

My Intercultural Experience Portfolio

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Practical Theology (Major in Community Development)

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Certificate Context: EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation (EUCI)

This portfolio has been prepared as part of my participation in the EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation (EUCI). I enrolled in Cohort 2 of the programme during the 2024/25 academic year, attending four 90-minute seminars weekly from 20 May to 13 June 2025.

EUTOPIA, launched in 2019 through the European Commission's European Universities Initiative, is a leading alliance of universities committed to open, inclusive, and innovative education. It includes members across Europe and global partners including Stellenbosch University (South Africa).

This non-credit-bearing certificate recognises international learning and reflective practice. This portfolio highlights my experience in Finland as my primary international engagement.

1. Introduction: About Me

I am Noku Katom, a writer, speaker, and final year master's student in Practical Theology (Community Development). This portfolio reflects on the impact of four key experiences that deepened my understanding of identity, culture, and community: a faith-based exchange in Finland, speaking at Winter School, facilitating a SWEEP branding workshop, and presenting at SU Winter School 2025.

2. Key Activities and Experiences

2.1 Finland Exchange: Abraham Goes Global



In Finland, I participated in a multi-faith exchange exploring cultural and religious identity. This included site visits to churches, mosques, and synagogues, and open dialogues with leaders and students. The experience challenged my assumptions and taught me the importance of context, curiosity, and humility in intercultural settings.

It was in Finland that I began writing my book, *Discovering Identity and Faith in Finland*, a reflection on spiritual formation, cultural diversity, and self-awareness.

2.2 Speaker at the 13th Winter School



I was invited to speak at the 13th Winter School at Stellenbosch University. This gave me a platform to share my reflections from Finland with professors and leaders, emphasizing how intercultural exposure transforms one's view of theology, race, and reconciliation.

2.3 SWEEP Branding Workshop



As Chairperson of SWEEP, I facilitated a workshop that explored the power of naming and self-perception among young African women. This included reflecting on how colonial legacies still affect how women see themselves today. We used the example of Nelson Mandela, whose Xhosa name Rholihlahla was replaced with “Nelson” at school—a small act representing a much larger history of identity erasure (Nelson Mandela Foundation, n.d.).

2.4 SU Winter School 2025 Participation

I will present at Winter School 2025 under the theme: “Embracing Differences: Faith, Identity and Community in a Global Context”, offering a pastoral perspective. Additionally, I will serve as chair for the keynote session titled “Faith, Farming and Food Security: The Church’s Role in Sustainable Agricultural Transformation.”

These contributions are helping me develop into a confident leader in faith-based academic spaces.

3. Themes and Lessons Learned

Faith in a Global Context: Theology must respond to real-world diversity.

Naming and Identity: Owning and reclaiming our histories and cultural legacies.

Community and Reconciliation: Healing happens when we dialogue across difference.

Formation through Exposure: International learning is not a luxury—it is essential for transformation.

4. Skills and Competencies Developed

Intercultural communication

Public speaking and facilitation

Reflective writing and theological framing

Workshop and event coordination

Leadership in student and academic settings

5. Gaps Identified and Areas for Growth

Although these experiences were transformative, they also exposed critical areas in which I need to grow:

1. Research in Global Theology and Justice

I need to strengthen my academic foundation in global theological perspectives, especially those rooted in the Global South. I also want to explore frameworks that connect theology to social justice in practical and scholarly ways.

2. Building a Broader Network

My current network remains primarily local. I need to intentionally expand my connections—through mentorship, global forums, conferences, and collaborations with students, academics, and practitioners beyond South Africa.

3. Digital Storytelling and Outreach

While I enjoy writing, I must improve my use of digital tools for broader engagement. Learning video editing, blogging, podcasting, or creating online courses would help me reach and inspire others more effectively.

4. Indigenous Knowledge and Language Fluency

I want to deepen my understanding of indigenous knowledge systems and their integration with faith and development. Additionally, enhancing my fluency in African languages will allow me to better serve and relate to local communities.

6. Taking Stock and Looking Ahead

This portfolio has helped me pause and reflect more deeply than I had before.

I now recognise that exposure to the global community is crucial in opening one's mind. If I had not been presented with the opportunity to travel and interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, I would still be limited by the familiar.

From a theological standpoint, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). This reminds me that all nations, people, and perspectives are part of God's design. Engaging across cultures is not just academic, it is spiritual.

As I look to the future, I aim to:

Pursue postgraduate research and fellowships aligned with theology and development.

Engage more deeply with both local and global communities.

Become a voice for hope, healing, and intercultural unity rooted in faith.

7. Conclusion

My international journey has only just begun.

While I have gained meaningful insights and found the courage to share my voice, I am also discovering where I still need to grow.

This portfolio reflects that tension—celebration and challenge.

It is a mirror of where I've been, what I'm learning, and who I am becoming.

Formation is ongoing. I am still being shaped—by experience, by faith, and by the people I meet, ready to serve, lead, and build across cultures and communities.

8. Reference

Nelson Mandela Foundation. (n.d.). Who was Nelson Mandela?

<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/learn-and-teach/who-was-nelson-mandela>