



Thought Leadership | Catalyzing Movements

Not All Who Go Are Sent

A RESEARCH REPORT ON THE MISSIONARY
PREPAREDNESS OF AFRICAN CHRISTIAN
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, PAST AND PRESENT,
FROM 16 AFRICAN NATIONS.



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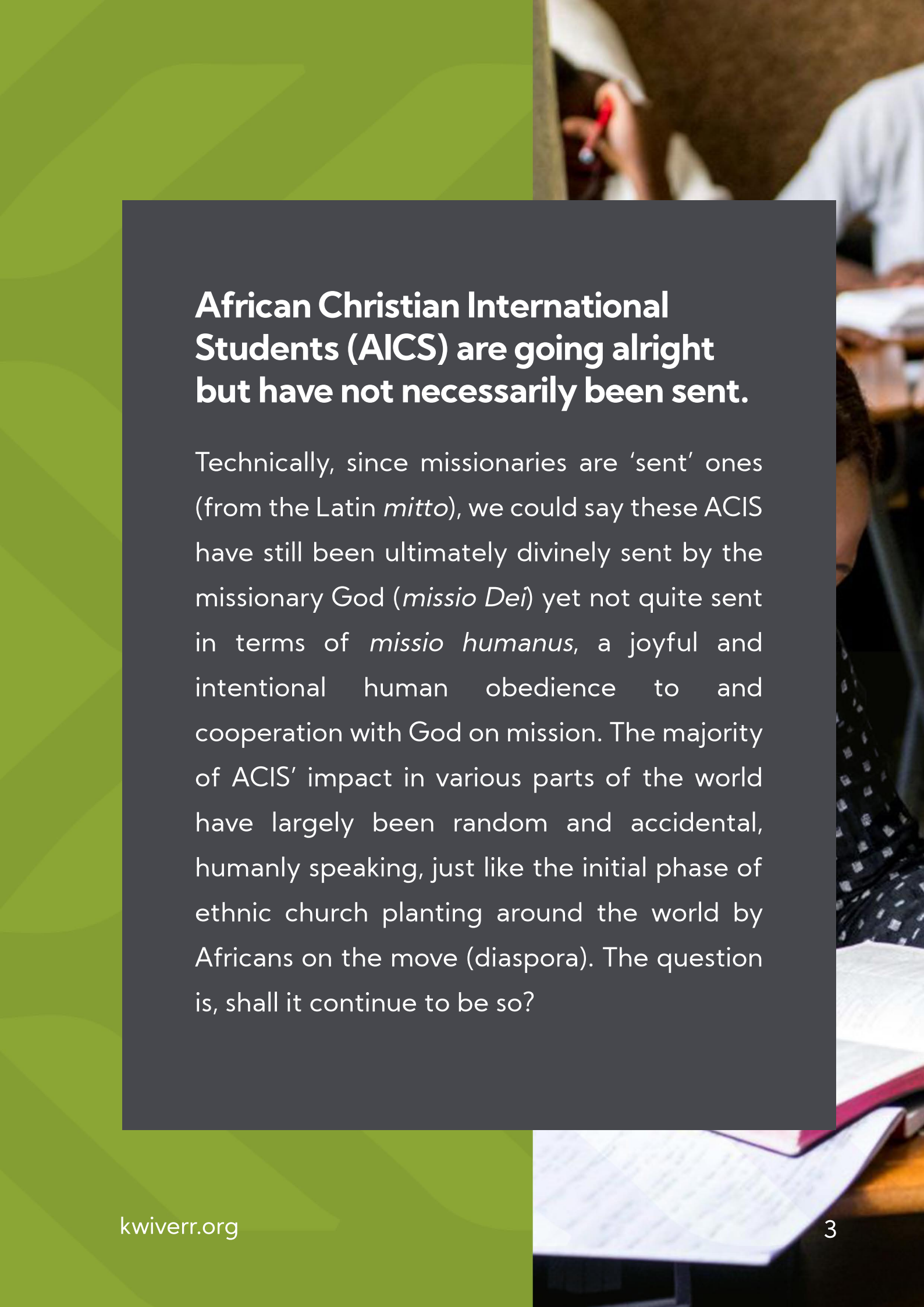
Note of Thanks

Special thanks to all our respondents from around the world. We are especially grateful to friends and co-workers in the Worldwide International student ministries Network (WIN) of the Lausanne Movement who passed the research link around until we had over 100 respondents.

Introduction

For a continent synonymous with mineral wealth, a statement like “the African Church is sitting on a goldmine” may not come as a surprise. Yet gold in this instance is only metaphoric for a specific segment of African society which many, particularly the churches in Africa, tragically, remain oblivious to. As stated in the *Journal of African Christian Thought*, “...there is a steady, legal flow of hundreds of thousands of young people, with huge ramifications for the mission of God that is mostly unrecognized and untapped: international students to and from Africa.”¹

¹Yaw Perbi, ‘The African International Student Phenomenon: Turning an Unsung Force into a Tour-de-force in Mission Dei.’ *Journal of African Christian Thought* Vol. 24, No. 2, Akropong-Akuapem: Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, December 2021, 41.

The background of the page is a photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, a student's hand is visible holding a red pen over a notebook. In the background, other students are seated at desks, some looking towards the camera and others looking down at their work. The lighting is warm and indoor.

African Christian International Students (ACIS) are going alright but have not necessarily been sent.

Technically, since missionaries are 'sent' ones (from the Latin *mitto*), we could say these ACIS have still been ultimately divinely sent by the missionary God (*missio Dei*) yet not quite sent in terms of *missio humanus*, a joyful and intentional human obedience to and cooperation with God on mission. The majority of ACIS' impact in various parts of the world have largely been random and accidental, humanly speaking, just like the initial phase of ethnic church planting around the world by Africans on the move (diaspora). The question is, shall it continue to be so?

Gold Prospecting | Demographics

In July 2022, Kwiverr set out to survey ACIS in preparation for the Lausanne Global Diaspora Consultation in Cape Town, South Africa in August 2022. Of the 116 respondents from 16 African countries who participated, the mean age was 34 years, ranging from 20 to 59 years of age. They were almost split down the middle with 50% male and 50% female. The ACIS hailed from (in alphabetical order) Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo DRC, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

A slight majority (56%) were alumni, 40.5% current or imminent students (already admitted and about to set off) and 3.5%, both. Impressively, almost all respondents (84.5%) knew that currently Africa has more Christians than any other continent in the world.

DEMOGRAPHICS

116
Respondents

16
African Countries



the mean age was **34** years,
ranging from **20** to **59** years of age



50%
Male & Female

85.4%

knew that currently Africa has more Christians
than any other continent in the world

56%
were alumni

40.5%
current students

3.5%
both

Gold Prospecting | Results

The overwhelming majority (77%) went to study in a Global North destination with 3% of them having had the opportunity to do both the Global North and the Global South. **Half of them considered themselves as missionaries before traveling while the other half did not.** However, while studying, a slight majority (61.2%) considered themselves as missionaries. Some respondents who stated not participating in missions as internationals acted so because they did not see themselves as capable of serving as missionaries. Others stated their host countries were statistically Christian and therefore did not need further missionary work. A handful of participants were indifferent and did not see the need to engage in missions since they traveled for the sole purpose of studying. These raise worrisome issues about the level of missional discipleship of ACIS.

Participants who considered missions while studying in other countries mainly did so because they had a zeal for Christian missions and had it nurtured by engaging in voluntary missionary work while in their home countries. Some others saw missions as a Christian duty while studying.

Gold Prospecting | Results

For the 58 participants (50%) who stated their initial zeal for missions as outbound ACIS, only 20 out of them (34%) had actually taken Kairos or other missions-related courses like Every International's online modules or undergone denominational summer camp evangelism training. The remaining 38, a majority of 66%, even though passionate and considered themselves as missionaries before leaving Africa as international students hadn't participated in any form of equipping or empowering course.

A number of ACIS who engaged in missionary activities while studying did so because they had participated in outreaches, crusades and local missionary activities before traveling to study. Some also participated in the activities of Christian missionary societies they were introduced to during school orientations in their host countries.

RESULTS

80% went to study in a Global North

93 Participants

50% stated their initial zeal for missions



34%

of the above zealous half had actually taken Kairos or other missions-related courses/training

66%

of the above zealous half hadn't participated in any form of equipping or empowering

75%

overall had no missionary training whatsoever

78%

had never taken the Kairos or Perspectives on the World Christian Movement courses

8%

had heard about them

62.1% had not established any relationship with a local church at their destination



With the overall 29 participants (25%) who stated having a little training in intercultural missions, they confessed such training was not of much help since they experienced the culture shock of a high resistance to the gospel and unfavorable state or school laws on religious activities.

Participants who stated their inability to engage in missionary work while studying did so because they had an academic work overload and could not afford the time for extracurricular activities which were religious in nature. While we must acknowledge the reality of academic load, and that excelling academically is also a good witness to Jesus Christ, a mindset that separates witness from the normal life of a Christian needs to be nipped in the bud. A participant mentioned the fear of being ridiculed for sharing her faith since most of her colleagues were completely engaged in academic work. For some participants who shared this challenge, the presence of Christian support groups would have been a great resource in engaging in international missions.

Most of the ACIS researched (66.4%) had no general cross-cultural training and an even larger percentage (75%) had no missionary training whatsoever. This is even more worrying as 78.4% had never taken the Kairos or Perspectives on the World Christian Movement courses. Eight percent had heard about them. This is an indictment on the Church as a whole, to send unprepared soldiers to the battlefield.

Most of these ACIS (62.1%) had not established any relationship with a local church at their destination. Yet that is not only the simplest thing to do in reforming the outbound ACIS stream, it should be one of the first, for mission is first and foremost not even doing anything but *being* the people of God. As tragic as not sharing the gospel, is not living in Christian community as Hebrews 10:24-25 admonishes. It is the witness of presence. And yes, we have seen and heard many stories of hitherto Christians falling away from the faith after arriving in a foreign land, especially in the West, as international students.

Special Emphasis on Need and Want for Training

Looking back, 82.9% of African Christian international alumni in particular said they wish they had prepared well enough to be missional/missionaries in another country. It is remarkable that even for the 50% who considered themselves missionaries before heading out, only 34% of them had some form of training before departing. Some alumni expressed the need for organized training ahead of traveling to study. A participant expressed that prior training would have made her more aware and prepared for the need of missions. Such a training would have enlightened these respondents on the needs and expectations of different cultures. The majority (69.9%) said they would be willing to attend a cultural and missionary training before departing for their studies. It would be interesting to find the reasons for the 19% who said they wouldn't be willing to attend such training.



SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON NEED AND WANT FOR TRAINING

82.9% African Christian international alumni wish they had prepared better

50% considered themselves missionaries before heading out

34% of the half that considered themselves as missionaries had some form of training before departing

69.9% willing to attend a cultural and missionary training before departing for their studies

Immediate Innovative Interventions

Kwiverr has been approached by a church on the University of Ghana campus in Legon, Accra to assist in designing a strategic and comprehensive course that will prepare their many ACIS who go year after year, yet are not properly sent. Dr. Ria Llanto Martin, Senior Research Fellow at Kwiverr, is the lead on the project and a number of modules are already underway. Interests from other parts of the continent are an indication that this will be a gift to the wider body of Christ.

International students have typically been seen by the Western Church as “missions at our doorstep.” While that is still largely true, we hereby call on the same body of Christ in the Global North to be alert to ACIS as “missions *help* at our doorstep.”

Other interventions have been prescribed in the Kwiverr international director’s paper at the Lausanne Global Diaspora Consultation in Cape Town, South Africa, soon to be published by Langham.

Research Recommendation

It is highly recommended that a wider version of this study (at least 1,000 respondents) be conducted sooner than later to establish an even more certain baseline for the current centrifugal mission of God through ACIS. This will be especially important in measuring the tangible changes that interventions in the next few years result in.

Conclusion

The largely unaware and unprepared hordes of African Christian International Students virtually unseen and unsent by the African Church, the most populous and youngest in the world, is a tragic tale. Considering how visas and funding are primary bones of contention in sending African missionaries from the continent yet these are already a given with this ACIS demographic, what are we waiting for? Ponder for a moment how the accidental impact of ACIS has left indelible marks on many people in umpteen places on the planet and imagine how an intentionality in sending these unaware and unprepared missionaries could be significantly impactful. Shall we responsibly mine our God-given gold in this era or keep on comfortably sitting on it?

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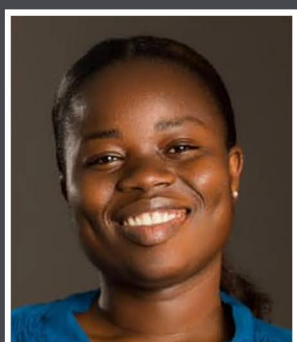
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Think Tank | Incubator | Lab | Accelerator

We dream of a day
when every African Christian
International Student who goes is sent.
Hasten that day, O Lord!

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