programmes like TEE. It is important to note that in the 1990s ACTEA developed and published detailed accreditation standards and procedures for TEE programmes. TEE was much more prominent as an alternative mode of theological education than it is now. But it is a mode not without similarities to the challenges of online theological education today and of accrediting such. ACTEA's offer of accreditation for TEE programmes was, however, never implemented, owing to internal transitions, and was thus forgotten.<sup>8</sup> Critical questions concerning the quality and equivalence of alternative programmes are an ongoing concern. Institutions launching quality online education will have to ensure that the materials are prepared by a qualified person, the lecturers are trained in online teaching and the students are exposed to the pedagogy of online education.

Contemporary educational philosophy rightly focuses on the outcome(s) of theological education in Africa and has alerted institutions of the value of

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8. I thank Paul Bowers for this historical point.

measuring their performance. Whilst most institutions have composed professionally written documents about the institutional vision, mission, objectives and strategic plans, few have gathered data to assess educational outcomes of their programmes. This data could be gleaned readily through honest institutional self-evaluation, by talking with alumni, boards, denominations and the public. Moreover, ACTEA Guide to Self-Evaluation provides sets of probing questions that guide institutional self-assessment. Yet ACTEA seeks to partner with educational specialists in developing more tools for assessing educational outcomes.

Many institutions have not achieved financial sustainability and face uncertain futures. The paucity of funds translates into a reduction of payments of salaries and maintenance cutbacks. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has intensified sustainability challenges. Relying on Western donors, whose economies are also impacted by COVID-19, is no longer viable and supported by ACTEA Standards. Providentially, African institutions will have to cultivate home-grown solutions to their sustainability needs. Nevertheless, institutions will exhibit wisdom by building partnerships, without undue dependence, with their international partners. Financially robust institutions will raise most of the support locally and regionally even as they maintain their international networks. Thus, healthy institutions in Africa nurture partnerships with local communities, churches, organisations and other like-minded people from Africa whilst also seeking support abroad.

The growing recognition of the importance of holistic training will impact programmes and curricula. Institutions have realised the value of training in life skills such as leadership, public speaking, research, publishing, media, technology and marketing. However, few institutions have such competencies incorporated in their curricula. Theological institutions must build upon traditional cross-cultural training that emphasised evangelism, discipleship and mission outreach, and equip students with competencies in public speaking, community development, community cohesion, conflict transformation, public theology and public service. Theological institutions also need to educate in prophetic witness to equip students to engage in critical areas facing African societies such as materialism, corruption, sexual depravity, creation care, peace-making, urbanisation and interfaith relations. Yet evidence that Africa's theological institutions are adequately prepared for effective training in this endeavour seems lacking. Consequently, ACTEA has the opportunity for impact.

One challenge facing seminaries in many regions of Africa is the pressure of transformation into Christian universities with an expansion of programmes beyond theological and biblical training. Several reasons drive this transition. One factor involves the sustainability of seminaries, which may be enhanced; it is thought by expanding institutional programmes to attract more students and funds. Another issue is pressure from governments, such as The Commission for University Education (CUE) in Kenya. As CUE rarely accredits one programme,

seminaries must offer programmes in disciplines other than theology to gain accreditation (charter) from CUE. The transformation of the seminary to Christian University might benefit the institution through increased students and faculty, but such institutions may be fraught with the serious problem of diminishing evangelical Christian identity (Kintu 2019:160; Mulatu 2017:190–201).

These institutions must think critically about preserving the vision and mission of the founders and the sponsoring denominations and agencies. ACTEA observes that seminaries that have become Christian universities have had to redefine their vision and mission; that many struggle to maintain their evangelical distinctive and that nearly all wrestle with secular impulses introduced variously from the character of students admitted to the university programmes to the secular departments on campus. The gravity of these issues compels honest conversation, which ACTEA has encouraged. Should seminaries become liberal arts universities? What are the benefits of such a transition? Would the benefits align with the vision and mission of the institution? If the transition from seminary to university is inevitable, how does the seminary, now religion department, preserve an evangelical distinctive? What needs to be preserved, and what needs to be redefined or abandoned?

Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa encourages accredited seminaries that have become Christian universities to maintain their ACTEA accreditation, even adjusting the accreditation process for such institutions. Only ACTEA, and not federal or secular accrediting agencies without commitment to the evangelical faith, works with such institutions to preserve, enrich and renew their evangelical vision. Only ACTEA Standards monitor the spiritual formation of students and vocational development of pastors produced by chartered Christian universities with theological departments. Those are ACTEA concerns. ACTEA is concerned that institutions produce the best graduates for the church as Steve Hardy (2017) noted:

Great fruit is the best indication of excellence in theological education. The graduates of excellent programmes preach better, evangelize better, administrate better, and live better in that their lives faithfully imitate our Lord Jesus Christ. Their learning prepared them well for the ministries to which God has called them. (p. 83)

ACTEA hopes that Africa's theological institutions and Christian universities will preserve this vision of producing excellent graduates for the church and society because the health of the church depends on such graduates.

## ■ Conclusion

The future of theological education in Africa greatly depends on the efficiency and effectiveness of vision-setting institutions such as ACTEA. ACTEA is a premier association that stands beside theological institutions in the African continent to serve the church and society. ACTEA will not waver in its mission to serve theological institutions in their quest for excellence and renewal.