

Mission Agencies as Multinationals – Vinay Samuel & Chris Sugden

National church = visible expressions of the body of Christ on the neighborhood, local & national levels, financially and politically independent.

The effective power and decision making still lie with org outside the country.

General attitude of local churches: we are the church, we are capable of handling our own affairs, yet they lack the ability or desire to reach.

Multinational mission agencies = similar to multinational organizations.

1. Promotion and distribution

- same clear message, universal slogan, widely and easily available.
- studies made of individual and psychological needs
- the message may fail to meet actual needs or create inappropriate needs
- the hearers are treated in their psychological needs, ignoring their social existence

2. Church ~ to distribution center; if the national church is deemed inadequate in its outreach, then agencies create their own churches or distribution systems, by-passing the national church

- target: to reach the 2.5 billion of un-reached people in the world (~ to sales pitches), local churches cannot hope to meet the challenge
- agencies create needs than only they can meet and by the time that is done another need arises that can also be met only thru the agency

3. Leadership

Multinationals draw on the leadership resources of a country, offering more secure and lucrative employment to students and people who have been educated by the taxpayers, bypassing the national industry, government and church. Agencies approach pastors for support and access to their congregations which they get due to resources and facilities they have to offer, hence they bypass the wider authorities the former are responsible to. Finally the agencies begin imposing their own leaders by establishing colleges. Studies have shown that their graduates join para church bodies immediately or 5 years from graduation, are loyal to agencies' message and methods, form "national evangelical leadership", control the resources but represent no national church body.

4. Total Control

Pressures for growth in multinational mission prevent them from taking the whole gospel to the whole person because growth requires money and that means the church takes the middle position in order to ensure a large donor base, failing to stand clearly on the side of the poor.

5. Evaluation

Mission agencies have their own limited agendas. A recommendation that they try to educate the supporters into the real situations in the 3rd world and its relation to the 1st world was predicted to deplete 90% of agencies' income. John Inchley, author of "Kids and the Kingdom" states that it may be more biblical to regard the children as persons who belong to Jesus until they reject him, rather than lost souls who need to repent as soon as possible. Should this understanding be accepted, many large-budgeted, foreign-sponsored organizations for children's evangelism in India would have to alter both their strategy and their fund raising appeals. None of these twenty-one agencies during the International Year of the Child in India publicly raised one query about the child-labor employment of over 40 million Indian children.

A Way Ahead for the 1980s-1990s

History shows that chief bearers of mission have been groups within the church who have been promoters and seedbeds for new initiatives in mission. Solution: analysis so they can forge the skills and resources of missions agencies with the sensitivity and cultural authenticity of the local church.

1. examine their respective understanding and practice of mission by the biblical criteria of incarnation and servanthood.
2. agencies need to rectify their present relations with other groups and form constructive partnerships
3. agencies need to initiate and encourage new patterns of relationships among Christian groups. The national church in India is not the sole guardian of the welfare of the 70% of Indians who haven't met Jesus. The church is the body of Christ worldwide called to bear one another's burdens. Agencies must be committed to a holistic gospel just as Jesus came as an incarnate servant in the context.

The results cannot be expected to be quick.

The national church should be affirmed (by allowing it decision power) and not bypassed.

The process will be costly because the agencies will have to take stances that will not sit well with their constituencies (solution: educate constituencies in the true struggles of the gospel in the context).

There will be differences so maturity in partnership is required.