


# Leadership development: Effective tool for urban Christian missions in the 21st century in Nigeria

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Urban Christian missions battle with many challenges in this 21st century, such that there is a need for a strategic plan to do missions in the cities. Over the years, missions' emphasis has focused on village missions and underdeveloped places. However, there is a clarion call to shift attention to urban Christian missions in recent times because the world is witnessing a massive migration of people from villages to cities for greener pastures. Christian missions' opportunities are evident in the cities because the cities attract all kinds of people. Urban Christian missions involve assembling converts and nurturing them to maturity, enabling them to teach others about Christ, and to do likewise to ensure that the Christian faith continues. The article employed a descriptive research method, and it investigated the task of developing leaders for active Christian missions in urban areas of Nigeria because of insufficient leaders who could adequately handle Christian mission work.

**Contribution:** This article is in line with the focus and scope of *HTS Theological Studies* in the sense that the journal is an acclaimed Open Access journal with broad coverage that promotes multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary religious aspects of studies in the international theological arena and the journal's publication criteria are based on rigorous research, accountable methodologies and novel findings based on sound ethical standards. Also, the research reveals that leadership training must be Bible-based and the Bible is the basis for Theological Studies.

**Keywords:** leadership development; effective tool; urban Christian missions; urban missionary; life challenges.

## Introduction

The world is witnessing a significant shift as numerous people search for greener pastures, moving from rural to urban areas. For a very long time, great emphasis has been on reaching out to persons in rural areas. However, Christ died for all, and there is the need to preach the gospel to the whole world. The 21st century has emanated significant challenges to doing urban missions so that there is a need to plan strategically to do missions in cities.

Therefore, for the church to perform optimally in the city, there is a need for competent leadership at every ministry level to function in the most productive manner possible (Ginnan 2003:5). Christian workers should train individuals who will direct the new church to be what God intended. The obligation to produce leaders for the church is essential because it ensures Christian missions' effectiveness in the urban setting despite the challenges.

The article observed leadership helping Christian converts mature as they plan to lead fellow believers in God's vineyard. The church should identify and train potential leaders to have the necessary skills and abilities that are important for developing future leaders (Watt 2014:1).

Hence, the discourse considered the concept of urban Christian missions, leadership training during the Bible era, nature of urban Christian missions in the 21st century Nigeria and leadership training for efficient Christian missions in urban areas, biblical foundation for leadership training, challenges to urban missions and steps to developing leaders despite these challenges.

## Concept of urban Christian missions

Over the years, the emphasis has often been on rural missions and other underdeveloped places, but attention has recently shifted to urban missions. Of the truth, mission work in urban settings is quite different from rural areas. Lois K. Fuller (2013:183) observed that 'people in the cities see churches every day. Most cities have regular evangelistic crusades

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and people often think that there is no need to have missionaries in the cities'. Reflection on this submission reveals that there is a chance that most people who live in the cities view the church only from a distance and are not a part of it. Hence, there is a need to take the message of the gospel to them. Fuller observed that the categories of people likely to dwell in the city are people of different religions, poor and the rich, busy people who are conscious of their career, diplomats and businessmen and women, travellers and passers-by and hosts of others. The gospel of Christ Jesus should reach all these sets of people (Fuller 2013:183).

Anna Ruddick opines that 'Christian mission is what Christians do among people before they become Christians' (n.d.). This definition suggests that mission is an activity aimed at bringing souls into the kingdom of God and because the Great Commission includes those situated in the world's urban regions, there is a need to plan to reach them for Christ strategically. To substantiate this statement, Robert (2009:9) states that 'Christian mission involves crossing cultural and language frontiers by those who consider themselves followers of Jesus Christ, intending to share their faith'. This definition indicates that engaging in urban missions is one of the ways to prove to the world that one is a Christian, probably because of the various challenges one is bound to encounter when engaged in urban missions compared with the rural mission. The Anglican Urban Network (2008) posited that 'the real challenge to Christian missions in the 21st century will be that of urban missions'.

As discussed, the question that comes to mind is 'what is the urban mission?' Yu Zhu (1999:15) posited that 'there is no consensus on the definition of urban and urbanisation in literature'. However, quoting the view of a renowned sociologist, Louis Wirth defines a city as 'a relatively large and dense settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals'. This definition projects a city as a place where many people dominate and move to search for a better life. Hence (Zhu 1999):

[T]he centralising power of the city added to the pervasive influence of a global market makes the urban environment the postmodern condition. Consequently, the challenges and opportunities for the urban missions have been greater. (p. 15)

Therefore, mission in the urban areas is crucial (Zhu 1999:15).

## Leadership training during the Bible era

The Bible recorded different instances of leadership training in both the Old and the New Testaments. As no one can deny that the idea of leadership training is from the Bible, the writer, because of this, points out a few leadership training models that exist in the Bible time and thus lays a necessary foundation for Church leadership training today. They are<sup>1</sup>:

- Leadership model in the Old Testament Foundations

<sup>1</sup>This is not an exhaustive biblical exegesis, and the study is located within the Missiology discipline.

The demonstration of the principle of leadership training in the Old Testament are as follows:

- Moses and Joshua:

Joshua was under the guidance of Moses for many years and this period of training was his time of leadership preparation (Ex 24, Nm 27:18–23, Ex 17). Joshua later took over from Moses when he died.

- Eli and Samuel:

Samuel's mother fulfilled her vow when she brought him to the Lord's temple when the boy was weaned (1 Sm 1:24–28). Eli was a mentor to the young Samuel and because Samuel lived with Eli, this mentoring relationship allowed Eli to direct Samuel to understand the voice of God (cf. 1 Sm 3:2–10).

- Leadership model in the New Testament

Here are a few leadership training cases in the New Testament:

- Jesus and his disciples:

During his earthly ministry, Jesus devoted substantial effort to the development of his disciples (Watson 2012:231). Firstly, Jesus recruited 12 men (Mt 10:1–4). They journeyed with him throughout his ministry. Jesus later commissioned them to do what they had learnt from him (Mt 28:18–20).

- Paul and Timothy:

Like our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Paul invested significantly in emerging leaders (Watson 2012:273). One of these persons is Timothy. Paul contributed substantially to the spiritual formation of Timothy as a leader (1 Cor 4:17) even as overseer of the Church in Thessalonica (cf. Th 1 3:2). To avoid the generational leadership gap, Paul instructed Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 to train other faithful men, who would train others.

Therefore, the Bible contains several leadership models and the process of leadership development is evident in God's word, so people could use the Bible as a manual to train and develop emerging leaders.

## Nature of urban Christian missions in 21st century Nigeria

Nigeria has witnessed a great movement of people from rural areas to urban centres in the last centuries. The rate at which people migrate into urban centres is alarming. Fortunately, this is in congruence with global trends, 'the world is now undergoing its largest human migration in history and that migration is both international and from rural to urban, shifting the balance of the world population' (Sandercock & Brock 2009:35). Friedmann states that 'by 2025, about 60% of humanity will be living in cities, compared with 40% in 2000'. The quest for greener pastures has caused many to abandon the rural environment. Simona Varrella (2020) documents that:

In 2019, Nigeria population was over 200 million people and was estimated to increase in the following decades constantly. Lagos city has the largest population in Nigeria and the largest city in Sub-Saharan Africa. (n.p.)

Considering this ever-increasing population, the question that readily comes to mind is 'is there a need for missions' work in the city because mega-churches and Christian religious activities are going on frequently?' Truly, doing missions' work in an urban setting is necessary because of the overwhelming challenges faced by the missionaries. No wonder the Anglican Urban Network assert that 'growing cities hold many challenges for global institutions, governments and even the church'. These challenges are the outcome of the rapid civilisation of the cities compared with the rural setting. These challenges are: secularisation, postmodernism, pluralism, multi-ethnicity, and a 'population explosion and socioeconomic gap'. For the church to overcome all these challenges, there is a need for the church to develop new leaders who could handle the current challenges (Varella 2020). The discourse now considers the effectiveness of leadership training methods of Christian missions in the urban area.

## Leadership training for efficient Christian missions in urban areas

One of the crucial tasks of leaders is to raise other leaders. The primary purpose of Christian mission workers is 'to raise local church leaders who can pastor the new church planted, which would continuously reproduce missional disciples and church planters' (Wong 2013:6). Watt (2014:125) agreed that leaders need to make other leaders for efficient leadership by educating, equipping and empowering them for the work of the Church. Training must prepare prospective leaders mentally, emotionally, spiritually and practically (Harley 1995:79). Hence, developing leaders includes an intentional and holistic combination of some steps, and those steps are discussed in the following subsections.

### Make right selection of personnel

John Maxwell (1995:40–43) asserted that the primary responsibility is to identify potential leaders. Emerging leaders have a strong desire to grow. Also, they know it is God's will for them to lead (Harley 1995:60–61). Jesus prayed all night and then selected those he would train to hand the mantle of leadership over to (Lk 6:12–13). He discerned leadership in these men by leading the Holy Spirit through prayer. Stacy E. Hoehl recounts that Paul selected Timothy to join him in his ministry to propagate the gospel. Timothy's character and the nature of the ministry convinced him that Timothy was well-suited for serving as a witness to God's kingdom (Hoehl 2011:41). Before the church appoints anyone to a leadership position, the person should first lead his or her family well (Tm 1 3:5).

### Discipleship

The core of Jesus' leadership development strategy was discipleship (Hoehl 2011:4). 'Leadership development should

be on the serious discipleship of a believer' (Sin 2013:52) because, through this, the leader himself or herself will be able to help his or her followers until they become like Christ. Therefore, an appropriate discipleship process breeds good leadership.

### Be a man or woman of 'your' world

Every good leader should always lead by example. John P. Vick (2011:35) agreed with this by saying, 'the greatest tool a leader has to demonstrate high performance is his or her attitude'. Any leader whose teaching is different from his or her way of life is not a leader at all; that is why Paul wrote, 'Imitate me as I imitate Christ' (1 Cor 11:1). Moreover, Cohen and Bradford (2005) concurred by saying:

[M]odelling to others what one is teaching them establishes credibility, and gaining people's attention and imparting their lives would not be possible until there is credibility on the part of the leadership. (p. 225)

Modelling shows the trainee what the theory looks like in the practical sense.

### Contextualisation

Contextualisation means presenting the gospel as culturally acceptable, so leadership strategy for active urban Christian missions must develop leaders' ability to contextualise. For example, apostle Paul, a practitioner of urban missions, writes in First Corinthians 9:20: to the Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law'. Contextualisation is for effective communication of the gospel in the city. Leadership development is to value the specific culture of their context and be flexible so that the gospel might be meaningful to recipients and this does not mean that one should compromise biblical truth; instead, contextualisation allows one to penetrate people group to transform them with biblical truth without watering down the word of God. Generally, religion is within the cultural interpretation of hearers.

Contextualisation aims to connect individuals to God so that they may worship their creator freely.

### Having a good relationship

Ministry is relational and leadership plays a vital role if any ministry survives, so friendship is valuable in leadership training for Christian missions. Mission workers will be significantly affected if they connect with future leaders at a relationship level beyond involvement in religious activities even before leadership training. 'Christian community depends upon personal relationships and lack of good human relation on the part of any missionary will cause his failures' (Robert 2011:100–101). Friendship is an opportunity to show Christian love and bridge the gap between the old set of leaders and the new ones. 'The credibility of Christian fellowship rests on solid friendships, especially with those whom they are training for leadership' (Robert 2011:102) Jesus referred to his disciples as friends (Jn 15:15). Therefore, friendship aids mentorship.

Upcoming leaders have a strong desire to grow. They are potential candidates for leadership training. Jesus prayed all night and then selected those he would train to hand over leadership to as led by God (Lk 6:12–13); he perceived leadership in these men by the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer.

The concept of leadership development in Christian missions aims to equip genuine converts to serve the will of God through his church and this reveals the type of leadership training to be pursued, particularly in the urban context (Wilhelm 1998:102). Instead, to the author, this reveals the type of leadership training needed or that should be pursued, particularly in the urban context – a training that moulds the promising leader into a godly servant of God.

## Conclusion

This discourse has centred on leadership development as a strategy for active Christian missions in the urban area of Nigeria. The researcher explained the meaning of the concept of urban Christian missions, also considered what leadership training looked like during the Bible period, nature of urban Christian missions in 21st century Nigeria, challenges to urban missions concerning leadership training for efficient Christian missions in urban areas and steps to developing leaders with the mindset of selecting the right people and disciple them. Also, the leader himself or herself should lead by example, that is, to do what he or she preaches. The leader should also contextualise the training given to the emerging leaders to make it relevant to their context. The leader should also relate well with the future leaders because leadership development is critical to ensuring Christian missions' effectiveness in the urban context. It is possible to raise influential future leaders if urban Christian missions' workers consider the given points. The author now makes the following recommendations:

## Recommendations

1. The mentor needs to study the environment, and this includes the culture of urban areas because the urban missionary must understand that the way of life of the people in urban centres is different from those people living in the rural areas; hence, whatever will put the people off must be carefully avoided. Being urban and living in a predominantly urban world shapes how one thinks, lives and relates with others.
2. The significance of the Holy Spirit in leadership training cannot be overemphasised on the part of both the trainer and the trainee because it is the Holy Spirit that orchestrates transformation through the Word of God.
3. Leadership training must be Bible-based training. The most excellent and foremost tool for leadership development is the Bible, and that is why the church should handle the matter of leadership in Christian missions with care.
4. Leaders in training should be trusted to lead gradually and take on more responsibility as time goes on. Smooth

leadership transitions must be implemented at the appropriate time, giving developing leaders a free hand particularly in decision making, to avoid falling into the trap of overprotectiveness.

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## Author's contributions

A.O.A. is the sole author of this article.

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## Data availability

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## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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