

ISSUES, TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND MODELS OF AFRICAN INITIATIVES IN MISSIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Critical Issues and Challenges to African Initiatives in Missions

1. The missionary initiatives of the Church in Africa is mostly “mission agency driven,” in most cases generating unnecessary tension between mission agencies and denominations/local churches.
2. There is still manifestation of strong influence of western models and patterns of mission. Dominant in the mindset of many African Christians and Church leaders is the image of a missionary being “white” and coming from ‘abroad,’ the missionary task being that of the Church from abroad and as such, the tools and resources for carrying on the task must also come from abroad.
3. There is also an undeclared rivalry between Western mission structures and the emerging ones. While the emerging missions are craving for space and visibility in the new things the Lord is doing with and through His Church globally, the older ones are fighting for relevance and sustenance of the status quo. Of course, these result in some untoward developments and polarization.
4. Islam remains a critical and major challenge to every initiative to fulfill the great commission in Africa. This is compounded by the use of government organs and political machinery where Muslims are in majority to undermine evangelistic and missionary initiatives.
5. Socio-economic challenges as posed by the HIV/AIDS scourge, ethnic rivalries and clashes, abject poverty, political instability, corruption and other vices continue to stare at the face of every effort being made to bring the love of Christ to our people in the form that meets their holistic needs.
6. The popularity of the unbalanced “gospel of prosperity” to a great extent is undermining the initiatives by the Church in Africa to send and support her own missionaries, because majority of those who should go and who should send have got their priorities and values misplaced, exchanging eternity for the momentary gains.
7. We are also not oblivious of the spiritual strongholds that contend for the souls of our people. We are aware of the resistance and challenges that are coming from the kingdom of darkness. We are therefore determined to take up the whole armour of God to fight the good fight of faith.
8. The absence of national mission movements in many countries (especially those with very potential labour force for missions) in Africa has impeded the mobilization and envisioning process in such countries. Also the obvious gap between the strength of the church in English speaking countries and their counterparts in the French-speaking countries is another militating factor in the effort to galvanize the Church in Africa for mission’s involvement.

Phases of Mission’s Evolution in Africa:

1. Western Mission initiatives (initially along the coastline, then thrusts into the interior; in some cases exploring trade routes and exploiting favourable political platforms).
2. Apprenticeship with limited objective: Africans working with and under Western Missionaries as agents, assistants, helpers, etc, just to accomplish current tasks, not necessarily for the purpose of integrating them in team for continuity.

3. Delegation with limited vision: As a result of nationalization and indigenization policies of many African nations following independence, Western missions turned over the leadership of denominations to Africans with little or no envisioning/empowerment for missions involvement, and maintenance of existing institutions and structures with limited resources and paternalistic relationship which encouraged dependency on the West, thereby stifling local initiatives.
4. African Mission Initiatives through self-discovery and self-definition. The current missionary zeal that is emanating from Africa is more or less borne out of self-discovery and self definition of the nature and the mission of the Church in Africa, and the determination to overcome all the limitations and labels imposed upon her and become a legitimate part of the Body of Christ, as well as fulfill her mandate in God's divine enterprise. These describe the various models and patterns of mission structures and activities coming from Africa which defy conventional description of missions from other perspectives.

Trends of Missions in Africa:

Some notable trends characterize the mission initiatives and models in and from Africa:

1. There is an increasing awareness and involvement of denominations and local churches in missions. Even though the indigenous mission's movement was spearheaded and driven by indigenous mission agencies, denominations and local churches are discovering and taking up their rightful place in the missionary enterprise.
2. There is a lot of spontaneity in mission's sending and going in and from Africa. Many of those who go, do so when and as the Holy Spirit leads them. As a result, majority of those who go are not sent or supported by any group, church or agency in the traditional sense of sending. However, majority of such have had very successful ministry (e.g. Sunday Adelaja in Kiev, Ukraine). Some denominations also do not follow the conventional prescriptions for an effective sending structures nor do their policies fit into what is considered as the code of best practice in member care delivery, yet they have a steady flow of well motivated volunteer-missionaries that spread across the globe and are successfully planting churches first among their own people in the Diaspora and also among the native hosts (e.g. The Church of Pentecost, Ghana).
3. Mission agencies, the denominations and local Churches involved in missions in Africa are demonstrating a lot of initiatives in defining, structuring and carrying out mission from the African Church perspective. This was very much evident in the creative ways denominations and mission agencies in Africa defined and determined the target groups they were to reach and the best way to reach them, the types and forms of support to raise and how to raise them, and the type and duration of the training they were to give to their missionaries in order to accomplish the set goals during the AD 2000 & Beyond era. This has continued to characterize most of the efforts of the sending churches and mission agencies in Africa today.
4. Some Western missions and global networks are restructuring and repositioning themselves to empower, encourage and resource the denominations they have established in Africa to take initiatives in missions and assume responsibility for the remaining task of reaching the unreached in their countries and beyond. In many cases, some of these Western Missions now define their involvement and role in missions in Africa in terms of how such role will enhance and strengthen the Church in Africa to fulfill her part of the mandate (E.g. AIM, OCI, IMB of SBC, etc).

Categories and Models of Missionary Initiatives in and from Africa

A. Category by origin: The missionary initiatives in Africa can be identified by how they originated as follows:

1. Offshoots of Initial Missions from the West: Some of the older missions from the West right from the beginning established indigenous or national mission outfits to work along with them especially in vernacular and contexts which such structures were considered most appropriate and reasonable to employ. E.g. the Evangelical Missionary Society (EMS) which was set up in 1949 by the then Sudan Interior Mission to reach the natives of the middle belt and Northern Nigeria.
2. Independent Charismatic/Pentecostal groups: These are the denominations and ministries that were started by Africans in response to the move of the Holy Spirit in their different countries and dispensations. These groups were very 'missionary' in their approach as their members founded branches of their denominations where ever they found themselves. E.g. Church of Pentecost, Ghana.
3. Christian Youth and Student Movements: Like other continents, student and youth groups in Africa have been vanguards of missionary initiatives within and outside Africa. A number of the current mission agencies in Africa today came to be through the visionary leadership of former leaders of evangelical student/youth groups. Most of the pioneer missionaries of the Church and mission agencies in Africa are graduates of higher institutions. Currently, the national, regional and continental student organizations have missions as a major focus of their activities and engagements.
4. Indigenous Mission Agencies: These are mission agencies founded, led, funded to a great extent, and directed by indigenous believers in a given country, with little or no link with a mission from the West. Majority of such agencies work cross culturally and in many countries other their country of origin and operate several aspects of the missionary enterprise, while others specialize.
5. Mission Departments/Societies of Denominations/Local Churches: Some denominations and local churches, as they become aware of their responsibility in missions, now set up their own structures to recruit, train, send and support missionaries from their churches.

B. Category by type: Structures for Mobilization, Training, Sending and Supporting

1. Denominational
2. Non-Denominational,
3. Local Church,
4. Mission Agency,
5. Mission Department,
6. An Institution
7. National, Regional and Continental Mission Associations
8. Students/Youth Movements

C. Category by specialization:

1. Mission Sending Model
2. Mission Training Model
3. Mission Mobilization Model
4. Missions Supporting Model
5. Mission Research Model
6. Mission Networking Model

Examples of Structures of the various mission specialization models

1. Denominational Mission Mobilization, Sending and Supporting model:
2. Local Church Mission Mobilization and Supporting Model: Glory Tabernacle, Ibadan Nigeria
3. Mission Agency Mission Mobilization and Training Model:
4. Mission Agency Mission Support Models: Gospel Bankers; Mission Supporters League, etc
5. An Institution Mission Training and Reseach Model:
6. Mission Association/Network Model of Mission Mobilization and Networking:
7. Mission Society/Department Mission Mobilization, Training, Sending and Supporting Model:
8. Students/Youth Movements Model of Mission