

Understanding challenges and prospects of partnership in Christian missions in Nigerian Baptist convention

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Partnership in Christian missions is of great importance because of its necessity for the effectiveness of all missions engagements. Partnership in missions has a biblical basis, and it is theologically correct. The concept of *Missio Dei* demonstrates the Triune God as the owner of Christian missions. Likewise, as a body of Christ, the church must work together to achieve God's purpose. The church can utilise each member's gifts and virtues through partnership to glorify God. Christian missions will not be tedious with practical knowledge of partnership in missions. This paper provided vital information related to partnerships in the Nigerian Baptist Convention missions. A partnership creates an avenue for effective and holistic missions. The researcher used the descriptive research method and discovered that some challenges, such as misunderstanding, selfishness, miss-appropriateness of resources and information gap, are sometimes part of the partnership.

Contribution: Apart from the challenges, partnership in missions has many prospects amid technological advancement and globalisation if the appropriate partnership models, credible partnership principles and accurate theological perspectives are inculcated. This will result in more converts, planting churches, making disciples and raising more Christian leaders.

Keywords: partnership; missions; challenges; prospect; Christianity.

Introduction

Partnership in missions is inevitable in the contemporary world, and even though it comes with some challenges, it has prospects because the challenges can be overcome. God created the world to function in mutual relationships, and although the fall alters the relationship, much can still be achieved through partnership. The Christian faith is a faith that is inclusive in the sense that unity is held in high regard. The concept of the Trinity in Christianity aligns with what an ideal partnership nature should be. Also, the concept of *Missio Dei* shows that God is personally involved in the work of missions. Therefore, the partnership is coming together to do something for God's glory. Christian missions need the pulling together of diverse resources to function effectively as holistic missions. The resources that are needed are placed within reach of different persons.

There are different callings, different gifting and different forms of ministry. Individuals and groups must seek personal leadership from God regarding the specific niche in which they will participate in whatever aspects of missions God has called them to. It, therefore, means that the individuals are not to only partner with God; they must partner with other believers to fulfil the Great Commission, which has always been challenging. Understanding Christian missions' biblical and theological perspectives will help stabilise partnerships in missions more significantly because God and the scriptures are not silent about it. There are many excellent prospects for partnership in Christian missions; if done according to scriptural or biblical details, it will benefit all the partners involved and further or enhance the work of missions. This article examined the current challenges and prospects of partnership in Christian missions through descriptive research methods; it explains an overview of partnership in missions, its biblical and theological perspectives and its challenges and prospects.

An overview of partnership in Christian missions

Different fields of study use the word partnership, usually defined in its context. For instance, partnership in the business world involves joining two or more individuals or groups to own and manage a business. They share the business's losses and income (Business Encyclopedia 2022:1). However, in Christianity, God owns everything and deserves all the glory. Although, there are

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benefits that God have for all those that partner with Him (Mt 25:21). Partnership in Christian missions can be adequately understood when there is a clear understanding of the term Christian missions.

There are diverse definitions of the word missions. Missions could be defined as the sending of church evangelists to other people of different cultures (Mays 2008:1). It can also be described as all the local church's activities to win the world for Christ (Andy 2017:27).

In a nutshell, it is an intentional witnessing or proclamation of the gospel in words and deeds among people of other cultures to make disciples to the glory of God, the Father. There are two broad concepts of doing Christian missions as deduced or inferred from the scriptures. The significant distinguishing factors between the Old Testament and the New Testament in their concepts of missions are that the Old Testament is centripetal, as the nations will come to Israel or Zion (Is 2). In the New Testament, it is centrifugal as God's people are commanded to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Mt 28:19). To be practical in Christian missions, the church needs to combine the two concepts wisely because the contemporary society provides various opportunities for Diaspora missions, cross-cultural missions and marketplace ministry, among others.

Missions models

There are various types of missions models of partnership in Christian missions. The missions' aim and purpose largely determine the partnership models' choice. The missions models are: traditional partnership model, networking partnership model and emergent partnership model:

- **Traditional Partnership Model:** It is a partnership between mission societies and churches (Cueva 2015:114). Examples of societies that practice traditional models are the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), founded by the Father of modern missions, William Carey, in 1792; the London Missionary Society (LMS), founded in 1795; the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), which appeared in 1799; China Inland Mission (CIM), founded by Hudson Taylor in 1865 and Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade (WEC) founded in 1913.
- **Networking Partnership Model:** It is a type of partnership between mission societies in a non-territorial way. Networking partnership's key characteristics are similar to the traditional model. However, the first has a crucial difference in the sense of a non-territorial outlook; globalisation is the primary influence; partnership is developing in terms of strategic alliances, and this model uses all kinds of communicating technologies (Cueva 2015:115). Examples of missions bodies that practice the networking model are the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), started in 1846, Global Connection (GC) and Partnership for World Mission (PWM).
- **Emergent Partnership Model:** It is a partnership between local churches and can extend to indigenous missions'

societies. It reflects the influence of grass roots churches. It seems to rest on God's provision (believing that God's project carried out in God's way can never lack God's provision- Hudson Taylor) and the Great Commission's fulfilment (Cueva 2015:116). Churches come together to fulfil the great commission with a sense of urgency. Mission bodies that practice the emergent model include the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Lima, Peru, Iglesia Misionera Evangelica, Latin churches in Spain and London (Cueva 2015:167). When the partnership is solely between churches, the emergent partnership could be termed a church-to-church partnership (Global Ministries 2023:1).

Each partnership model is not exclusive in that two or three models can be engaged together by churches and mission agencies depending on the purpose of the partnership and the context where that mission engagement takes place. Every partnership in Christian missions needs to be contextualised to be effective. Although contextualised missions partnership is not easy, it is achievable if presented so that all the people involved will understand what is embedded in it and wholeheartedly accept it. Furthermore, it demands having a thorough understanding of the scriptures and the culture of the parties involved in the partnership (Kassis, Kwant & Paul 2017:70). Contextualised partnership in missions makes the partnership relevant to the partners and their situations.

The principle of partnership: Oneness

The oneness principle is fundamental to the effectiveness of partnership in missions, since the scripture points out that all Christians belong to one kingdom in which Jesus Christ is the King. It is disheartening to see Christians competing or fighting each other on missions fields over potential converts or disciples. The business mindset of competition has subtly halted the church, and the primary vehicle is denominationalism. The scriptures reveal the importance of oneness in diverse portions. The people of Babel were determined to build a tower, and God reveals that it could have been done because of their oneness, also known as unity, only that it was not in the will of God (Gn 11:1-9). The children of Israelites could not enter the Promised Land at first because of their disunity, 10 were fearful and only two were courageous (Nm 13). They were delayed for 40 years because of their disunity. The Holy Spirit descended on the apostles in the oneness of hearts (Araujo 2013:2) (Ac 1, 2). Some other passages that reveal the importance of one are: 1 Corinthians 12:13, Deuteronomy 6:4, and Psalm 133:1.

Some other guiding principles vital for all forms of partnerships are mutual trust, shared knowledge, innovation, agreed goals, respect, genuineness and commitment. Out of his wealth of experiences, Bill Taylor (1999:748) gave vital advice for anyone intending to engage in partnership in Christian missions. These include:

- Listen while entering into a partnership agreement or arrangement, and be willing to learn from one's previous mistakes and that of others, then try again.
- Partnerships work better when there is shared project ownership, including finance.
- Be balanced: Do not get sucked in by hard sells based solely on cost-effectiveness comparisons. Take time to check out potential partners before signing up.
- Church-to-church partnerships arrangement has real potential but must be entered with wisdom, humility, and a teachable spirit.
- Spirit-filled churches recognise what they cannot do and partner with those who can assist them in their long-range goals.

Partnership in Christian missionary endeavour is vital to successful mission work. It functions with different models and principles. As discussed below, the Bible provides a biblical and theological basis for partnership in Christian missions.

Biblical perspectives of partnership in Christian missions

The Old and New Testaments mentioned some examples of partnership in Christian missions. Although Christian missions mainly refer to the church's work in the New Testament, there are some glimpses of God's intentions in the Old Testament.

Old Testament

Some passages on partnership with God include: Joshua 1:9 (Joshua), Genesis 1:26 (Adam and Eve) and Jeremiah 29:11 (all humanity). Passages on partnership with one another include: Ecclesiastes 4:9 (friends), Amos 3:3 (partner) and Proverbs 27:17 (friends).

New Testament

Some passages on partnership with God include Philippians 1:5, 2:13, 4:13:

- 1 Corinthians 1:9, 3:7, 9, Luke 1:37, John 6:37, 15:4–5, 1 John 1:7, Ephesians 2:10 (the passages demonstrated God's passionate love for believers).
- Passages on partnership with others include 1 Corinthians 3:9, Philippians 1:5, 4: 15, and 2 Corinthians 6:1, 14–17 (the passages demonstrated human needs for one another because if you want to go fast in life, you can go alone, but if you want to go far in life, you need to learn how to go with others).

Theological standpoint

Partnership in Christian missions is not about focusing on what partners can do together because it is primarily a subject of theology. Mutuality in God's mission is far more than doing things together. Therefore, before partnership begins in any context, it is imperative to reflect on the principles God

has revealed in the scriptures that show that Christian missions belong to God, *Missio Dei*. Out of that realisation, Christians begin to ask what their role is and what mutuality means when it comes to different partners joining in what God is doing already (Tankler 2022:91). There is a need for Christians to understand the importance of a theological approach when involved in partnership in Christian missions, especially when the partners are from different cultural and social contexts.

Missio Dei speaks of God's plan and purposes for humanity regarding creation, the fall, salvation and the consummation of God's sovereign reign over all things. The understanding of the concept of *Missio Dei* reveals God as the creator (Gn 1:1); God as the sender (Jn 3:16); God as the servant (Mk 10:45) and God as the saviour (2 Cor 4:6).

However, the church would serve as co-operator of God (1 Cor 15:28; 1 Tim 2:1–4) (Cueva 2015:79). The church can be described as the elect people of God with the privilege and responsibility of service to God and humanity (Lygunda Li-M 2018:32). The church has the responsibility of witnessing about the kingdom of God by telling others about the redeeming acts of God through Christ.

Christological theology and Paul's theology of partnership

Christological theology of partnership suggests some aspects of the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son in the light of the gospel; and its influence on the disciple partners with Jesus as Servant, who came to give freedom to humankind, with particular attention to the poor and the weak (Lk 4:18–21).

In Paul's thinking, the righteousness of God, according to Romans 3:21–31, is interpreted as a gift to the community rather than the individual. Furthermore, this implies that individualism is prohibited in a biblical mission partnership since Paul develops a theology of Christ's body, the *ekklesia*. The Lord's Supper and baptism are signs that partnership in Christian missions is not about solving disagreements or resolving differences but instead developing a transformed human relationship through Christ's work of reconciliation.

The Pauline theology of partnership is based on the *Koinonia* (fellowship) concept (Phlp 1:5), which is related to a relationship of shared goals and a common understanding of reciprocity between those partners in God's mission. *Koinonia* implies fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, partnership and contribution to the work of Christ (Cueva 2015:70).

The church needs to participate in God's mission because it is a community of those who glorify God, manifesting the reconciliation and redemption found through Christ Jesus (1 Cor 5:18). God's mission (*Missio Dei*) is to bless all nations through His people whom He has chosen, redeemed and

bound to himself in covenant relationship (Wright 2006:357). The glory of God is fundamental in Christian missions partnership, and it should be the motivation.

Current challenges and prospect of partnership in Christian missions

Various challenges may evolve among partners as they engage in Christian missionary endeavours; the following is not an exhaustive list but are major.

Manifestations of the sinful nature

The fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden resulted in many things malfunctioning on Earth (Gn 1&2). The sinful nature is always against the things of God; that was the reason why Apostle Paul said in the book of Romans Chapter 7 verse 9, 'that the good I wanted to do, I am unable but the evil, I did not want, it is what I am doing'. Although God has given Christians the grace to live above sin, some people claim to be sons and daughters of God but are still carnal in their dealings with others (Akanni 2010:110). Sinful nature manifests its deeds through selfishness, self-centeredness, greed and unfaithfulness, which might be interpreted as a lack of accountability. Moreover, it hinders partnerships in Christian missions. Other manifestations of the sinful nature are listed in Galatians 5:20.

Without biblical freedom, there is no appropriate Christian reciprocal contextual collaboration (Partnership). Biblical freedom is the liberation of Christians from sin. Partnership demands the exhortation of Christ and His kingdom in the spirit of humility. Discipleship books, newsletters or tapes can be distributed regularly among the partners to keep their focus on becoming more like Christ Jesus.

Lack of contextual theologies on partnership in Christian missions

The motivation for engaging in partnership in missions will go a long way to determine the success of the missions' engagements. A wrong theological understanding that partnership in Christian missions is only between agencies, churches or individuals, without considering the role of God as the owner of all things, will affect the missions' endeavours or missionary activities. Likewise, intentionally contextualising the partnership details in light of the cultural milieu can lead to frustration. Contextualising every partnership agreement in Christian missions is necessary by considering the various factors that may affect the partnership arrangement. As stated by Samuel Cueva (2015:79), There is no appropriate Christian reciprocal contextual collaboration without consideration of contextual theologies. There is a need to inculcate translation, adaptation, and contextual models to revitalise Christian missions and theological dialogue between missions' partners. Theologies of partnership that will be effective must give priority attention to the gospel, the church and her culture.

The gospel, the church and culture are to be given priority in the dialogue between missions' partners. If any of the three is omitted, the partnership arrangement will not produce the best expected.

Lack of consideration of external influences

External factors include socioeconomic factors, natural disasters, political instability, insecurity, pandemic and sudden death. Every partnership in Christian missions should consider external factors that may result in or influence the missions' endeavours. A partnership agreement in Christian missions may be hindered without adequate consideration. The instability of the world economy has resulted in some missions' agencies not meeting up with their plans (Rogers 2009:3).

There is no appropriate Christian reciprocal contextual collaboration without consciousness of the influence of external factors in missions. External factors such as geopolitical conflicts and economic activities affect partnerships in Christian missions. For instance, the coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) pandemic resulted in many changes in missions' plans, strategies and targets. Therefore, missions agencies, churches, and individuals involved in any partnership in Christian missions should make appropriate room for adjustments.

Lack of balance in power and control

God is all-powerful and sovereign. However, He delegates power and authority to human beings to use it as stewards (Gn 1:28). For instance; it is a wrong notion to believe that the developing nations with which one is partnering have no power or ability to influence the partnership. Every mission agency, church or individual that seeks to partner with others and still has the sole power and control of the partnership will fail (Odesola & Moses 2019:9). There is a need for the partners to have shared knowledge of the missions and have balance, power and control between them.

No appropriate Christian relationship exists without sharing the control of power and decision-making. Inflexibility in sharing power control is a significant obstacle to partnership in missions. Although all the partners may not have equal power or influence, it should be balanced so that none is enslaved or one dictating to the other (Good Therapy 2019:1). This challenge can be overcome by constant communication and sensitivity to the opinions of other partners.

Inappropriateness of relationship

Contentment and humility are very vital in a partner's relationship. For true mutuality in Christian missions, partners not only need each other's gifts, but they also need each other's insights. No one has a monopoly on the truth when partners engage in God's mission. For instance, a partner may know certain things better, but the other partner's view is also needed (Tankler 2022:91). When partnerships in Christian

missions' relationships are patterned after the world system, it will result in deceit, envy and manipulation.

There is no appropriate Christian reciprocal contextual collaboration without reciprocal Christological relationship (Lk 9:1–6; 10:1–12, 17–20). Faith and total dependence on God for results and resources are vital to overcoming the temptation of entering an inappropriate relationship in partnership. We must trust God's grace in each other and work together by faith, considering others better than us.

Integrity issues among partners

Before going into a partnership with anyone, the person's integrity should be considered because some people are nominal Christians; they are Christians only by bearing Bible names. Whatever they say should not be taken hook, line, and sinker. They are not like David, whom God testified about the integrity of his heart (Ps 78:72) 'And David shepherded them with the integrity of heart; with skilful hands, he led them'. Someone with sound integrity of heart would not be thinking about how he will dupe or defraud other partners. Moreover, the second quality mentioned in Psalm 78:72 was 'the skilfulness of hands'. Partners should be skilful in what they are planning to do together, that is, to have at least a basic understanding of what the partnership or the agreement is all about; with that, the individual partner will know what his or her contribution is going to be, and each of them will be able to play their role well as it ought to be.

Lack of vision

The goals of partnership can be renewed over time, but the vision needs to be pursued wholeheartedly (eds. Seifer & Connors 2006:5). For instance, no task related to the sending function of missionaries is more essential or foundational in the local church setting than keeping the vision of missions and outreach before the congregation. Unless there is passion fed by insight and knowledge in their hearts, one can say goodbye to the vision of being an influential sending church. A leader may do four things to motivate believers to action (Moreau, Corwin & McGee 2015:234):

- It takes the right balance of information with inspiration. The heart must be stirred, and the mind must be informed because if we cannot see possibilities, it will be difficult for our eyes to see opportunities.
- It takes promising pathways for gaining service experience; this is where short-term missions are done well and have made such a decisive contribution. There is no substitute for hands-on ministry when the goal creates a heart burdened for the task.
- It takes the reinforcement of targeted and effective teaching and training; this is true at the congregational, mission communities and ministerial staff levels. Furthermore, indeed, it is accurate at the level of those who are being sent.
- It takes resources that make a difference. Fortunately, numerous resources are available today, and they come in

just about every variety imaginable. Among the most active and helpful has been Advancing Churches in Missions Commitment (ACMC), which until 2011, engaged effectively in direct ministries of consulting, providing resources and working with local churches to improve the impact of their missions (Moreau et al. 2015).

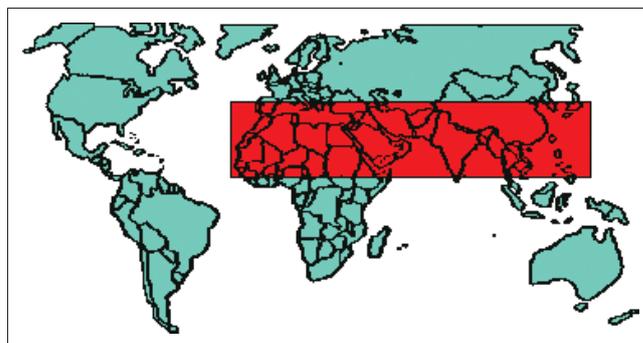
Prospects of partnership in missions

As narrated in Luke 5:7, Peter signalled to his colleagues when he discovered that his net had caught many fish. Jesus later informed him that he would be catching men. The 21st century has provided diverse opportunities for partnerships in missions. Four of the prospect of partnership in Christian missions will be discussed in the following sub-sections.

Unreached population

According to research carried out by the travelling team media, the world population is 7.9 billion, with a total people group of 17 432 and the unreached people group with less than 2% evangelical Christians are 7402, which makes up 41.5% (3.28 bn people) of the world population. In contrast to the reached people, which have greater than 2% Evangelical Christians (majority Christian Population) has 7070 people groups, making up 3.74 bn, that is 47.7% of the world population (Missions Stats 2021:1). In 1990, Christian missions strategist called Luis Bush started calling this rectangular area or 'band' as indicated in the Figure 1, the 10/40 window (Jesus Film Project 2019:1).

Of the 55 least evangelised countries, 97% of their population lives within the 10/40 Window. The statistics provide opportunities for the church to strategically engage God's giving resources through partnership in missions to evangelise the unreached. Through the partnership, the church and agencies can avoid wastage or overpopulation of missions' efforts in a particular place to the detriment of other places. Partnership in missions is the only way to reach unreached people groups because its demands are more than what an individual, church or missions agency can handle.



Source: Christian missions and world evangelism, n.d., 10/40 Window: We need to be stirred to action!, viewed 04 December 2022, from <https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/1040.htm#facts>

FIGURE 1: World map showing the band of 10/40 window.

Advancement in information and communication technology

The world is increasingly going digital. There is close connectivity and a wide spread of information. Through social media, Christian messages can be spread worldwide without restrictions (Larson 2021:5) because the world has become a global village through digital facilities. The regions where the practices of Christianity are forbidden can be penetrated through social media. Online churches are influential in places where people cannot gather for a physical worship experience. Social media provides opportunities for churches that are distant apart to enter partnerships quickly (Alawode 2020:5). Christian missions' progress can be measured tangibly as live streaming, video and audio records and pictures can easily be transferred.

Communication is made easy among partners. The Zoom app, Google Meet and WhatsApp calls can be used for meetings, and this is cheaper than travelling from one place to another, which might involve a level of risk. Through the availability of social media, more partners from different parts of the world can function together as a team, and they will be able to converge more quickly than the time they must travel.

Post-modernism and globalisation

Post-modernism seeks to dismantle Christianity by overturning binary oppositions and traditional standards. It is designed to construct meaning and values by not setting off two opposite statements against one another. While post-modernism proposes harmony and community, it is done at the expense of deconstructing established structures, texts, arts and systems (Alawode 2020). The church can take advantage of what post-modernism promotes, which is the creation of harmony and community. The church can therefore demonstrate genuine harmony, love and peace. Through effective partnerships in Christian missions, the people of the post-modern world could be attracted to the Christian faith.

The Internet, new patterns of immigration, greater ease of international travel and networked styles of an organisation have critical implications for church missions programmes worldwide (Barnes Davies 2003:2). In the contemporary world of globalisation, conversion seems to take place gradually. The relationship is vital in convicting people (Pope-Levison 2022:1). Globalisation makes it easy for the church to fulfil its global nature as intended by God (Hebrews 12:23). It is much easier to find a partnership with people for other professionals. People cherish relationships and want to be connected with people of like minds (Lianno & Deih 2016:4). Partnership in Christian missions will thrive as people find out that the church, agency or individuals are faithful and committed to their agreement.

Prayer movement

The Bible says, 'pray without ceasing' (1 Th 5:17 KJV); also, Luke 18:1 says, 'And he (Jesus) spake a parable unto them to

this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint'. There is an increasing awareness of the importance of prayer in the world. The church is awakening to her responsibility of praying for the propagation of the gospel. As stated by Steve Hawthorne (2012):

Despite some usual patterns of prayerlessness in the universal church, more Christians are praying now, surely, than at any time in history. More than 200 million followers of Christ pray every day for the advancement of world evangelisation. At least 15 million groups around the globe pray weekly for missions in their communities, and probably many more. Prayer events and gatherings abound in many countries (p.11).

Christian missions will be enriched through the activities of intercessors as people pray for the work to progress, with many signs and wonders following. The contemporary world is attracted to pleasures, experiences and mystics (Olson 2012:5); therefore, many will be attracted to the endeavours when signs and wonders accompany partners' activities. Prayer partnership will help missionaries to function effectively and take territories for Christ (Lk 11:21–28).

Conclusion

Partnership in missions has its basis in *Missio Dei*, as God said in Genesis 1:26, 'Come, Let us...' this shows Mission work cannot be done in isolation, and the Bible clarified further that Christian missions must be carried out through partnership. An individual local church, missions agency or personality cannot fulfil the task of the Great Commission. It takes the intentional collaboration of mission-minded individuals and groups to meet the demands of making disciples of all nations. Various challenges like the manifestation of sinful nature, lack of understanding of biblical partnership or its principles and lack of vision, among others, may accompany partnership in missions. The paper reveals how the challenges can be overcome.

It further explains partnership prospects in missions, especially in this contemporary time. The concentration of the unreached group, as explained in the 10/40 window, advancement in information and communication technology, globalisation and post-modernism and prayer movements reveals that partnership in missions will improve and be exceptionally advantageous to global evangelisation.

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