**Kaunda, Chammah J.**

# Nyambura J. Njoroge's ecumenical theological education vision for African Christianity

**In:**

Chitando, Ezra; Mombo, Esther; Gunda, Masiiwa Ragies (Eds.), That all may live! : essays in honour of Nyambura J. Njoroge, Bamberg : University of Bamberg Press, p. 89-108. 2021. DOI: 10.20378/irb-50019

**Bookpart - Published Version**

DOI of the Article: 10.20378/irb-93729

Date of Publication: 18.03.2024

# Nyambura J. Njoroge's Ecumenical Theological Education Vision for African Christianity[1]

*Chammah J. Kaunda*

## Introduction

Nyambura J. Njoroge is one of the most significant and courageous African women theological voices in 21st century. This chapter utilises Njoroge as a *lens* to conceptualise what is seen as ther main concern of her ecumenical theological education vision for African Christianity, especially during her tenure as Global Coordinator of Ecumenical Theological Education (hereafter, ETE). The second aim is to investigate what she saw to be significant and how that has continued to influence her theological thinking through her writings. The investigation is divided into three main sections. First, I provide a brief biographical account of Njoroge. In the second section, I evaluate some of the main projects that she supported in Africa. In the third section, I analyse some of the emerging theological themes in the light of Njoroge's theological thinking on theological education.

## Njoroge, a "Lamenting Woman Theologian"

Nyambura Njoroge (2002:53), whose first name literally means "the-rain," is one among the most influential African women theologians with an innate ability to articulate a vision of African Christianity that is firmly anchored in African religio-cultural heritage and within critical issues of peace, justice, and dignity without losing its historical roots and ecumenical dimensions. Njoroge has lived up to her name as a theological blessing to the church in Africa. She perceives her theological voice as a lamentation, a tool to decolonise the mind from internalised exploitation and oppression as women and as Africans (2002:51). At the foundation of her academic life has always been an insatiable craving and a search for a "life-

[1] This chapter is based on my doctoral thesis in African Theology, completed in 2013.

transforming and life-giving ethics" for an "empowering and liberating ministry" (2008b:114). Kenyan born, Njoroge has had an experience of "a lifetime of firsts," including being the first African woman to study at St. Paul's United Theological College (now St. Paul's University) located in Limuru, Kenya and at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in the US (Hill and Melton 2009). She was the first woman to be ordained to the ministry in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in 1982, and the first African woman to receive a doctorate of philosophy (PhD) from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1992 and the first ordained African woman to earn a PhD in any theological field (Hill and Melton 2009). She is one of the founders of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) (Njoroge 2001d). Njoroge worked with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), in Geneva, Switzerland, before serving as the first woman Global Coordinator of the ETE of the World Council of Churches (WCC), a position she held from 1999 to 2007, whereupon she moved to her position as Coordinator of the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) (later, Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy), of the WCC.

Through her critical reflection on African Christianity, Njoroge has shown the crucial role that the church must play in the transformation of Africa through a critical engagement between the religio-cultural and social, political and economic context of the contemporary African experience and the gospel promise of liberation, justice, peace and abundant life for all members of the African Christian community. Njoroge's ecumenical vision is pinned on the view that ecumenical theological education is a foundation to interpreting and understanding how Africans are travelling with God their Creator and Source of Life in the church and world entrenched in strife and life-denying forces. In a bid to articulate her ecumenical vision, Njoroge has written extensively on African women's theologies and ethics, ecumenical theological education, sexual and gender-based violence, HIV & AIDS, gender and sexualities. Her (2008b:118) ecumenical vision is based on collaboration with theological educators and students to critically examine the way the church and community leaders can be prepared for a broader range of ministries both for the ordained and laity. She (2013:39) believes African religious leaders must be equipped to engage effectively with contemporary issues such as "HIV, sexual reproductive health and rights, abortion, barrenness, ageing, and sexuality" for "all issues that complicate the struggle for life after birth, dignity, justice, and

peace." She (2013: 39) laments, however, that "such personal issues remain at the periphery of the priority lists of churches, theological institutions, and ecumenical organisations." Placed within the broader perspective of African women theological methodological/pedagogical reflections, Njoroge offers a critique of power relationships along the lines of gender, class, race, and sexualities as mutually defining and reinforcing systems of oppression which form matrices of power and domination.

## Sustained Attention and Support Emphasis

Njoroge has done a lot for African theological education. Some of the projects she supported have had a tremendous contribution not only across Africa, but internationally. As ETE director, she supported the Circle, but also took a keen interest in strengthening African women theologians and students in theological institutions (Kanyoro 2002:25). She enabled the Circle women to travel for theological conferences and consultations. Njoroge (2013: 40, 42) has also assisted in curriculum development of gender and theological education in Africa. She argues for a critical mass of students to have opportunities for "transformative learning", "as well as visionary and transformational leaders" "to engagement in God's mission for justice, peace, and struggle for life."

This approach is described as a "Journey of Hope" which began with a consultation Njoroge organised and supported at Kempton Park, Gauteng, South Africa in 2002 which was jointly planned with the Council-wide Framework for Special Focus on Africa. The objective of the consultation was to "reflect and critically evaluate theological education and ecumenical formation in Africa and, to formulate together strategies for action" (Njoroge 2002:1, WCC 2002:2). The consultation pondered on the question: "what kind of theologies and ethical value systems inform and help shape the church, Christianity and ecumenism in Africa?" (Njoroge 2002:2). According to Njoroge (2002:1), the consultation was informed by the WCCs concern about how church leaders were being equipped for their ministry, mission and ecumenical involvement. In addition, since the eighth General Assembly in Harare in 1998, the WCC had made Africa a special focus of programmatic activities until the next Assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006. The consultation was developed from the;

> Journey of Hope, which took a crucial step with the Harare Covenant of Africans both from the continent and the Diaspora at the WCC 8th (Jubilee) Assembly held in Harare, Zimbabwe in December 1998, called for "a new vision of life for our people in Africa and for the rest of the world". This vision was also an affirmation of the Johannesburg dream expressed by Africans in May 1997 which called "for creative unity and solidarity among Africans; the elimination of all dividing walls and structures of enslavement; reconciliation and healing of human brokenness; and responsible management of human and natural resources in the spirit of Pan-Africanism (WCC 2002:2).

The Harare Covenant called for "unity and solidarity" of Africans both from the continent and the Diaspora. In the quest to respond to the question mentioned above, the delegates developed an elaborate and concrete outline of commitments as part of the Plan of Action. These commitments, which were projected as being long term, were developed at five levels with critical declarations, each beginning with the phrase "we commit ourselves to ..." Njoroge, through the ETE, until 2007, made an excellent contribution to the implementations and achievement of many of these commitments (Werner 2010:287). Werner (2010:286) narrowed the commitments to those that have made a noticeable impact since the consultation:

**First**, the Circle had received encouragement for the participation of women in theological education and research and for their voices to be heard more. Isabel Phiri (2005:37) noted that it is from this consultation that the Circle embarked on the process of rethinking the theological education in Africa. Njoroge, through the ETE, assisted in curriculum development for gender and theological education and the call for mainstreaming gender issues in theological education. Some theological institutions in Africa have taken up the challenge of mainstreaming gender issues in their curricula; for example, the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics of the University of KwaZulu-Natal offers post-graduate studies in Gender and Religion.

**Second**, the commitment focused on public health to take on board concerns such as violence, HIV and other dreaded diseases. Gender issues, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and ecumenism have become a major concern of the ETE-based initiative for mainstreaming HIV & AIDS in theological education in Africa, a programme which is now carried forward by EHAIA of which Njoroge herself has served as the Programme Executive. "EHAIA promotes HIV competence among

churches and works with theological institutions to integrate and mainstream HIV into theological curricula as well as addressing the root causes of the pandemic" (WCC 2018). This programme led to the formulation of a multi-sectoral approach to education and research on effective ways of fighting HIV & AIDS (Njoroge 1999-2007:3). Musa Dube served as the WCC HIV & AIDS Theology Consultant for Africa from 2002 to 2003, and has been instrumental in the curriculum formulation and training of people for HIV competence in sub-Saharan Africa. The mainstreaming of HIV & AIDS in theological education curricula is perhaps one of the most crucial achievements in the history of theological education responding to this issue (see Dube 2003b; 2003c). The HIV & AIDS curriculum that was formulated has been translated in Spanish, French and Portuguese (Njoroge 1999-2007). While these achievements reveal significant progress, as Ezra Chitando (2010:243) is careful to point out: "there is still a lot of work to be done before theological institutions in Africa become HIV competent." Chitando, who succeeded Dube as WCC HIV & AIDS Theology Consultant, has focused on how issues of masculinities and sexualities play a key role in the spread of HIV & AIDS in Africa. The curriculum has made a significant contribution to contextualising and theological institutions relevant in their response to African needs.

**Third**, the commitment to address the concerns of people with disabilities such as incorporating signed language subjects in theological curriculum has been vigorously applied by the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) in cooperation with the ETE/WCC. As Samuel Kabue (2010:232), Consultant/Executive Secretary for the EDAN has affirmed, the EDAN saw the need to focus on theological institutions as the most suitable approach towards conscientising students and engaging the churches about people with disabilities. Njoroge worked in partnership with the EDAN to promote curriculum development. This too has been translated into Spanish, Portuguese and French (Njoroge 2006:7). This curriculum led to the introduction of a two-year Master's in Social Transformation (MTS) at the *Universite Protestante au Congo*. The global significance of these two curricula demonstrates that Africa has reached a stage where African Christianity is seen to have something significant to share with the global ecumenical family. Africa is becoming a global theological womb.

**Fourth**, the commitment was "supporting and encouraging the networking of all TEE institutions in Africa in their efforts to sharing materials and standardising their qualifications." This commitment has also been

taken up by the formation of the All-Africa Theological Education by Extension Association (ANTEEA) (see Mabuluki 2010).

As can be observed, Njoroge perceives the need for African theological education so as to enhance life and facilitate the creation of a humane-community within which justice and equality are enshrined as basic rights. In fact, through the initiative of both Njoroge and Musimbi Kanyoro, a section within St. Paul's University library was developed and equipped with books on feminist theologies and other related subjects (Njoroge 2001d:257). Through this effort, the library has become one of the best theological libraries in Kenya. It was also during her time as Global Coordinator of the ETE that the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa introduced the Gender and Religion Programme at postgraduate level.

**In summary**, it is through such projects that Njoroge endeavours to promote the WCC agenda for African theological education. The questions that arise are: by supporting such projects, what kind of theological education does Njoroge envision for Africa? In other words, what is Njoroge's theological understanding of the function and purpose of theological education? Building on these questions, the next section will explore Njoroge's theological vision for an African theological education that promotes the principles of justice, peace and dignity in an African Christian community.

## Ecumenical Theological Imagination

The aim of this section is to articulate Njoroge's theological vision for an African theological education by analysing the emerging themes from the kind of projects she supported during her period as the Global Coordinator of the ETE and as Programme Executive, EHAIA. A thematic approach in light of Njoroge's written work is utilised with a view to giving a concise view of her theological vision for an African theological education. Of the many themes which can readily be identified from Njoroge's sustained sponsored projects, three in particular will be discussed.

## An Appropriate Curricular

One of the main concerns emerging from above is the need to create an appropriate curriculum for transformative learning in African theological education. Njoroge spent considerable resources and energies in trying to develop appropriate curricula. She is convinced that the dominant content of the curricula reveal the kind of theologies that are shaping and influencing the destiny of the African continent. Njoroge (2004:87) believes that the twenty-first century context of Africa demands an ecumenical theological curriculum that includes a critical evaluation of what exists in all areas of study currently offered. The question is: what kind of ideology should shape an ecumenical theological curriculum?

She has always believed that transformative ecumenical education is one of the most critical sites through which God has been leading "Africans to peace, justice, and dignity, as more Africans are enabled to address the oppressive structures that have condemned millions to lives of misery and suffering" (Njoroge 2013:40). She envisaged ecumenical theological education and resources as significant in enabling theological institutions to make informed decisions about what should be included or dropped from their teaching curriculum. Njoroge (2004:87) argues that the curriculum that is most needed is one that enables theological institutions to explore the causes of pain and suffering in the lives of African people and seek to identify what can bring life to people during destruction and death. According to Njoroge (2004:87), such a curriculum takes seriously the pedagogy of the oppressed and education for critical consciousness while affirming its biblical, theological and spiritual orientation consistent with the mission of God. The curriculum will have to pay critical attention to gender issues, leadership models, people with disabilities, HIV & AIDS, sexual and gender-based violence, refugees, the poor and the many other challenges present in Africa. Such a curriculum implies that contextualisation must take these existential challenges seriously. Njoroge (2004:99) further argues that an appropriate curriculum for ecumenical theological education should be both deconstructive and constructive and must utilise a variety of disciplinary tools. Put differently, Njoroge calls for a curriculum that can utilise feminist and liberationist theories to help foster justice, peace, dignity, freedom and responsibility in Africa (Njoroge 2004:100). Njoroge (2001d: 255) urges that theological education must ensure a fresh and critical engagement with socio-cultural critiques that leave no stone unturned in an ecumenical search for healing, wellbeing

and fullness of life. For Njoroge (2004:100), space must be given to baptised members of the church to fashion the curriculum under the guidance of trained leaders and theologians. That said, Njoroge does not give space to interreligious dialogue in the formulation of the curriculum. This raises a question: In recognising the religious plurality of Africa, should theological curriculum create a 'diaspace' (dialogue space) with other religions?

This implies more than just introducing a new curriculum or adding some few new courses to the old ones. Instead, it demands a paradigm shift about African theological education. Njoroge calls for rethinking curricula and pedagogical assumptions in most theological institutions in Africa, by not only contextualisation of curricula, but by also appreciating and strengthening women's leadership among theological educators in each theological institution in Africa. This implies that creating an integrated curriculum should go hand-in-hand with developing gendered theological educators with contextual mind-sets. The creation of new curricula will yield very little results with the same brainwashed male-shaped theological educators.

## 'Doing' Theology

Njoroge early in her theological work made a shift from theology as an abstract noun to theology as a verb. For her, theology is something religious people do rather than what they merely think. It is interactional work that goes along with being a religious person. Religious people are always performing theology even when they do not take time to reflect on their daily experiences. Njoroge (2000, 1997b) calls for a critical orientation toward a liberating and transforming theological education when she criticises African male theologians for their uncritical retrieval of African culture and their failure to include the voices of African women in liberation and inculturation. As with many African women theologians (see Phiri 1997b:68), Njoroge's African womanist theological perspective initially emerged as a reaction to the exclusion of African women's experiences in patriarchal society. Njoroge (1997b:77) argues that by taking the religio-cultural plurality of Africa seriously, the Circle decided to embrace African women with various religious orientations and ideologies to be part of the sisterhood of 'doing' theology. Njoroge (1997a:8, 1997b:77) de-

lineates that doing theology is a way of "participation and exploration, emphasising the activity that produces theology." In other words, it is the struggle with God's word to find meaning in meaningless circumstances, as African Christians confront the systemic socio-political and economic powers and principalities that continue to deny them life. This emerged from an understanding that as the situation changes so is the way theology is conceptualised. Theology is no longer seen as a complete and established body of knowledge that must be handed down to students. Instead, theology is an activity of a given community that demands that emphasis be laid not so much on thinking as on doing. Doing theology focuses not so much on abstract and ontological ideas emerging from the past generations. Instead, it finds its locus in addressing current life-threatening/destroying and life-affirming/giving issues. Consequently, authentic theological education emerges from within the womb of a given community and responds to the existential challenges of that particular community. Despite this new orientation of theological education, Njoroge (1997a: 9-10) highlights three issues that have not been addressed adequately. First, the purpose of theological education is to help students in their quest to "learn to be human." Njoroge feels that African Christians have not yet learned to be truly human, for when one looks at the extreme violence that has been perpetuated on the continent, it is doubtful whether theological education is making any difference whatsoever. Second, African Christians have not been taught how to do theology or how to seek to live as Christians in their context and by applying their minds and faith to their problems in the light of a global agenda. Instead, the African church has perpetuated a soul-saving theology inherited from its Western missionary progenitors, which disregards societal challenges. Third, awareness has not been created to reflect that by participating in doing theology, the masses in the church engage in the event of producing theology, which theologians craft systematically into academic language. The implication of this is that, constructing and living theologically is a shared communal process. In this process, both lay people and theologians as members of a given community are involved, in various ways, in articulating a theology for their community. It also implies that all learning is contextual in the sense that it is historically, socially and culturally situated and responds to such a context.

Njoroge (2001c:240) believes that the most important resource that is most often overlooked and undermined in theological education is that of

the people in the community. Indeed, sometimes theologians are in danger of living as if they are not members of any community. To counter this, Njoroge (2001c:237) proposes a holistic community-based approach, especially in the context of HIV & AIDS, which is based on encouraging people to undergo "self-scrutiny, discovery, repentance, healing and growth." This model demands a critical, social, ethical, cultural, theological and biblical reflection and analysis of the daily realities of the community through critical encounters with them as *subjects* of their life and not *objects* of study. In other words, doing theology is based on cultivating holistic interdisciplinary theological ways of looking for solutions in Africa. Therefore, Njoroge (2008a:226) argues for the urgent need to provide a holistic interdisciplinary approach to the multiple existential challenges the African continent is facing. While interdisciplinary perspectives must be stressed upon, it is also important to highlight that the approach is limited in the sense that it does not give theological education the power to transcend the boundaries of academic disciplines or embrace their integral nature. This is important because the challenges being experienced in Africa are not confined to any single discipline.

## New Ways of Doing Theology

In calling for disentangling theological education from its colonial entanglement as an abstract scientific project, Njoroge (2001c:254) laments that the process of creating a new theological thinking in Africa has been long overdue. She (2013: 40) opines that African theologians "are not alone in asking critical questions, providing transformative learning, and rethinking the whole question of understanding and experiencing faith" and social challenges. The current existential challenges in Africa are screaming in the ears of the African church to construct its own theological discourse, which will inspire Christians to speak words that affirm life by subverting and resisting theologies of death. In her call to rethink theology from the underside of modernity, Njoroge (2001c:254) stresses the point that;

> Even long before the scourge of HIV/AIDS, dare I say that creating new theological thinking is long overdue? For so long, many churches in Africa have been living with imported theology, which does not speak to the fears and hopes of the people ... I am here begging for a theology that will help us ask critical questions about our inactivity or wrongdoing ... a theology that will creatively help us to retell our story of colonization, cultural and

> religious imperialism, people's resistance and struggle for land and freedom to the point where we say no to injustice, exploitation, globalization and senseless death.

In short, the theology that Njoroge is calling for emerges and finds its locus in the concrete existential experiences of African people. Njoroge (2008b: 118; 2005a: 29-46) believes that theologians stand to gain if they pay critical attention to the lived experiences of people who have made a significant difference in ending suffering and restoring dignity in seemingly hopeless circumstances. In the view of Njoroge (1999:54);

> Building on communitarian ethics means taking into account African methods of sharing information and passing on knowledge, for instance, singing, storytelling, folklore, proverbs/sayings and rituals, which would reaffirm cultural values that give sense of belonging and meaning to people.

It is in this context that she demands a transforming theological education that can facilitate social transformation in Africa. Njoroge describes the process of such transformation in five crucial steps. First, it must take the mission of God seriously as the liberating response of God to Africa. Such a mission is God's agenda which comes to us through the life and person of Jesus Christ (Njoroge 1994: 21). This mission demands a partnership between women and men as the substratum for "participation and community building where mutual love, justice and respect for all life are the building blocks" (1994: 30). Njoroge (nd: 3) argues that there is an urgent need for Christian leaders with wisdom and deep insight into what is going on in communities and are involved in self-retrospection and theological reflection on God's vision of a just and equitable African Christian community enshrined in the biblical promise. This is crucial, especially because the struggle for contextual theological education and theological thought has already begun to bear fruit on the African continent. Njoroge (nd: 4) reveals that in the last two decades, there has been a small, yet significant group, of African theologians who are the product of the contextualisation of theological education; stepping in to provide important leadership in addressing the HIV pandemic, violence, globalisation and in developing contextual theologies and teaching in new and creative ways suited to the context of Africa. In Njoroge's view, unless theological education finds its locus in developing leaders for Africa; the quality, effectivity and empowering of leaders for the church and society at all levels will remain inadequate.

The second crucial step is that theological education will need to include the voices of African women. African women, through the Circle, have written articles and books on women's experiences and perspectives in African religion and culture, affirming its life-giving practices and criticising its destructive elements. Njoroge (1997b:80-81) contends that in order for theological education to become more liberating in Africa, it must affirm and ensure women's full participation in both studying and teaching theology, otherwise the "truth will remain hidden, and the life-affirming African theology is doomed to fail." Indeed, theological education will benefit significantly if it takes the voices of African women theologians seriously. This raises several important questions: to what extent are the books written by African women theologians utilised in various theological institutions in Africa? Are there some empirical studies that have been conducted across the continent to investigate the number of theological institutions that use, as part of their theological material, the literature written by African women theologians? In what ways is African theological education encouraging the use of these materials or making them available in various theological institutions?

In the view of Njoroge (1996a:12, 1996b:9), unless theological education helps to facilitate building an inclusive community which takes the concerns of children, the poor, women, sex workers, gender and sexual orientation communities, and the neglected at heart, theological institutions will continue to produce men and women who are gender blind and who have no compassion for the excluded and oppressed. Njoroge (1997b:83) firmly calls for a "justice-oriented" theological education which will take into account everything that keeps women economically and sexually exploited, culturally dominated, and politically alienated. What is being underlined here is the need to encourage and empower African women to study theology by finding ways and means of raising theological scholarship grants for them because funding seems to be the most critical hindrance. Justice demands that theological institutions in Africa respond to the needs of women, their experiences and perspectives in such a way that they are taken as core values in shaping theologies, teaching and research methodologies, and in the way of doing theological education (2005a:41).

The third crucial step for African theological education is found in the theological response to HIV & AIDS. For Njoroge (nd: 2), this requires the church in Africa to make a 'U-Turn' in the way it has addressed or not addressed this crucial issue. She sees HIV & AIDS as a disease that thrives on multi-dimensional social injustice at every level. "It is an epidemic

within the social epidemic of injustice" (Dube 2003a: vii). This means that theological education must confront the issues of HIV & AIDS in an activist manner. In this, Njoroge argues for the need to address the violent legacies of bad theology in order to envisage a theological education that can help in creating a new future. Njoroge (nd: 2) argues that theological institutions are the sites of struggle against existential challenges in Africa. Njoroge recognises the efforts of small groups of theologians and pastors who have worked hard to formulate ecumenical HIV & AIDS curriculum for theological institutions in Africa and later in regard to the TEE methodology. Njoroge is of the view that this needs to be properly addressed within the broader social injustices of violence, human rights abuses, racism, poverty, child abuse, gender inequality, ageism, classism, ethnicity, international injustice, and sex-based discrimination among other social injustices. By so doing, theological education will be crucial in facilitating ways in which the community of faith can become aware of the importance of food security, healthcare, human rights and the human dignity of the majority of African people who live in the constant struggle of such existential needs. It must also engage in peace-making and the transformation of the African church from the house of oppression and languishing for women, to an inclusive household of God, free of sexism, exploitation and oppression (Njoroge 2001b:81).

The fourth crucial step that African theological education must take is towards issues of persons living with disabilities. There is an urgent need for African theological education to be inclusive, sensitive and relevant to persons living with disabilities both in the churches and society in general (2001a:7). Njoroge stresses that ministry with and for persons living with disabilities is not an option but is an integral part of the life and mission of the church. This is why theological institutions must be in the forefront of promoting and supporting the work of EDAN. For Njoroge (2001a:9), addressing concerns voiced by persons living with disabilities means being critically engaged in the societal and political issues of the day. Hence, persons living with disabilities must be seen as the people of God who need to be prepared for the mission of God in the world.

The fifth crucial step is the search for ecumenism in theological education. Promoting ecumenical learning seems to be the most difficult task of African theological education. Njoroge (2003:34-40) acknowledges the daunting nature of the task by identifying six challenges and obstacles for ecumenical learning as follows: (i) the art of teaching ecumenically; (ii)

relevant and contextual theological literature; (iii) stewardship and ecumenical leadership formation; (iv) teaching about faith and economy; (v) mainstreaming other major issues affecting African people; (vi) mentoring and networking. Njoroge argues that the majority of theological institutions in Africa are yet to conceptualise the meaning and implications of ecumenical learning. This raises the important question: to what extent are theological educators in Africa familiar with the concept of intentional ecumenical learning?

One can contend that with the mushrooming of Christian universities in Africa, ecumenical learning will become crucial for doing theological education. Even though intentional ecumenical learning may not yet be taking place, the majority of these institutions are ecumenical in their teaching staff which can act as platforms for envisioning intentional ecumenical learning. Njoroge (1998:10) contends that the multi-dimensional existential challenges of contemporary Africa hold some of the keys to empower and encourage "churches to engage in mutual learning processes not just within the same denominations but ecumenically." In the view of Njoroge (2001d: 306), ecumenical theological education "is a holistic approach in recruiting, nurturing, guiding, equipping, training and preparing" students for "a life of faithfulness in God and critical engagement in the church and the world." Njoroge (2001d: 316) believes that ecumenism is not an option but a gospel imperative, rooted in the Scriptures and yet demands to be conceptualised within "African culture, religion and the stories of African people, their struggles for liberation, freedom, justice, wholeness and life." Similarly, Emmanuel Katongole (1998:39) has called for African theological education to take African people's "story seriously, as a socio-political ideology, capable of mobilising creative social goals and possibilities, as well as engendering a distinctive and alternative social praxis." Two questions from this discussion can be raised: in what ways does African theological education take seriously the stories of African people? What kind of theological education can take seriously the stories of African people?

For Njoroge, African theologians must wrestle with the meaning of ecumenism from the experiences and perspectives of African people. Yet, ecumenical theological education must not be seen as "an end in itself but a means of systematically and intentionally enlightening and educating" the whole people of God for God's mission (Njoroge 2003:34). Njoroge (2005b:235) believes that it is only through ecumenical theological educa-

tion that the African church will be able to overcome "the captivity of narrow confessionalism" and liberate theological education from its erstwhile narrow theological reflection. Njoroge (1995:23) adds that ecumenical theological education is also important for addressing the African disease of dependence on Western systems which permeates all spheres of African life. In addition, there is a need for ecumenism in confronting the many challenges that face Africa today. Njoroge has managed to demonstrate that identity and personhood are gained through the struggle for social transformation and liberation. Hence, the task of theological education is to motivate people to understand their situation and ecumenically work together to experience the liberating and transforming Word of life. Nevertheless, Njoroge is yet to develop her ecumenical theological education vision in addressing the central issues of economic development theory in Africa which are "the balance between industry and agriculture, the best way to finance social expenditures, improving trade relationships between industrialized and industrializing countries, incentives for private producers, how to create jobs and the trade-off between the incomes of this generation and the next," capitalist liberal free market and so on (Fitzgerald 2008:257). The question which arises is therefore, important: does African theological education create leaders that give theological support or justification to the neo-liberal economic system that is denying fullness of life for the poor?

While this agenda might seem too demanding of theological education, to neglect these more practical issues will have serious consequences on the rest of the challenges confronting the African continent. A viable theological education has a responsibility to evaluate the ways in which the economies of African countries affect the quality of life in the continent as a whole. As Katongole (1998:38) observes, African theological education must be aware and critique not only the political forces but also the church for there are Christian practices "which make it impossible for Christians to be good consumers in a liberal capitalist economy." Secondly, Njoroge also generalises about the concept of ecumenism in its obscuring of the African religio-cultural symbols and metaphors. In short, she has not given adequate attention to the contextual grounding of the ecumenical imperative for African theological education. It is my contention that every ecumenical imperative needs contextual metaphors for expression and it is these metaphors which are the embodiment of social transformation. Thirdly, one would have liked to see how ecumenism can help African people deal with the current ecological crisis. The question

is decisive: how does the 'care for creation' become incorporated into theological education and thereby develop theological students as eco-activists for the whole of the created order? Fortunately, many African communities are culturally protective towards creation. Yet, how can intentional ecumenical learning take advantage of that culture in the quest for protection and care of creation?

## Conclusion and Methodological Observations

The chapter has demonstrated that Njoroge's vision of African theological education is more than just a call for recuperating the link between Christian faith and historical realities of African Christians. Instead, it is a call for an alternative African community that celebrates the full humanity of women and men. A critical concern for *life itself* is seen as a criterion for analysing social challenges. Njoroge calls for a theological education that bears witness to the truth of the Christian gospel, through which the incarnation promises to establish a kingdom in the midst of the people of God with justice, peace righteousness and wholeness. Njoroge's vision for an African theological education that promotes justice, peace and dignity for African Christian communities can be summarised as follows: **First**, it acknowledges the critical need for the contextualisation and genderisation of theological education and theological educators as the first step. **Second**, theological education must respond to existential challenges facing the African continent in a multi-sectoral and narrative way. There is no possibility of over-emphasising other existential challenges for they are all interwoven in a social web of injustice. **Third**, Njoroge's view is unmistakably missiological in intent, centred as it is in the *missio Dei*. She believes firmly that the *missio Dei* should be based on a partnership between women and men for the liberation and transformation of society. **Fourth**, she holds an intentional ecumenical vision. Theological education that promotes the principles of justice, peace and dignity should be ecumenical by nature otherwise it cannot help African Christians realise a community built on equity and justice and affirm the dignity of every individual. **Fifth**, it is based on an interdisciplinary approach. It was also highlighted that the interdisciplinary perspective does not transcend the problem of artificial boundaries of academic disciplines. Instead, it only opens the way of dialogue among disciplines while retaining their distinctiveness. It is significant, therefore, that theological education will not only

uphold interdisciplinary scrutiny, but also embrace a more integral approach that brings coherence to academic disciplines. Theological education must come out of the confinement of isolationism and narrowness on theological discourse and transcend the boundaries of disciplines through a more integral approach (this is unavoidable because of the cognitive nature of pluralism, languages, ethnicities, religions, denominations, etc.) in order to give viable solutions to the critical existential questions that African Christians are struggling with in their daily lives.

## References

### *Primary*

Njoroge, Nyambura J. 1994. "Partnership in God's Mission in Africa Today," Pages 16-31 in Partnership in God's Mission in Africa Today: The Papers and Reports of the Consultation of African Women and Men of Reformed Tradition 9-15 March 1994 Limuru, Kenya, edited by Nyambura J. Njoroge and Páraic Réamonn. Genève: World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

___ 1995. "Ecumenical Theological Education and the Church in Africa Today," *Ministerial Formation* 71: 20-25.

___ 1996a. "Groaning and Languishing in Labour Pains," Pages 3-15 in *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*, edited by Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro & Nyambura J. Njoroge. Nairobi: Acton Publishers.

___ 1996b. "Revising Theological Education and Ministerial Formation," *Ministerial Formation* 75: 6-10.

___ 1997a. "Theological Education and Doing Theology Lessons from the Past," *Ministerial Formation* 78: 7-12.

___ 1997b. "The Missing Voice: African Women Doing Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 99: 77-83.

___ 1998. "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope," *Ministerial Formation* 83: 4-12.

___ 1999. "The Promise and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: Empowering Africans to Search for the Fullness of Life," *Ministerial Formation* 87 (October), 48-56.

___ 2000. *Kiama Kia Ngo: African Christian Feminist Ethic*. Legon: Legon Theological Study Series.

___ 2001a. "Not an Option: Ministry with and for People with Disabilities," *Ministerial Formation* 92: 7-9.

___ 2001b. "A Spirituality of Resistance and Transformation," Pages 66-82 in *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women,* edited by Nyambura J. Njoroge & Musa W. Dube. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

___ 2001c. "Come Now, Let Us Reason Together," *Missionalia* 29/2: 232-257.

___ 2001d. "Talitha Cum! To the New Millennium: A Conclusion," Pages 248-259 in *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women,* edited by Nyambura J. Njoroge & Musa W. Dube. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

___ 2001e. "Transforming Ministerial Ecumenical Formation," *Ecumenical Review* 53/3: 306-318.

___ 2002. "Reclaiming Our Heritage of Power: Discovering Our Theological Voices," Pages 39-57, in *Her Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa,* edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri, Devakarsham Betty Govinden & Sarojini Nadar. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

___ 2003. "Searching for Ways of Promoting Christian Unity in Theological Education and Ministerial Formation," *Ministerial Formation*101: 31-41.

___ 2004. "Ecumenism and Theological Education in Africa," Pages 83-104, in *Theological Education in Contemporary Africa*, edited by Grant LeMarquand & Joseph D. Galgalo. Eldoret: Zapf Chancery.

___ 2005a. "A New of Facilitating Leadership: Lessons from African Women Theologians," *Missiology: An International Review,* XXXIII/1: 29-46.

___ 2005b. "An Ecumenical Commitment: Transforming Theological Education in Mission," *International Review of Mission* 94/337: 248-262.

___ 2005c. "ETE Programme Staff Report 2005, April 2004 – March 2005," in World Council of Churches, Minutes of the Working Group: Ecumenical Theological Education Formation Team, 7-10 April 2005 Chavannes-de-Bogis, Switzerland, 3-10.

___ 2006. "ETE Programme Staff Report 2004, April 2005 –April 2006," in World Council of Churches, Minutes of the Working Group: Ecumenical Theological Education Formation Team, 10th – 11th June 2006 John Knox Centre, Genève, Switzerland, 3-10.

___ 2008a. "Theologizing during Labour Pains: Women, Children and War in the Bible (1 Samuel 4:1-22)," Pages 225-233 in *Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in Theological Education: Experiences and Explorations,* edited by Ezra Chitando. Genève: World Council of Churches.

___ 2008b. "Beyond Suffering and Lament: Theology of Hope and Life," pages 113-120 in *Shaping a Global Theological Mind*, edited by Darren C. Marks. Aldershot: Ashgate.

___ 2013. "Daughters of Africa Heed the Call for Justice, Peace, and Fullness of Life," *International Review of Mission* 102/1: 30-43.

### *Secondary*

Chitando, Ezra. 2010. "Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in theological education," pages 242-250 in *Handbook of Theological Education in the World Christianity: Theological Perspectives – Ecumenical Trends and Regional Surveys* edited by Dietrich Werner, David Esterline & Namsoon Kang. Oxford: Regnum Books International.

Dube, Musa W. 2003a. "IIXh. Theological Education: HIV/AIDS and Other Challenges, A Vision for Mission in the 21st Century: Ways Ahead for Ecumenical Theological Education Theological Education: HIV/AIDS and Other Challenges in the New Millennium," http://www.thecirclecawt.org/focus_areas3d57.html/ [accessed 18 October 2011].

Dube, Musa W. 2003b. "Towards Multi-Sectoral Teaching in a Time of HIV and AIDS," Pages vii-xiii in *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, edited by Musa W. Dube. Genève: WCC Publications.

Dube, Musa W. (ed.) 2003c. *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, Genève: WCC Publications.

Fitzgerald, Valpy. 2008. "The economics of liberation theology," 248-264. http://www.nd.edu/~druccio/documents/VF-LT.pdf/ [accessed 07 February 2012].

Hill, Toya R. & Melton, Michelle E. 2009. "Nyambura Njoroge is a 2009 Distinguished Alum," http://www.lpts.edu/News-Events/article.asp? intid=307/ [accessed 03 January 2012].

Kabue, Samuel 2010. "People with Disabilities and Theological Education: Disability Discourse, Theological Education, and the Journey of EDAN," Pages 230-241in *Handbook of Theological Education in the World Christianity: Theological Perspectives – Ecumenical Trends and Regional Surveys* edited by Dietrich Werner, David Esterline and Namsoon Kang. Oxford: Regnum Books International.

Mabuluki, Kangwa D. 2010. "Diversity Theological Education: Genesis, Development, and Ecumenical Potential of Theological Education by Extension (TEE)," Pages 251-262 in *Handbook of Theological Education in the World Christianity: Theological Perspectives – Ecumenical Trends – Regional Surveys*, edited by Dietrich Werner, David Esterline and Namsoon Kang. Regnum: Regnum Books International.

Kanyoro, Musimbi R. A. 2002. "Beads and Strands: Threading More Beads in the Story of the Circle," Pages 15-38 in *Her Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa,* edited by Isabel A. Phiri, Devakarsham B. Goviden & Sarojini Nadar. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Katongole, Emmanuel M. 1998. "'African Renaissance' and the Challenge of Narrative Theology in Africa: Which Story/Whose Renaissance," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 102: 29-39.

Phiri, Isabel Apawo. 1997b. "Doing Theology in Community: The case of African women theologians in the 1990s," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99: 68-76.

Phiri, Isabel Apawo. 2005. "The Church as a Healing Community: Voices and Visions from Chilobwe Healing Centre," Pages 29-46 in *On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions*, edited by Isabel A. Phiri & Sarojini Nadar. Genève: WCC.

Werner, Dietrich. 2010b. "Viability and Ecumenical Perspective for African Theological Education: Legacy and New Beginnings in Ecumenical Theological Education/World Council of Churches," *Missionalia* 38/2: 275-293.

WCC, 2002. "The Journey of Hope in Africa: Conference on Theological Education and Ecumenical Formation, Plan of Action, 17 - 22 September 2002, Kempton Park, Lutheran Conference Centre Gauteng Province South Africa," 1-7. http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wccmain/documents/p5/ete/Journey%20of20hope%20in%20Africa.pdf/ [accessed 31 December 2011].

WCC, 2012. "Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA)," <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/hivaids-initiative-in-africa-ehaia.html/> [accessed 31 March 2012].

WCC, 2018. "Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA)," https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/ehaia [accessed 16 July 2018].