

DEVELOPING TOOLS TO EVALUATE NATIONAL MISSIONS MOVEMENTS

National Missions Movements, the engine of COMIBAM

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1. The importance of the NMM in the development of COMIBAM regional Missions Movement

The strength of the Ibero-American Cooperation is equal to the sum of the strength of its 26 national mission movements. The vision of COMIBAM that has moved us to work since 1984 is to see the church in Ibero-America transformed in a missions force. With more than 50 million Evangelical Christians and hundreds of thousands of churches all around our continent, we had to develop a strategy in order to be more effective in challenging and empowering the church to be ready to send missionaries and to support the establishment of the church among the Unreached Peoples Groups (UPG's). This task demanded us to think wisely on how to approach the church in an effective way.

From the beginning some key decisions had to be made in order to be more effective. That led us to some key definitions in our Ibero-American Missions Movement.

1. Inclusiveness:

COMIBAM is described as the sum of all those who are in some way involved in the fulfilment of the Great Commission in Ibero-America. Our main focus is to build a cooperation atmosphere that combines and makes those who are already working or thinking on contributing to the Great Commission feel involved. This includes churches, sending structures, training centres, and missionaries in and from Ibero-America.

2. Networking:

We strongly decided that we did not want to become a new organisation, but a network in Ibero-America. It has been our experience that the effectiveness of networking depends on the openness and freedom of each of the participants who sit and dialogue without hindrances, and who do not work out of competitiveness with other organisations or feel threatened to be swallowed up by a new organisation. All members in COMIBAM, either individuals or bodies, had the freedom to feel committed to be involved with the same vision and to feel free to go back to their own organisations and continue to work in their own processes.

3. Mission-mindedness:

We know that the church in Ibero-America presents a lot of opportunities to work. But COMIBAM made a decision to work primarily to show, to produce and to provide for the church, the resources that are needed to establish the church among the unreached.

4. Church-centredness:

One of COMIBAM's non-negotiables is the belief on the church's role in the global evangelisation process. Our focus is to think in advance and work to make available all the resources the church needs to be effective throughout the process of global evangelisation.

2. The 3 main issues in the strengthening of National Missions Movements

Most of COMIBAM's resources are invested in the establishment of effective national missions movements in each of the countries that are part of Ibero-America.

We have been observing the development of national missions movements during the last 20 years, and we have compared strategies, projects and ways of working of at least 23 effective national missions movements in Latin America. We have come to the realisation that the three main areas in which we have focused are strengthening the national regions movement.

- a. Representativeness. For a NMM (national missions movement) to be effective in the service to the church, a clear recognition of the main church bodies in its country is needed. Each NMM must be a missions element within the national church in regard to the UPG's, but every church must be aware of that.

We learned that from the beginning. We have to be strongly committed to the church bodies like mission alliances of Evangelicals or pastor and church fellowships, and some other that already exist in the countries. People have to know that our work is to provide the country with a NMM, and we invite all of them to be part of the process of thinking, planning, and the emerging of leadership for the future NMM's.

This is the hardest part in the process of establishing a NMM. Sometimes it seems easier to build a parallel organisation. However, 20 years of experience have confirmed us that the best choice is to join hands with already existing church organisations in the countries, and help them focus in the understanding of the church's need to be lead by the Great Commission, and to contribute supply for this need.

Most of the 23 NMM's in Ibero-America emerged after a consultation process with the national alliance of evangelicals and other church bodies from every country. One of the challenges of this process for establishing the NMM is to commit ourselves to respond to the expectations of the church, working hard to be effective.

- b. Functions. To build an effective NMM demands a mentoring process to help to respond to the needs of the church, depending on the stage in which the national church is.

First stage of the process. The functions are oriented mostly in promotion efforts within the leadership of the church as well as the mobilisation of people for missions. The NMM begins to emerge as a source of connection materials and advice for the churches on how to make the first steps.

Second stage. The functions begin to be more specialised, with teaching and thought provoking activities that help the church develop a missions mentality and understand the basic facts of global evangelisation.

Third stage. Functions are more advanced. There is focus on cooperation, on forming and supporting of strategic alliances and especially on providing resources and services for the church and those involved in missions.

- c. Structure. Because of our experiences, and especially because of our commitment to keep the NMM as a network, we take charge of all of the process to avoid over-structure of the NMM, trying to keep the balance between the response capacity and the efficiency in the use of the scarce resources. We have to be aware that a NMM structure does not compete with the church, the sending structures or the training centres and schools. It should not either become compromised with a heavy load of budgets and expenses in order to keep things moving.

3. A tool to focus and follow up the development of the NMM in COMIBAM

The mix between representativeness, functions and organisations responds to the question of what is the stage of a NMM. In COMIBAM, we have devised some questions to help the NMM's, What is the best combination of these three elements? What stage of development are we in? And especially, What are the next steps to be taken in the development as well as the external services?

These tools intend to help the leadership of the NMM to identify the areas of work and the most urgent needs they have for the future, and the areas to be strengthened to be more efficient and effective in serving the church in global evangelisation.

4. Cooperative Work:

The regular use of these tools for evaluating the NMM's helps COMIBAM International plan the kind of national, regional and international activities and events we have to prepare in order to respond to the needs of the church.

Understanding the stage in which one of the 26 NMM's is helps us connect more effectively all who are in the same stage, or at least who are sharing the same needs. Regionally, we can anticipate how different activities in every NMM can empower and accelerate the development of those NMM which are in the previous stages of development.

5. The benefits of NMM connected by a common typology

One of the important resources that this evaluation tools are providing to COMIBAM is the ability to probe the emerging leadership in every country, to be sure that we have a healthy process of renovation of leaders and of producing an international dynamics of growth in the experience of being part of the NMM leading structure or one of the network organisations and programmes.

We understand that the particular characteristics of the Ibero-American church has worked in our favour to strengthen one of the most successful missionary movements in the Southern Hemisphere. However, we are noting that most of the crucial needs and areas of work are similar in some areas of the Majority World, and it is our prayer that our experience in COMIBAM would help and challenge the regional missions movements to organise and to make a clear

agenda to build the church to become a people capable of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

6. Appendix

Quick Evaluation Test for NMM

This test serves as a tool to evaluate and classify any national missionary movement, whatever development stage it might be. According to it, it can be located in one of these following stages:

Stage I

Organization

1. It has a minimum structure represented by a committee, an *ad hoc committee*, Board of Directors and other.
2. It is in the process to establish a work team, either staff or committed volunteers.

Representativeness

1. It is looking for recognition before ecclesiastic organized bodies in the country.
2. It undergoes identification and connection process from entities that will be part of the three basic networks of a national missionary movement.
3. Its members are recognized in the country as the ones who lead the national missionary movement.

Functions

1. Its main function is to encourage pastors and churches.
2. A great part of the time is invested to promote itself among established ecclesiastic bodies.
3. It has access to basic communication media, telephone, and facsimile.
4. Regularly, it carries out missionary events.
5. Its authority is recognized among mission churches looking for advice.

Stage II

Organization

1. It relies on well-identified organization.
2. It counts on personnel staff or volunteers working to its development as first priority.

Representativeness

1. It is recognized as relations' facilitator entity among those that participate in missionary work.
2. Movement basic networks are identified.
3. It counts on formal recognition from established ecclesiastics bodies from the country.

Functions

1. It is counseling churches and denominations in their missionary development.
2. It is following an established missionary outreach strategy in the country.
3. It works to build up more responsibility on the local church.
4. It counts on a regular established publication.
5. It has organized missionary events on a national level with certain success.

Stage III

Organization

1. It has a minimum structure to attend missionary work (contact office).
2. Its organization is within national range.
3. It counts on a minimum staff of two persons working full time, including a Chairman or similar

Representativeness

1. All the action networks are well organized and identified.
2. It performs specific activities for each network.

Functions

1. It generates its own resources and services.
2. Support enthusiastically other countries' national missionary movements from its region.
3. It works to maintain and promote building new working structures