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Multiplying Resources and Research in Africa – The NetACT Story

ABSTRACT

This paper is a case study of the Network for African Congregational Theology, NetACT, a network of theological institutions in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is conveyed from the vantage point of the researcher and the institution that he serves. It describes the mission and goals of the network and tells the story of its establishment. The hypothesis is that through networking and the sharing of resources theological institutions can achieve goals that individual institutions cannot achieve on their own. The article then discusses the goals and to what extent they were achieved as well as which goals proved to be unrealistic.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper is a case study of the Network for African Congregational Theology, NetACT, a network of theological institutions in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa¹. It is conveyed from the vantage point of the researcher and the institution that he serves².

NetACT's mission and goals address the challenges faced by seminaries in Sub Saharan Africa. Christianity is shifting south.³ This case study may well illustrate aspects of Jenkins's (2002:220) hypothesis that "Christianity is flourishing wonderfully among the poor and

1 At present NetACT has ten "members": Stellenbosch University (SU), South Africa; Justo Mwale Theological College (JMTc), Lusaka, Zambia; Murray Theological College (MTC), Morgenster, Zimbabwe; Zomba Theological College (ZTC), Malawi; Nifcott (Nkhoma Institute for Continuing Theological Training) and African Bible College (ABC), Lilongwe; Reformed Theological Institute (RITT), Eldoret, Kenya; Hefisiba Theological School, Vila Ulongue, Mozambique; Namibia Research Institute (NRI), Namibia, which is an umbrella organization for the Paulinum Lutheran Seminary and the Namibian Evangelical Theological Seminary (NETS); and several colleges are linked through the office of the *Igreja Evangelica Reformada de Angola* in Luanda, Angola (two colleges may be mentioned: the *Instituto Superior Emanuel Unido* in Huambo, and the *Instituto Biblico de Kikuni* near Sanza Pombo in the Uige province). Angola is only now becoming part of the network because of the unbelievable destruction of more than 40 years of war. The first hurdle was to become acquainted with their circumstances. In 2004, a NetACT delegation visited all the seminaries in their denominational headquarters. NetACT is now engaged in trying to set up a reliable communication system and to develop individual relationships. See Addendum 2 for more information on the NetACT institutions.

2 Since the 2001 meeting in Lusaka, the researcher has served as Executive Director of NetACT. He is also Chair of the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at SU.

3 Jenkins (2002) speaks about *The next Christendom: The coming of global Christianity*. Lamin Sanneh (2003:22-23) rightly points out that it is wrong to call Christianity in the south a "Christendom," and titled his book: *Whose religion in Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*. The context of the people and church in Africa should be seen in the framework of extremely powerful global economic shifts that are taking place (leading to the continent being sidelined and impoverished), of the rise of the Fourth World, of informational capitalism, poverty and social exclusion (Castells 2000:68-168).

persecuted, while it atrophies among the rich and secure.” In accounting the NetACT story, the challenges that the network faced and the achievements it attained will illustrate the theme set by this SSSR-RRA meeting and session. The basic hypothesis of this paper and the philosophy of NetACT are that by networking and sharing resources one can develop academic infrastructure and multiply research⁴. My footnotes refer to sources, mostly minutes and reports available on the internet. Since most of the research done by means of the infrastructure created by NetACT and SU is in the form of doctoral work, Addendum 2 lists most of the doctoral degrees of students from other African countries to illustrate the research done in, and through, the NetACT connection.

2 NETACT’S MISSION AND GOALS

During the August 2005 Annual Meeting, NetACT revisited its mission and goals and formulated them as follows⁵:

Mission

NetACT is a network of theological institutions in Sub Saharan Africa, created and directed by these institutions, to assist them in preparing leaders for missional congregations.

NetACT’s Major Goals

- To upgrade the standards of curricula at member institutions.
- To develop an effective system of communication, consultation and networking among all member institutions.
- To provide scholarships for advancing the theological training of institutions’ lecturers.
- The creation of an affordable and welcoming living environment for lecturers who receive advanced training.
- To organise lecturer exchanges among institutions, thus providing the necessary expertise, and to create space and time for lecturers to further their studies.
- The maintenance of an adequately staffed coordinating office.
- To publish theological textbooks relevant to the African context.
- To enhance and maintain the relevance of NetACT’s proprietary HIV/Aids course and to ensure that it remains part of the curriculum at each of the institutions.

The first mission and vision statement formulated at the 2001 Annual Meeting in Lusaka explained what is meant by ‘congregational theology’ by stating:

“**Congregational Theology** is theology as practised in the Christian Congregation as the body of Christ, discerning the will of God in the process of interpreting the Scriptures and its own specific context, empowering the Congregation to address its multiple problems, challenges and sufferings, in Sub Saharan Africa manifest in the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, abuse of power, corruption and economic injustice (among others)” (AGM 2001:30).

The emphasis on ‘congregational theology’ will be explained by means of the case study reported below.

4 The theory behind the networking / social movements referred to, is explained by Castells (1996, 2004). NetACT illustrates a social movement that was formed by institutions with a shared history and faith perspective. See also Ammerman 2005:158-205.

5 Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2005:122,123.

3.1 The initial relationship-building period: 1997 to 1999

In 1997, three staff members of Stellenbosch University (SU) and one from the University of the Western Cape embarked on an exploratory trip in Southern Africa, travelling 10,500 km (6,600 miles) through five countries and visiting 34 institutions from all denominations (Conradie *et al.* 1997). The purpose was to visit theological institutions in Southern Africa and be informed of their problems and challenges.

SU's Faculty of Theology was founded in 1859 as a seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) that, in subsequent years, has played a major role in mission work in Africa. With the demise of apartheid, members of the churches founded by the DRC's mission work, amongst others, came to Stellenbosch for post-graduate studies. The objective of the 1997 'safari' was to meet with institutions and churches that were sending their ministers for post-graduate studies at SU. A detailed report of the tour (Conradie *et al.* 1997:1-3) outlines the problems that theological institutions in Africa face and has played a major role in changing the mission and vision statement of the Faculty of Theology at the SU. Personal relationships were established between people serving in these institutions. The number of post-graduate students from other African countries who chose to follow post-graduate courses at SU has increased annually (see section 4.2 and Addendum 2).

As a result of the 1997 visit, this researcher visited post-graduate students in Zimbabwe and Namibia in 1998 and spent three months in 1999 presenting a module on Congregational Studies (Practical Theology) at theological institutions in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique⁶. Part of the research was to obtain 116 identity analyses of congregations in these countries. Reading them truly was an educational journey! At all the institutions, the students requested that basic training in conflict management be added to the module. Role-playing, part of conflict management skills training, provided the most information about realities in these countries.

From a research point of view, these visits were important since scholars from these countries, as well as Namibia, were co-opted and helped to prepare papers for the 2000 triennial meeting of the International Society for the Study of Reformed Communities (ISSRC), where ten papers that dealt with African realities were read. For seven of the presenters it was a first experience of researching and presenting a paper to an international interdisciplinary research group (Hendriks, Luidens *et al.* 2001:4-83). This meeting took place in Stellenbosch in June 2000 and, in many ways, was a unique meeting between very specialized First World researchers and very down-to-earth Africans who did primary research and accounted what was taking place in Reformed/Presbyterian congregations in Third World settings. For both groups it was an eye-opener to come into contact with hitherto unknown worlds and experiences. As such, the meeting had a most intense emotional atmosphere and influenced all participants. From an African perspective, the participants became aware of their valuable contribution to the academic and research-oriented world while, to my mind, the First World researchers were afforded the opportunity to experience the people and realities of the Third World, where religion is not simply an academic pursuit but the very essence of one's total existence.

6 The researcher adapted and used material from Carroll, JW, Dudley, CS, & McKinney, W. 1986. *Handbook for congregational studies*. Nashville: Abingdon, as well as Ammerman, Nancy T., Carroll, Jackson W., Dudley, Carl S. & McKinney, William. 1998. *Studying congregations*. Nashville: Abingdon in conducting these modules. These authors not only gave their permission, but helped in several ways with reworking and adapting their work (AR 2002:5-6).

The report of the researcher to the Faculty of Theology (Hendriks 1999:8) stated that the 116 identity analyses studied, and the notes made while watching conflict management skills-training role-playing pointed to the following observations:

1. A difference and tension exists between urban and rural congregations.
2. A tension exists between 'the elders and the youth'. This is due to the influence of modernisation, Pentecostalism⁷, the authoritative style of many ministers and elders, and the fact that the younger people are more educated than the older people.
3. None the less, the (Reformed/Presbyterian) Churches are growing. Sociological factors and the role of choirs play an important role in the growth phenomenon. Other research pointed to the positive role of the Women's Guild (Runyowa & Rutoro 2001:56-64; Sanneh 2003:18).
4. The ministers are bogged down with funerals; the AIDS pandemic has many facets.
5. One of the main causes of congregational conflict is the misappropriation of funds and sexual misconduct. Both these issues need to be understood in their contextual or cultural setting.
6. From the perspective of the researcher, the first impression of the visit to these schools and countries was that of shock at the reality of abject poverty and how it curtails development and initiative. Africa's plight is an overwhelmingly heavy emotional burden (Castells 2000:68-168).

Basic to the formation of the network was the shared history of the institutions through the mission work of the DRC of South Africa⁸ and has continued to play a role to this very day. Although the relationship between 'mother and daughter' churches has come full circle, they managed to survive colonialism, the independence era and the demise of apartheid in South Africa. With the 1994 new dispensation in South Africa, the scene was set for a new era in dialogue and cooperation. It is interesting how much of the MTh and DTh research work by SU scholars from Sub-Saharan Africa have revisited their history dealing with the transition period or addressing cultural or ministerial issues in a theological perspective (see Addendum 2). The humiliation of colonisation and apartheid and the tumult of the independence period had to be overcome before mutually beneficial networking could develop.

3.2 Nairobi 2000: NetACT conceptualised

From 2 to 5 February 2000, the cradle for NetACT's birth in Nairobi was a consultation organised by the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA, <http://www.theoledafrica.org/ACTEA>) and the Nairobi Evangelical School of Theology (NEGST, <http://www.negst.edu>). This was attended by 350 delegates from all parts of Africa. It dealt with the relationship of seminaries as theological institutions of higher education and their relationship with the church. "Serving the church: partnership in Africa" was the theme, and Prof Tite Tienou, the previous president and dean of the Faculty of Theology in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, and current professor in Missiology at the Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, was the main speaker (<http://www.tiu.edu/people/faculty/tienou.htm>). The challenges, shortcomings and tensions in theological education in Africa were debated. Emphasis was laid on the importance of the church's financial support of seminaries and on the responsibility of seminaries to cooperate with the church in training future ministers.

7 See, for instance, BBC Focus on Africa (July-Sept 2005:10-19) for their special feature on evangelism.

8 Cronje (1982); Pauw (1980); Saxe (1993); Pretorius (1987); Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982); Van der Merwe (1981); Turnbull (1965); Retief (1958).

In this atmosphere, the representatives of SU, JMTC, ZTC and RITT met and decided to form NetACT. The following institutions were not present, but indicated their willingness to be part of such a network: MTC, Nifcott and Hefsiba (NetACT: Minutes of the Constituting Meeting of NetACT, 2000). The very first objective was to work together to produce theological textbooks and to commence by writing *Studying congregations in Africa* (Hendriks 2004). The emphasis on ‘congregational theology’ should be understood in the light of the conference’s theme and with the conviction that nothing will change in Africa if change does not start at a congregational level. Leadership development in, and for, congregations was a crucial concern in the founding discussions. In June of that year, at the Stellenbosch meeting of the ISSRC, staff members, presenting papers, represented all institutions and upheld the momentum. The stage was set for the 2001 meeting of NetACT in Lusaka where the mission, vision, and values of NetACT were first formulated and where the constitution was drawn up.

3.3 Lusaka 2001: The birth of NetACT and formulation of its constitution and mission

The eight-day 2001 meeting in Lusaka was a most formative one⁹ with 22 delegates from all countries, except Angola, attending. The meeting displayed several characteristics:

- Seeking the Lord’s guidance in the mornings and evenings played an important role.
- Three father figures played an important role as facilitators. Gerard Dekker, professor in Sociology of Religion, Free University in Amsterdam, helped us to secure funds and offered valuable academic guidance. Martin Pauw, professor in Missiology, SU, was born in Zambia and is fluent in several African languages. He is particularly familiar with the institutions and everybody trusted him. Dr Ron Hartgerink represented the donors. He had a commercial background, was Chair of the Board of the Western Theological Seminary in Michigan, USA, and facilitated the process of formulating NetACT’s mission, values, goals and constitution.
- It took several years for the group to overcome a number of obstacles and tensions. There were cultural differences and, because of a shared (colonial) history, a hermeneutic of suspicion existed. For instance, the SU’s motive for initiating the network was questioned¹⁰. However, the setting in Lusaka and the amiable personality of the Chair, Rev Amon Kasambala, did much to inspire frankness, honesty and transparency.
- Writing the mission statement and work on the first draft of the book, *Studying congregations in Africa*, attributed much towards a sense of achievement. The group felt fulfilled and grateful after eight days of hard work.
- The setting of Justo Mwale Theological College and the shared fun-time built relationships. The group became acquainted with the College and staff and were impressed by their achievements with their minimum of resources and plenty of ingenuity.
- The leadership team was elected and the goals were set. NetACT now had a ‘DNA structure’ and a course was set.

4 MULTIPLYING RESOURCES THROUGH NETWORKING

In this section, the focus of the NetACT story will be on the goals set by the Lusaka meeting. The data was drawn from the Annual Reports (ARs) and the Minutes of the four successive Annual

⁹ Annual Reports (AR) and Minutes of the Annual General Meetings (see AGM 2001) are on the website <http://academic.sun.ac.za/theology/netact.html>

¹⁰ See the following ARs and AGMs: AGM 2001:20.3; AGM 2002:9.1;14; AR 2003:14.3; AGM 2003:49,53,62; AR 2004:14.2; AGM 2004:84d.

General Meetings (AGMs) that were held at Lilongwe (Malawi) in 2002, Stellenbosch (South Africa) in 2003, and Vila Ulongue (Mozambique) in 2005. The eight subsections deal with the goals that were set to be realised by 2007. The footnote on each section contains references to the Annual Reports and Minutes of the Annual General Meetings

4.1 An adequately staffed administrative infrastructure and accommodation¹¹

The goal set by the meeting was to have

- “An adequately staffed coordinating office for NetACT has been established.”

The researcher was appointed Executive Director, which implied that the office had to be at SU. This has the following advantages. Being an internationally and academically acclaimed institution, SU has resources available for NetACT and it has put office space and its administrative infrastructure at the disposal of NetACT. NetACT's finances are to be integrated in the University's system implying that, although NetACT has full mandate over the nature of its expenditure, its administration must conform to the SU's strict regulations and external auditing processes. Financial statements will be available to all members and donors.

All international students of theology get acquainted with the NetACT office as it liaises with the SU International Office, which helps post-graduate students with all the hassles of international travelling and university applications. This service is invaluable.

By means of a generous gift from the Elmar E Hartgerink Trust and the DRC, the SU provides a house that accommodates 16 or more theology students. This house has proved to be one of NetACT's most valuable assets since it has been stipulated that preference be given to post-graduate students from its institutions. It is a home away from home for all who reside there. It offers the most affordable accommodation in town with all facilities (e.g. 2 kitchens, a TV set, telephones and computers) that foreign students need.

No administration or network can function without adequate finances. From 2001 to 2005, the efforts of the NetACT office, the Executive and SU have amassed foreign funds in excess of R2 million (\$330,000).

4.2 Scholarships for theological training of lecturers and ministers¹²

Lusaka's goal has been attained as follows:

- A programme for the upgrading and further theological training of lecturers at the participating institutions, as well as other pastors, has been established.

This goal should be linked to the objective of measurable steps towards accreditation and upgrading of the academic standard (4.7 below). Amongst others, accreditation depends on suitably qualified staff. SU is the only institution within NetACT that offers Masters' and Doctoral studies. The Lusaka meeting was unanimously in favour of theological training in Africa. It is at least five times more expensive to study and attain a degree abroad. Most institutions found it problematic to send students abroad. Once they become accustomed to the living standards in rich countries, they do not wish to return, or they find great difficulty in adapting when back home. Most Western programmes and supervisors do not understand, or address, contextual African issues.

11 AGM 2001:4.1; AR 2002:7.9,11; AGM 2002:5.8,5.9,19,23,24; AR 2003:3-5,14.5; AGM 2003:38-40,67,70,72; AR 2004:3-5; AGM 2004:83,84; AR 2005:3-5 and Addendum 2; AGM 2005:112-115.

12 AGM 2001:8.2.7,12; AR 2002:4; AGM 2002:30; AR 2003:7-8; AGM 2003:55,74; AR 2004:8; AGM 2004:88,99d,95,97; AR 2005:8; AGM 2005:118.

NetACT decided to seek scholarships for lecturers and gifted ministers. The number of students from NetACT institutions and from elsewhere in Africa who have studied at SU proves that this goal has been attained (see statistics below). The DRC has provided a number of scholarships. An analysis of the budget of the Witness Commission of the DRC from 2000 to 2005 reflects that they have provided R458,869 (\$72,000) for scholarships, with which ministers from Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique have been trained. Five received a Post-graduate Diploma on Theology (Honours degree)¹³, ten received a Masters' degree¹⁴, and six are studying for doctoral degrees¹⁵.

Some scholarships have been received from other sources. Four key persons in the RCZ of Zimbabwe have received MTh degrees¹⁶. Among the JMTC's staff there are four MTh graduates¹⁷ and three DTh graduates¹⁸. Three staff members from RITT have received degrees¹⁹. ABC in Malawi has three staff members who have attained DTh degrees at SU²⁰, while several ministers from the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) have received doctoral degrees²¹. In Namibia, one part-time staff member has attained an MTh and two are doing doctoral work²². From Hefsisba in Mozambique, Rev Kruger du Preez is working on his DTh on curriculum development within the NetACT institutions.

Three sets of figures illustrate how the statistics on post graduate enrolment have changed at Stellenbosch during the years under consideration.

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY, STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

2004 Enrolment

	White students	Other racial groups	Total
Undergraduates	63 (63%)	37 (37%)	100
Post-graduates	94 (42%)	118 (58%)	212
Total	157	155	312

Enrolment of Black (African) students

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
29	31	38	43	61	47	50

Enrolment of all students from other countries in Africa

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
23	28	28	24	33	37	29	42	34	35

These statistics prove that two-thirds of the students at the Faculty of Theology are post-graduates and a growing percentage of these students are from previously disadvantaged communities and from other African countries.

13 C Mufumhi, AA Sasu, C Msang'aambe, MF Matiquele and A Silambo.

14 S Kundishora, W Runyowa, R Rutoro, E Chomutiri, J Zingoni, AA Sasu, C Msangaambe, A M Katani Mwale, C Munikwa and W Gouws.

15 R Rutoro, W Runyowa, E Chomutiri, C Msangaambe, A M Katani Mwale and C Munikwa.

16 L Hoffman, GG Gurajena, M Zvenyika and KG Gwemende.

17 A Kasambala, N Mostert, V Chilenje and L Soko.

18 E Zulu and A Kasambala have received their degrees and V Chilenje is still studying. J Ndlovu, previous Moderator and part-time staff member is working on a DTh.

19 J van Zyl attained his DTh, E van den Ham and AL Ekitala received MTh degrees and the latter, Principal of RITT, is now doing a DTh.

20 P Chinchin, L Brown and J Brown.

21 The first Vice-Chair, Dr D Makwanandi, W Chikakuda, HA Kamnkhwani and WJC Manda, all ZTC lecturers, as well as JJ Kamwana received their DTh degrees from SU before NetACT was formed. Others followed, amongst whom are, O Joda-Mbewe, and W Kawale.

22 MTh: Z Pienaar; DTh: Z Pienaar and V Kuligin.

4.3 Effective communication²³

- Participating institutions should have computer facilities and be linked through e-mail and the internet.

NetACT spent more than R130,000 (\$20,000) on communication equipment for all its institutions. Through the initiative of the NetACT office, a large number of computers were donated to the institutions. A satellite system was installed in 2002 for reliable communication, since at least four institutions either did not have telephone lines, or these were unreliable. The satellite system was not viable as it was too expensive to operate and electricity was problematic at several institutions. However, the main reason was a lack of skills in computer technology. After five years of real 'hard labour' in establishing both skills and culture, and in supplying DTh students with computers to take home, operations are improving. The advanced technology and development in specific countries were of assistance. The situation in Angola and Zimbabwe remains problematic. However, most institutions now have an information technology module in their curriculum and a classroom or library with computers. The institutions still have a long way to go, but every year brings improvement.

4.4 Addressing AIDS²⁴

The goal that NetACT has achieved was the following:

- At least one course on curbing the spread and the effects of HIV/Aids has been identified and/or developed, distributed and taught, and is in the process of being used in a substantial number of congregations linked with the participating institutions.

This goal was addressed in all seriousness at the 2002 meeting at Lilongwe. Christo Greyling, an AIDS sufferer²⁵, and his wife Liesl presented a course that was developed and eventually has been taught at all the institutions. Greyling (2003:117-136) is considered to be one of the best practical theologians in this field. One of the most basic problems in addressing this pandemic in Africa is due to a culture where to speak about sex is taboo. The NetACT Board found difficulties in dealing with this. The pastoral gifts of the Chair, Dr Kasambala, and Christo and Liesl's faith-based approach, as well as the fact that what they shared was often based on their own experience, led to an in-depth discussion of this topic. The extended NetACT Board and several of the local church leadership followed the three-day module prepared for the institutions. The group visited Nkhoma hospital and AIDS-related ministries, and heard AIDS patients' stories. At this meeting, this experience created a bond between Board members, deepening the basis of trust.

NetACT partnered with the Christian Aids Bureau of South Africa (CABSA) where Greyling was working full-time and several of the institutions' key members have been trained by CABSA. Teaching on AIDS has become part of the institutions' curriculum. The initial Greyling-course, when first presented, included key church leaders. This had an awareness-raising effect and, subsequently, the fight against AIDS has gained momentum.

Due to a lack of funds, the goals set by NetACT against AIDS were not accomplished at a congregational level. NetACT received \$25,000 from the USA Health Authorities and applied

23 AGM 2001:8.2; AR 2002:2; AGM 2002:5.1; AR 2003:6; AGM 2003:41,61; AR 2004:6; AGM 2004:85; AR 2005:6; AGM 2005:116.

24 AGM 2001:15-20; AR 2002:1.6; AGM 2002:25-26; AR 2003:9; AGM 2003:43; AR 2004:9; AGM 2004:98; AR 2005:9; AGM 2005:119.

25 Christo Greyling is World Vision's HIV/AIDS church-relations advisor in South Africa. A haemophiliac, Greyling tested positive for HIV while a student of the theological seminary in 1987. He publicly disclosed his HIV status in 1992, while serving as a minister in the DRC in South Africa.

some of the Elmar E Hartgerink Trust funds. The NetACT AIDS work had other setbacks. Greyling was called to World Vision, Dr Kasambala to *Focus on the family's* Africa AIDS orphan ministry, while Dr Janet Brown from ABC, who attained her doctorate on this subject, is terminally ill with cancer.

However, indirectly NetACT accomplished more than what was foreseen in 2001. Several people who played a key role in the AIDS programme are now in key positions fighting AIDS elsewhere (Greyling, Kasambala and Patrique). The Uppsala University and the Swedish Government approached SU to offer a specialised MTh course on *Clinical Pastoral Care: AIDS* in collaboration with universities in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The course begins in 2006 and the Swedish government will cover all expenses while students receive full scholarships.

4.5 Lecturer exchange²⁶

Lusaka achieved the following goal:

- An effective system of mutual consultation, lecturer-exchange and networking among the participating institutions is in place.

Most of the NetACT institutions are understaffed and, because they are small, the staff members must teach a wide range of courses. Specialization and research are mostly but a dream. However, once NetACT's organization was operational, lecturer exchange took place on a regular basis. The Faculty of Theology at SU has an annual rotation of staff teaching at MTC and other institutions. All institutions took the initiative through the NetACT office to find lecturers for their institutions. The 2005 AGM accepted and implemented arrangements for relief personnel, thus helping staff members to complete their doctoral work. Every institution has its own unique situation and its own network in this regard. NetACT encourages the development of such networks and the Executive Director and Chair received a mandate from the AGM to help institutions to develop lecturer-exchange networks in Sub-Saharan Africa, but also with overseas partners. SU has many international academic agreements that are implemented to the advantage of NetACT members. One of the greatest drawbacks remains funding as travelling is extremely expensive in Africa. Notwithstanding financial pressures, two lecturers from Hefisiba, who are fluent in Portuguese, presented a course on AIDS and Practical Theology in Angola in 2004.

4.6 Theological Textbooks²⁷

The goal set in Nairobi in 2000 and subsequently confirmed was that:

- Textbooks on African Congregational Theology have been produced and are used at the participating institutions.

The production of *Studying congregations in Africa* was a very strong impetus in forming a bond between the NetACT institutions. The first draft that was taught at most of the institutions from 1999 to 2000 was revised in Lusaka. All attendees were divided into working groups and the draft of the book was scrutinised, revised and contextualised for the Sub-Saharan region. Illustrations from congregations and communities of NetACT countries were provided. The 2003 AGM finally examined the manuscript that, subsequently, has been published and distributed to institutions. In

26 AGM 2001:8.2.3,8.2.6; AR 2002:5; AGM 2002:5.3,5.6; AR 2003:7; AGM 2003:46; AR 2004:7; AGM 2004:86,97d,98b; AR 2005:7 and Addendum 1; AGM 2005:117.

27 AGM 2001:4.1,23,26; AR 2002:10; AGM 2002:14; AR 2003:12; AGM 2003:45,59,75; AR 2004:12; AGM 2004:90,91; AR 2005:11; AGM 2005:121.

2005, a second edition was published. The translation of the book into Portuguese started in 2004, then experienced a few problems, but hopefully will be finalised by the end of 2005.

The NetACT office wrote to a selection of DRC congregations in SA and, in response, received R50,000 (\$8,000) to sponsor this book. Institutions have received copies for all their students. However, these institutions sell these books at a locally affordable price to the students and may then use this money for library expenditure²⁸. In September 2005, seminaries received 400 books. This book gave the Network a sense of achievement and it is making an impact on teaching and leadership formation. It speaks to Africa, because it is of Africa, and proves that networking works.

The second book will be titled, *Preaching on AIDS in Africa*. NetACT asked Dr Johann Cilliers to act as editor/convener. NetACT received some funds from the *Gereformeerde Zendingbond* in The Netherlands, from the Elmar E Hartgerink Trust, and DRC congregations to cover the first draft. A book takes three-year for conceptualisation, writing and the editing process, in which the staff from NetACT institutions, as well as other experts, cooperates. The third book will be on *Ethics in Africa* and will deal with crucial and contextual ethical issues. NetACT has appointed Prof Nico Koopman as editor/convener. However, this project is on hold since NetACT needs approximately R150,000 (\$25,000) to conceptualize, write and edit the book.

Institutional capacity building and curriculum development²⁹

- All institutions (where applicable) have taken measurable steps towards accreditation by upgrading academic standards and institutional capacity building.

At the 2005 AGM, the institutions' reports were informative. All institutions, in their own way, struggle to make ends meet. This plight must be viewed against the overall financial position of African countries (Castells 2000:68-168), but, more directly, as the way in which the AIDS pandemic is silently sucking the very breath from institutions. In the typical African congregation every family has been affected by AIDS, which has dire financial implications in all cases. Communities and the church are impoverished and, way down the line, seminaries even more so.

Paradoxically, at all institutions there is growth! ZTC's four year theology programme received accreditation through the University of Malawi. Hefsiba received accreditation for a Bachelors' degree from the Mozambican government. One has to be in Angola to realise what is happening there. A report of a NetACT visit to Angola and theological institutions is on the NetACT website (<http://academic.sun.ac.za/theology/netact.html>). Despite frustration with the Zambian Department of Education, JMTC is hard at work to introduce an MTh degree. The Board of MTC started an ACTEA accreditation process and, miraculously, a farmer from the Free State in South Africa heard about their financial plight and donated the necessary funds for the evaluation.

Institutional capacity building summarises the NetACT mission, which, in its 2005 formulation, focuses on assisting institutions to prepare leaders for missional congregations. The 2003 meeting at Stellenbosch, South Africa, spent two days on curriculum development as an integral aspect of capacity building. Dr Saindi Chiphangwi, principal of ZTC, heads this desk.

28 In most of Africa, students cannot afford books. The selling price of *Studying congregations in Africa* (R160 or \$24) will, currently, be approximately a third of the monthly salary of a RCZ minister in Zimbabwe. The result being that ministers do not have books. Seminaries usually buy a number of 'textbooks,' and keep them in the library, where all students of the course make use of them. NetACT wants ministers to own books. The NetACT office finds ways of raising funds to attain this goal. It is an issue of faith.

29 AGM 2001:8.2; AR 2002:3; AGM 2002:25-26; AR 2003:11; AGM 2003:52; AR 2004:11; AGM 2004:87; AR 2005:10; AGM 2005:120.

NetACT has granted a scholarship for Rev Kruger du Preez of Hefsiba to research the issue of curriculum development among NetACT members.

NetACT is helping individual institutions to develop their own networks. By linking congregations, NGO's, and other theological institutions from abroad to one another, all benefit in the process of capacity building.

4.8 Programmes for congregational leadership and continuous training³⁰

This is an area where NetACT was unable to meet its goals. Lusaka projected:

- At least one programme/curriculum for training of congregational leadership in African Congregational Theology has been developed, has been distributed and is in a process of being implemented in a substantial number of congregations linked with participating institutions.
- Church leaders at all levels, including women and youth leaders, are targeted and included in the continuous training programmes.

The theory that inspired these goals is good. The challenges faced in Africa, beginning with the AIDS pandemic, cannot be overcome without a people's movement (Korten 1990:113-128), which will succeed only if there is adequate local congregational and communal leadership³¹. In Africa, the church is the most trusted institution that has the potential to play a leading role³¹. The goal was, however, unrealistic. Training congregational leadership is not the core business of seminaries and, given the struggle to survive financially, Africa's seminaries may never be in a position to address this aspect adequately. By and large, the denominations associated with NetACT realise the importance of empowering congregational leadership, which can be addressed only at congregational level. NetACT has played a role in networking institutions with NGO's to assist denominations / congregation in this regard. A good example is the role that NIFCOTT is playing in Malawi and the network it has established to do this work.

At the 2005 AGM, this led to the reformulation of the NetACT mission and goals. Institutions should never lose sight of this goal, i.e. to train local congregational leadership. How can it be attained? The answer is to provide the type of ministerial leadership that will form missional congregations (Guder *et al.* 1998). By this is meant the type of congregation that is no longer caught in the Christendom-institutional model, but is reforming in such a way that ordinary members are in touch with the triune missional God and are guided by the *missio Dei*, i.e. pursuing God's agenda in their part of the world³². The second chapter in *Studying congregations in Africa* deals with the methodology to attain this goal (Hendriks 2004:19-34).

5 CONCLUSIONS

Basically, theological institutions in Africa are all small and understaffed. The personnel have to teach a variety of subjects. Although these institutions struggle financially, the influence of the

30 AR 2002:5; AR 2003:14.1; AGM 2003:36c,e,f;71; AR 2004:14.1; AGM 2004:103; AR 2005:15.1.

31 An article in *Die Burger* of 16 Sept 2005 referred to a Gallup/BBC poll, which reported that in the 68 countries, where the poll was conducted, the average level of trust in politicians was 13%, while spiritual leaders received a 33% level of trust. In Africa, the trust in spiritual leaders is 74%!

32 From its very inception, NetACT was in contact with, and influenced by, the Gospel and Our Culture Movement (<http://www.gocn.org/>). At the 2002 GOCN meeting in Chicago, the Executive Director (ED) was one of the keynote speakers (AR 2002:4-5). Subsequently, key people from the GOCN, such as Proff George Hunsberger and Darrell Guder visited several of the NetACT institutions.

leadership they provide for church and society, receives the highest level of trust in the world.

The research presented in this paper proves to what extent networking has benefited all institutions involved. Because of a growing number of post graduate students from the continent, SU staff members took the initiative to network. The University provided ample infrastructure and expertise free of charge but, in turn, benefited by receiving as students the majority of staff and leadership from the institutions involved. Its own staff members also benefited by teaching these students, and being exposed to other African countries through the research of their students.

From the vantage point of the other NetACT institutions, a number of benefits from networking can be listed:

- They received much assistance with all the problems regarding travelling and studying in a strange country.
- Their skills in handling modern technology have improved, thus creating a better flow of communication and information.
- All institutions benefited from receiving international scholars to teach key modules on a regular basis and free of charge.
- The AIDS-denial barrier was broken. The AIDS curriculum that was introduced created the ability for church and society to start addressing the pandemic at all levels.
- All students in Practical Theology received, and could study, a locally produced, context-friendly and affordable textbook.
- In summary: because of networking, the academic infrastructure, training of personnel and the development of the curriculum of all institutions involved, have benefited. Now, the majority of the teaching staff have post-graduate degrees and are skilled in doing research.

The NetACT story testifies that networking works! By sharing resources and research, all the institutions and society at large benefit. Institutions that do not have the capacity to do research can do so by networking.

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Addendum 1: Graduates at Stellenbosch University from African countries to the North of South Africa M Th theses done between 1997 to 2005

1. Amadi, Ahiamadu 2005. Redefining stewardship: A Nigerian perspective on accountable and responsible landownership according to the Old Testament.
2. Chomutiri, Enos 2001. The interrelatedness of Christology and Ecclesiology from the perspective of John 9.
3. Achaia L 2001. The promise of land in the Old Testament: a theological-ethical study of its nature, conditions and purpose.
4. Gouws WJ 2004. Not by Might, nor by Power ... The History of the Igreja Reformada em Mocambique 1908-1996.
5. Katani Mwale, AM 2003. Traditional Malawian choral music: A theological-liturgical-critical study within the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian.
6. Puk J-T 2001. The relationship between Old Testament prophecy and Nuer prophecy – a comparative study.

DTh dissertations 1997 to 2005

1. Akper, GI 2004. Contemporary African perspectives on Jesus' cross and human suffering: A critical comparison of African Christology's.
2. Brown, JL 2004. HIV/AIDS alienation: Between prejudice and acceptance.
3. Brown, WL 2004. The History of the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian since 1962.
4. Chinchon, PD 2001. A reformation of mission: Reversing mission trends in Africa. An assessment of Protestant mission methods in Malawi.
5. Dau IM 2000. Suffering and God. A Theological Ethical study of the war in Sudan (1955–).
6. Dube-Chirairo, L 1999: Women spirituality in an African context: A study of the role of women prophets in Zimbabwe.

7. Frank, Minsi E 1999. African notions of sickness and death in pastoral care to the dying.
8. Kamwana, JJK 1997. The spirituality of Rev JS Mwale, Minister of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Nkhoma Synod.
9. Kasambala, Amon, Eddie 2004. The interplay between God images and healing in Pastoral Ministry.
10. Kawale WR 1998. God and nature in Genesis 1:1-2:4a and Chewa cosmogony.
11. Kombo, J 2000. The doctrine of God in African Christian thought: An assessment of African Inculturation Theology from a Trinitarian perspective.
12. Magezi, Vhumani 2005. Life beyond infection: Home-based pastoral care to people with HIV-positive status within the context of poverty.
13. Manda WJC 1998. Battling with words only. A rhetorical interpretation of the function of proverbs within Old Testament kingship narratives.
14. Matham, SW 2002. The Evangelical Alliance Mission: An evaluative study of its discipling ministry among the Coloured people of Swaziland and South Africa.
15. Musembi, BM 1999. Christian mission in a changing society: An evaluative study of the church in Kenya.
16. Mutumburanzou, AR 1999. A historical perspective on the development of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe.
17. Muyebe, S 2005. The Canon Law framework for arbitration in the Roman Catholic Church of South Africa.
18. Muyo J 2001. The scapegoat sacrifice in Leviticus 16 and the Nefo'o ritual of the Bafut of Cameroon.
19. Spencer, ST 1998. A historical analysis of religious education in Malawi with a focus on specific institutions. D.Phil Ed, Stellenbosch University.
20. Van Zyl, J 2001. The impact of Reformed Missions on the origin, growth and identity of the Reformed Church of East Africa (1905-2000).
21. Wiid, WJ 2002: An appraisal of Theological Training for untrained church leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa with particular reference to the training programme of Veritas College.
22. Xapile, SP 2000. The Quest for Unity between the Bantu Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa 1959 – 1973.
23. Zulu, Edwin 1998. An Ngoni assessment of the role of ancestors within ancient Israelite world views and religion in Genesis 11:28-50:26.

The following students are working on their dissertations:

1. Chilenje, Victor. History of the Synod of Zambia of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian 1880 – 2000. D Th
2. Ekitala, LA. Towards the Development of a Reformed Church order for the Reformed Church of East Africa. D Th
3. Kamikura, JU. The Holy Spirit in Sanctification according to John Calvin: A critical evaluation from a Luo perspective. DTh
4. Katani-Mwale, AM. Traditional Malawian choral music: A theological-liturgical-critical study within the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian.
5. Kuligin, V. The judgement of God. An evangelical perspective on pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism. D Th.
6. Moyo, C. A Karaga perspective on fertility and barrenness as blessing and curse in I Samuel 1-2. D Th.
7. Msang'aambe, C. 13515454. 2005. Laity empowerment in the Malawian church. D Th.
8. Munikwa, Christopher. The Binga outreach: Contextualization of mission in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe. D Th.
9. Mutinda, POK. Discipleship as a strategy for a value-based community life within the Kenyan context. D Th.
10. Muungani, K. The doctrine of "Justification by faith" from an African Perspective". DTh.
11. Ndhlovu, J. Combating AIDS: A ministerial strategy for Zambian churches. D Th.
12. Onwunta, UA.. Ethnicity and missional strategies within the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. D Th.
13. Runyowa, W. Evangelism as a holistic ministry in the congregations of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe. D Th.
14. Ruturo, R. The development of lay-leadership in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe. D Th.
15. Sokupa, MM. The Priesthood of all Believers – a Critical Ecclesiological Analysis. D Th.

TABLE 2: NETACT INSTITUTIONAL STATISTICS (27-10-2005)

	Full-time staff	Part-time Staff	Students	Congregations	Members
Angola: Seminariesⁱ					
Instituto Superior de Teologia Evangelica no Lubango	7		53		
Instituto Superior Emanuel Unido In Huambo	6(1) ⁱⁱⁱ		44		
Instituto Biblico de Kinkuni	7		55		
Denominationsⁱⁱ					
Igreja Evangelistica Reformada de Angola				753	149,000
Igreja Evangelica de Angola Central				1732	460,000
Igreja Metodista Unida de Angola				498	224,000
Kenya Reformed Institute for Theological Training Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA)	3	4(1)	48(6)	45/300 ^{iv}	20,000
Malawi^v : African Bible College (ABC) Nkhoma Institute for Continuous Theological Training (Nifcott)) Zomba Theological College (ZTC)	17(5) 6(2) 9	3 15 3(1)	175(52) 32(16) 71(20)		
Denominations: Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Baptist Church				3000 ^{vi} 1500	2,000,000 500,000
Mozambique: Hefsiba ^{vii} Igreja de Reformada em Mozambique Assemblies of God United Baptist Church Evangelical Church of Christ	7(1)	5(1)	46(23) ^{viii}	60/300 880 1206 ?	42,000 150,000 70,478 ?
Namibia^{ix} : Namibia Evangelical Theol. Sem. (NETS) Paulinum (Lutheran) Lutheran Church in Namibia (at Paulinum) Ref. Church Family & evangelicals at NETS	6 6	6 2(1)	24(4) + 550 TEE 48(16)	 631 423	 924,300 142,100
South Africa: Stellenbosch University ^x Dutch Reformed Church Uniting Reformed Church in SA United Presbyterian in Southern Africa	20(1)	40+	31 (86)	1169 734 ^{xi} 1759	1,450,861 1,554,838 698,225

Zambia ^{xii} : Justo Mwale Theological College Reformed Church in Zambia Church of Central Africa Presbyterian United Presbyterian in Southern Africa	10 (3)	18 (6)	149 (59)	154 43	300,000 47,000
Zimbabwe ^{xiii} Murray Theological College Reformed Church in Zimbabwe	5 (2)	1	18 (6)	50	40,000
TOTALS	108(15)	97	1075	15,164	8,779,802

- i The staff and student numbers were given to the researcher by the principals of the institutions in July 2004 in Angola. The three denominations mentioned below constitute the major partners at the *Instituto Superior Emanuel Unido* in Huambo. At Lubango, further south, 15 denominations use the seminary. At Kinkuni most students are Reformed but certainly not all.
- ii The numbers are from the World Christian Database (WCD), <http://worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd> downloaded on 29 Sept 2005. WCD data gives considerably higher numbers of congregations and adherents than those supplied by local leaders. Demographic and church statistics in Angola are basically informed guessing.
- iii Numbers in brackets refer to the number of women.
- iv Information supplied by Rev AL Ekitala, Principal of RITT. The RCEA has 45 parishes with over 300 churches. RITT has 1235 students doing TEE courses! The WCD says that the RCEA has 250 congregations and 178,000 members.
- v ABC data supplied by Rev Maggie Madimbo, staff ABC. Dr Hennie van Deventer, Principal of Nifcott supplied the Nifcott data. They are training 16 ministers as well as, in a separate course, the 16 wives of the ministers.
- vi Congregations refer in this case to all the prayer houses or prayer posts of the three CCAP Malawi synods. A congregation usually has 20-30 prayer houses in the CCAP of Malawi. The Nkhoma synod, for instance, has 118 parishes of which only 90 have ministers. Their total membership is about 1 million. The 118 parishes each have on average 8500 members. Members worship at prayer houses / preaching posts which function as a congregation. Everything is led by the elders. A minister visits a prayer house once or twice every year to conduct the sacraments and confirm new members. People do not have transport and walk to prayer houses. Ministers usually have either a bicycle, or, in some cases, a motorbike.
- vii Information supplied by Rev Kruger du Preez, Academic Dean, Hefsiba. The number of congregations of the IRM is 60 but each congregation has on average 5 prayer houses. One can therefore say that there are about 300 congregations. Hefsiba is in the Northern part of Mozambique and as such several denominations send their ministers to study there. After the war in Mozambique and Angola denominationalism is not a big issue and cooperation within the Protestant family is good.
- viii Like most of the institutions Hefsiba also teaches the wives of the pastors (23) on a certificate level in the duties of a pastor's wife which include cooking for larger groups, how to take care of a manse, and other very basic skills. A considerable number of the wives were raised in rural villages and have no knowledge of urban life. The United Baptist and Assemblies statistics was quoted by Rev Du Preez from Patrick Johnstone's *Operation World* (2001).
- ix The Principals of Nets (Rev Goaseb) and Paulinum (Rev George du Toit) supplied the seminary data. Church data was taken from the WCD (Sept 29, 2005). There are three main groups of Lutherans and a number of smaller ones in Namibia constituting at least 45% of Namibian Christians. The total population is about 2 million. Reformed-Presbyterian denominations have about 7% of the Christian market share. Quite a number of Reformed pastors are trained in South Africa. NetACT does not encourage graduate training in other countries.
- x In South Africa training of DRC ministers also takes place at the University of Pretoria and Free State (Bloemfontein). The 312 students represent the 2004 numbers.
- xi 1998 *Jaarboek VGKSA* (1998 Yearbook of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, URCSA) p 60 (This number includes the 41 Namibian URCSA congregations). The number of the Dutch Reformed Church congregations is from the 2005 DRC Yearbook. The number of Presbyterian congregations is

from the WCD (2005). The numbers of Presbyterian and Reformed members are from the 2001 South African Population Census.

xii Data supplied by Rev Dr DT Banda, Principal Justo Mwale Theological College, Zambia.

xiii Data supplied by Rev R Rutoro, Vice-Principal of Murray Theological College, Zimbabwe.

KEY WORDS

NetACT

Theological Colleges

Networking

African Leadership

Missional Congregations

Postgraduate Studies

TREFWOORDE

NetACT

Teologiese skole

Netwerk

Leierskap

Missionale gemeentes

Nagraadse studies

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