



# IFES STRATEGIC PLANNING EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS REPORT

## ENGAGEMENT WITH IFES THEOLOGICAL ADVISORS, FACULTY ACADEMICS AND RESEARCH STUDENTS

### INTRODUCTION

This report seeks to provide a compilation of key findings gathered from the listening process from the Engaging University (EU) listserv community and IFES theological advisors. The purpose is to gather insights on global trends, theological shifts and areas IFES should consider incorporate in the next ten years' strategic plan.

Respondents from EU listserv community are mainly from Latin America, EPSA, Europe and South Asia. Amongst those who have responded are research students and faculty members.

The responses from the EU community has its limitation due to low response and limited presentation by regions. Nonetheless, the respondents provided vital insights and often affirms the existing findings gathered from our engagements with national movements and students.

Following are the questions posted to the EU listserv community:

1. In your opinion, what are the top two global trends that are likely to impact IFES university ministry in the next ten years?
2. What are some big intellectual shifts that IFES will need to be prepared for in the next ten years?
3. How engaged is the IFES-affiliated movement in your country with the university?
4. How well connected are Christian faculty and Christian students in your university?
5. What resources would you like to see IFES develop?

Seven (7) theological advisors participated and responded to the following questions:

1. In your opinion, what are the top two global trends that are likely to impact IFES' student ministry in the next ten years?
2. What are some big theological shifts that IFES will need to be prepared for in the next 10 years?
3. How do you think IFES can go about developing theological maturity amongst general secretaries and staff of national movements?
4. What areas of partnerships would you like to see strengthened in IFES?
5. In what ways has IFES declined since your involvement as a student or staff worker?

## FINDINGS

### A. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE TOP TWO GLOBAL TRENDS THAT ARE LIKELY TO IMPACT IFES UNIVERSITY MINISTRY IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS?

The findings presented in this section is a combination of responses from the EU respondents and IFES theological advisors.

#### THE CHURCH

Some of the key highlights with regards to the Christian faith and the church includes:

- The increasing dichotomy of the Christian faith, culture and the world.
- The sacred/secular divide that still prevails in various contexts and limits holistic witness.
- Disillusionment of youth with establishments including political systems and Church, increasing anti-religious mindset that questions the relevance of Faith and Mission.

#### CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Rapid change in higher education landscape was most frequently highlighted by both groups of respondents. Some key issues highlighted are:

- Increasing digitization and automation of life- both threats and opportunities.  
*"Universities are moving more programs to on-line learning only. That means less students on campus. This will make difficult to reach this increasing number of students who "live" in a virtual classroom. This move to on-line learning has been forced now by this pandemic" - theological advisor.*
- Continued neo-liberalisation of the university system, expansion of private universities education.  
*"Increasingly, universities will be put under pressure to absorb more students while funding for infrastructure and other activities will be cut. Guaranteed state funding to universities are likely to be cut and the costs of education increasingly passed on to students. Staff are likely to be burdened with increasingly bureaucratic systems ostensibly aimed at "quality assurance" but in reality, adding greater layers of red tape to existing workloads. This is likely to mean less time for extra-curricular activity for staff and an increased administrative burden for all staff" - faculty staff.*  
  
*"Institutions in many parts of the world are increasingly seen in terms of their utility and their value for GDP and the creation of monetary wealth. In this setting, it will be harder to make an argument for the value of the study of humanities like history, literature, religion, and philosophy and the more human-focused social sciences like anthropology and sociology. At the same time, private universities will continue to grow and be oriented around economic goals*

*rather than goals like the formation of students as human beings, moral beings, or citizens” – theological advisor*

- Dialogue between different positions, either political, ideological, or religious, is being discouraged and in some cases persecuted.

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Mental health issues will continue to rise as students face loneliness, lack of emotional IQ and the ability to relate with empathy in the coming years. IFES ministry will have to be prepared in practical terms to address mental health issues more openly and more proactively.

Fear of the future including impacts of climate change upon society, hopelessness of human survival in a digital age, how to achieve peaceful revolutionary change, up ending the status quo to usher in a new future which will add to the existential anxieties of students. The next generation of students will be angry about the state of the world they have inherited.

## **ECONOMY AND POVERTY**

The Covid-19 pandemic has further deepened social inequality and poverty issues in recent times.

Poverty within the Global South will be scaled further in the short-term. The cost of living and of education may go up, and the living conditions of students may get worse in some parts of the world. Our ministry will have to speak to this context.

Global threat of economic collapse/survival of labour markets/joblessness in a post-pandemic world. This could lead to serious funding issues for students/staff/volunteers.

## **OTHER TRENDS**

Some of the other issues identified are corruption, immigration, persecution, discrimination and global warming & climate change. Proper adaptation to the new normal due to Covid-19 crisis particularly as related to economic implications should also be considered.

*“With many economies being affected, there is a likelihood of increased prevalence of corruption in the poorer countries. This happening in places where corruption is endemic only aggravates the social problem. On this issue, there will be need for confronting deep cultures. The IFES students in these places will be facing corruption as persecution in their journey of faith”.*

*“How immigration will be affected by Covid-19 is left to speculation. However, the global connection between students and graduates will be more intense. It is emerging that traveling will not be the only way of sharing cross-cultural experiences effectively. What an opportunity!”*

## **B. WHAT ARE SOME BIG THEOLOGICAL SHIFTS THAT IFES WILL NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS?**

The findings presented in this section are insights from members of the theological advisory group.

### **SHIFTS IMPACTED BY GLOBAL TRENDS**

Theological advisors raised theological shifts caused by global trends such as human sexuality and environmental issues. There is also a need for growing theological voices of women and marginalized groups, including the poor, weak and voiceless in the church. Advisor raised the importance of more relevant and deeper theological engagement with issues that face students globally (e.g., racism, poverty, climate change, fundamentalism, corruption, ...).

*"The agendas of the LGBT etc. community are pushing churches and other Christian ministries to evaluate their anthropology and genre theology. It is possible to perceive a move towards more acceptance of that agenda".*

*"I see lots of confusion about environmental issues. We are bombarded by supposedly "scientific" evidence that is no more than propaganda. The atheists and humanists are pushing their ideas on the subject and many Christians are taking those ideas without understanding their background. environmental issues".*

### **SHIFT FROM COMPLACENCY TO REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVISM AND REJECTION OF THE STATUS QUO**

Increasingly, students are becoming more passionate and responsive to social issues and causes that impacts the society. The next generation of students will be more activated in protesting social injustice and the status quo. IFES will need to have a robust theology of change to shape the Christian student's worldview and engagements in society.

### **OTHER SHIFTS**

Other theological shifts to note are as follows:

- Shift from old, traditional ecclesiology to a new ecclesiology based a new catechism for a new age, answering new questions.
- Shift from traditional patterns of mission to new partnerships and collaboration in a poly-centric missiology for World Evangelization and Mission.
- Intentional attempts to train and equip students to bridge the secular-sacred divide

- Understanding Christian faith in a pluralistic context rather than with Western philosophy will be important for IFES, and something that IFES can offer to a wider Christian community.
- The challenge of cross-cultural mission and global projects in an increasingly violent world
- Growing irrelevance and harm of Western "evangelical" theologies and methodologies to Majority World contexts.
- The impact of consumerism, celebrity and material culture on Faith and Christian Mission.
- Increased proliferation of church-based groups and sects on campuses with diverse theological underpinnings.
- Realization that the movement is neither a church nor to replace the church. IFES needs to have a general statement of faith with a broad evangelical perspective and a clear manifestation of that statement as IFES movements engage with contextual issues on the ground. There is a need for a better understanding of the theology of the church and para-church and how to practice this relationship in various contexts.

### **C. WHAT ARE SOME BIG INTELLECTUAL SHIFTS THAT IFES WILL NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS?**

Amongst the big intellectual shifts identified by the EU respondents are:

1. The role of and the often-uncritical acceptance of and hopes placed in artificial intelligence
2. The rise of right-wing ideologies and narrow nationalism.
3. The increasing acquisition of astronomical data has strengthened several general principles regarding the origin and evolution of the universe, which, in the mind of some scientists and less informed people who read them, eliminates the need for a creator.
4. There is a careful review of how science is constructed, and the specification of its limits is required, that would contribute to diminishing the apparent tension between science (natural sciences) and faith.

### **D. HOW ENGAGED IS THE IFES-AFFILIATED MOVEMENT IN YOUR COUNTRY WITH THE UNIVERSITY?**

The findings presented in this section are insights from the Engaging University respondents. Most of the respondents' answered "no" or "little engagement" with university.

In the context of South Asia region, engagement with the university in any official capacity is considered not possible. Some national movements have begun intentional conversations with

university premises. However, Christian students have found these conversations challenging. However Christian students do sometimes engage in community-based activities.

### **E. HOW WELL CONNECTED ARE CHRISTIAN FACULTY AND CHRISTIAN STUDENTS IN YOUR UNIVERSITY?**

The findings presented in this section are insights from the EU respondents. Most of the respondents' answered "little" or "not very well-connected". In most cases, there is no relationship between Christian students and professors.

*"Christian faculty and Christian students in my university are not connected to each other within the campus nor with the outside. Most of them are happy in their own world or prefer to affiliate to a non-affiliated body. Across the country, there is an increasing trend of forming "Christian Fellowships" within the campus with no connection to other (global or national) university movements or each local church planting a "prayer cell" within the campus for its church members (although, hopefully, inviting others to join their cells) thus competing 'fellowships' are emerging within the same campus" South Asia national movement*

### **F. WHAT RESOURCES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IFES DEVELOP?**

Some of the recommendations shared by EU respondents are as follows:

1. Encourage the development of resources locally, in the respective languages or for major language groups within a given multilingual country. Encourage more indigenous theologies and put less emphasis on building a kind of unity which tends to be dominated by Western theologies, partly through language.
2. Resources that enable the students and faculty to see their study/work as loving and serving God and thus enabling them to see the meaning and purpose of their study/work beyond their job as source of livelihood.
3. Resources that will enable students and faculty to identify and address contemporary issues and challenges.

### **G. HOW DO YOU THINK IFES CAN GO ABOUT DEVELOPING THEOLOGICAL MATURITY AMONGST GENERAL SECRETARIES AND STAFF OF NATIONAL MOVEMENTS?**

The recommendations shared by theological advisors are as follows:

1. De-emphasize managerial leadership.
2. Re-emphasize biblical studies/biblical hermeneutics/personal application

3. Use sabbatical policy for theological education and training of senior staff (2)
4. Establish links/partnerships with Bible Schools/Theological Seminaries/Christian Study Centers.
5. Promote Biblical and Theological Thinking
6. Promote the leaders and thinkers from the Majority World in IFES.
7. Partner with members of the Theological Advisory Group and with related training initiatives to facilitate intensive courses and online courses, regionally and internationally.
8. Scripture Engagement needs to continue to be emphasized as the main thrust of nurturing sound Biblical Minds among students, staff workers and graduates. Such Scripture Engagement need to be more holistic, with Bible studies, seminars/webinars relevant to and addressing some of the most pressing challenges faced by students- including social and economic challenges.
9. invest more in mature resources people who can provide pastoral care for general secretaries and staff workers in particular. In various contexts, there is particular need to provide more pastoral care for female staff workers.
10. There are many good options of theological programs available on-line.
11. The focus on contemplative prayer times of reflection need to be more intentional in our conferences and training programs. (Many staff workers do not just do enough to create enough time for personal retreats and reflection, which is critical for ongoing maturity
12. Investing time in serious reading and personal exposure outside their own churches and socio-economic contexts.
13. Support students, staff workers with relevant book lists as resources to use in training sessions in various contexts and reading classic books that older generations of IFES staff and students read not long ago
14. Promote cross-regional and cross-cultural staff learning (at present, some larger movements invite staff to their training events, but rarely if ever is there flow the other way).
15. Designing and implementing a global theology curriculum to be a requirement for all general secretaries and staff so all are on the same page.
16. Held regional seminars and consultations to address regional issues of interest to university students to be led by theologians and other Christian scholars of various disciplines.

## **H. WHAT AREAS OF PARTNERSHIPS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE STRENGTHENED IN IFES?**

The recommendations shared by theological advisors are as follows:

1. Partnerships with Mission Agencies and other relevant societies on campuses.
2. Partnerships with Christian Global Issue Networks such as the Lausanne Movement's global platform.
3. Partnerships with Christian NGOs tackling big social problems such as relief agencies like World Vision, Compassion etc. in view of increasing vulnerability of people in various parts of the world related to violence and displacement.
4. Partnerships with Theological Education institutions for staff
5. Partnerships with faculty and lecturers and faculty-led initiatives
6. South to south partnerships
7. Partnership to be more mutually beneficial so that it's not only in terms of the global North sending support- be it staff or other resources to the global South but also the other way round, to explore what the global South movements can contribute to the global North. In other words, global South movements should not always be on the receiving end and global North movements need to be open to learn from those in the global South
8. Explore ways of strengthening partnership with local churches in various context and denominations
9. Short term staff exchange between national movements and regions, particularly between movements in the global south.
10. Support graduates' spiritual growth and journey
11. Decentralise away from Oxford and the West
12. Partnership with initiatives such as the Society of Christian Scholars

## **I. IN WHAT WAYS HAS IFES DECLINED SINCE YOUR INVOLVEMENT AS A STUDENT OR STAFF WORKER?**

Some of the areas which IFES shows a decline as shared by theological advisors are:

1. In my region, Latin America, the groups have lost the theological edge of the first generations as well as the social involvement.
2. IFES today appears to have declined in:

- i. Emphasis on Discipleship of the Mind – ‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind’ (Lk. 10:27). How to train and employ Christian leaders with development of Christian worldview.
  - ii. Giving students a sense of being among the vanguards of social change for the betterment of human society. Although I am not close enough to the Movement today to make an informed judgment on aspects of perceived decline, nevertheless I would venture to say that IFES today appears to have declined in: A. Emphasis on Discipleship of the Mind – ‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind’ (Lk. 10:27). How to train and employ Christian leaders with development of Christian worldview.
3. Leadership transitions within national movements continue to be a challenge in some context.
4. IFES movements are no longer producing prophetic thought-leaders for the wider church in their countries, let alone internationally.
5. Most Regional Secretaries now seem to be more managers and fund-raisers than visionaries.
6. Local and regional groups/leadership could be used more effectively so that IFES decentralises away from the Centre and listens to the voices on the peripheries
7. Graduate and Faculty Ministry is also not as strong as I used to know it to be.
8. The weakness is pastoral care. When graduates are mature and still committed to student ministry, they can be good resource for pastoral care for both students and staff workers.
9. Lack of serious engagement with the university (perhaps this matter was not even a priority in the past).
10. Not progressing much beyond evangelism and Bible study groups. The towards whole life discipleship.