

'Little Drops, Mighty Ocean': An African Case Study in Partnership

BY
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Victor M. Tukura is a lawyer by profession and serves as the International Director of Missions Supporters League (MSL), a missions agency he founded with his wife Nosa, in 1998. He has also served in numerous capacities at various levels of the public and private sectors in Nigeria. Victor is a prolific writer, who has authored more than 20 books on the twin-theme of missions and discipleship.

It was a long road trip from Abuja, Nigeria's capital city, to Latana, a rural settlement located in Billiri Local Government of Gombe State, in the northwest region of the country. The rainy season was regressing, and the dry weather was just setting in. The cool harmattan wind and the towering mango tree above us did a lot to cushion the impact of the African sun, making our outdoor meeting an entirely refreshing experience.

I was in the village to meet with the members of the Latana Chapter of the Missions Supporters League (MSL). They were pleasantly surprised at my visit. It sounded unbelievable that the International Director of MSL would travel a distance of almost seven hours to meet with "unschooled people." Indeed, uneducated, elderly women made up a large percentage of their membership, and they reasoned that their chapter was way down the pecking order, compared to other chapters of means.

Such gestures and relationship building are an integral part of who we are in MSL. Humility and servant leadership are highly prized among us. Our membership is drawn from all strata of society, and we strive to give everyone a sense of belonging.

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Vision and Mission

MSL was founded by me and my wife Nosa. She is a physicist, while I am a lawyer. After my university and law school training, I was called to the Nigerian Bar in 1985. Shortly afterwards, I took up the challenge of mobilizing resources for mission work, and this set me on the path of

missions advocacy. In 1988, I set up a law office—Victor Tukura & Co. (Missions Chambers), with the primary aim of raising funds for missions. In the course of time, Nosa and I founded MSL, which serves as a platform for the mobilization of resources for global missions.

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As captured in our books and other publications, the vision of MSL is: "A God-centered and dynamic missions support movement committed to the holistic transformation of peoples of the world." Our mission statement is, "to raise prayer, financial, material support and other resources for all aspects of missions, through



the mobilization of the Church for the salvation of nations.”¹ The objectives of MSL are discharged through the establishment of chapters in various villages, towns and cities. These chapters are clusters of Christians from different local churches, who come together to fulfill the common goal of reaching the nations with the gospel, through missions partnership.

Why Chapters?

At the commencement of the vision, our ministry efforts were restricted to funds raised from the law office and other family sources, but God told us to go further to broaden and open things up by involving the Body of Christ (the Church). Whatever was ongoing on the family platform in praying and funding missions would only remain a drop in the ocean in view of the magnitude of need on the mission fields. But opening up channels of support for missionaries through chapters would constitute many drops that would in the long run become a mighty ocean. Consequently, we evolved a principle of “little drops, mighty ocean” in establishing clusters of Christians in mission partnership.

Problems we were trying to solve by adopting the chapter model:

1. Multiplying available channels for the funding of missions.
2. Trying to avoid donor fatigue that comes from individual or families for consistently bearing the burden of supporting myriad needs at the same time.
3. Providing a more robust spiritual cover to prevent or minimize spiritual attacks that come from supporting missions if done alone.

Some advantages of the chapter model are:

1. Provides a platform for the involvement of every Christian to pragmatically participate in the Great Commission, irrespective of status and class.
2. Denominational barriers are broken as chapter members are made up of Christians from various denominational backgrounds working together.
3. Little resources from each member can go a long way in accomplishing much when pulled together in a chapter, thereby creating multiplication and synergy.

4. Adoption of a mission field or work by the members of a chapter gives them concentration and focus on service instead of dissipating resources on many needs at the same time.
5. Mission work is backed with prayers and finances with equal intensity.
6. Creates a bonding and fellowship between Christians within the chapter which showcases the unity in the Body of Christ.
7. Everybody has something peculiar to bring for the advancement of the gospel work on the missions fields, e.g., giftings, expertise, experience, etc.
8. Carrying the burden of the field is spread and shared by many and therefore less cumbersome.
9. It creates opportunity for family involvement in missions that could endure from generation to generation, which leads to sustainability.
10. The whole Church is strategically engaged in the task to preach the whole gospel to the whole world.

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Methods and Membership

Our goal is to build bridges between Christians and Unreached People Groups, in the mission fields, by making disciples in the nations, one field at a time. It is our belief that Christians of all persuasions who are not missionaries serving God on the mission field are only at “home” to service all aspects of missions in partnership with the missionaries, by providing the resources needed to get the nations saved. Each and every Christian should, as a matter of necessity, be either a missionary or a partner, serving as yoke fellows and equal stakeholders in the mission of planting churches in the nations of the earth.

So, while MSL Chapters range in size from five to 20 persons, the numerical strength of the chapter is not the main issue. The most important thing is the commitment of the members to their collective assignment.

¹ MSL Handbook.

Each chapter adopts a mission field and works with missionaries to proclaim Jesus within an Unreached People Group. Through sustained involvement in these fields, the chapters provide prayer, financial and material support to missionaries.

Prayer Thrust

Prayer is key to every missions endeavor. With this consciousness, MSL has put in place prayer platforms for members and Christians to stand in the gap for missionaries and mission work. The first platform is the prayer segment of the monthly MSL chapter meetings. In addition, the Prayer Web, which is the prayer calendar of MSL, is used to develop a global praying web of Christians for missions.

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Financial and Material Support

In MSL, we have professionals like lawyers, engineers, medical doctors, judges, architects, nurses, entrepreneurs and teachers; but we also have artisans and local farmers. Some chapters periodically raise and send large sums of money to their adopted mission fields. However, some other chapters generate small amounts of money, but they do so faithfully. Some chapters send funds to their adopted mission field once a year, while others do so more frequently. Ultimately, each chapter adopts the approach that suits them.

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Relationship

In the traditional ways of missions support and partnership, donors contribute money to fund mission programs and projects. In MSL, we go further by establishing a consummate relationship between the

supporter and missionary. It goes beyond contributing money to establishing a viable collaboration which makes the two parties yokefellows and equal partners in the missions endeavor. The partner does not support from afar but takes personal interest in the fruitful outcome of the endeavor.

An example of this relationship between the missionary and supporters was demonstrated in what the MSL Jos chapter did sometime in year 2000. They had adopted a remote mission field located somewhere in the Mandara mountains along the Nigeria/Cameroon border for support. Accessing the field takes a six-hour trek climbing through the range of mountains from the base. The converts were constructing a church building made of mud bricks and had gotten to the roofing level. The dry season had just ended, and the rains were threatening. Any delays would bring down the whole structure and the efforts of the converts would be reduced to ground zero. Being an emergency, the missionary quickly rushed to the chapter and they promptly rallied round to raise the needed funds. Joyfully, the missionary went back to the field with all the materials required for roofing and windows. Immediately, the roofing was completed, the rains came down heavily, but the building was spared. The villagers were astonished and held the view that the God of the Christians is very powerful. He withheld the rains until the church building was completed.

One of the ways of fostering this missionary/supporter relationship is through field visitations. In this case the supporters, at the convenience of the missionary, visit the latter on the field for fellowship and encouragement. Some have even engaged in medical outreaches.

On the flip side, the missionary could be invited to spend some time with the supporters when on vacation or when he or she needs to take some time off the field. In the process, a relationship commences and is sustained over time. It is this synergy that provides the needed impetus for field work to thrive.

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Mobilization and Ministry Growth

Mobilization Thrust

In order to fulfill our mandate of mobilizing the Church and creating awareness among believers, MSL has adopted some measures, which include the Senders Assembly, an annual missions conference, and state summits, which are a one-day awareness program aimed at mobilizing Christians for missions in the different state capitals. We also organize breakfast meetings where the vision of MSL is shared with the invited guests. In addition, church visitations are conducted for the purpose of creating awareness in churches.

Other forms of mobilization include the MSL New Frontiers, an arm of the ministry that specifically targets the mobilization of 10,000 youth towards various aspects of the global mission workforce within designated periods. The essence is to inculcate a missions mindset in the youth and to prepare them for the emerging new frontiers in missions.

Ministry Growth

The first chapter was established in Jos, in Plateau State, but the vision has spread steadily to other parts of Nigeria. MSL is contributing modestly, and in productive ways, to global missions, discipleship and evangelism, through the network of chapters and the adoption of Unreached People Groups. Currently, MSL has chapters spread across 22 of the 36 States in Nigeria, and we are in partnership with 25 mission agencies based in Nigeria and other African countries. So far, we have adopted more than 102 mission fields or Unreached People Groups.

MSL is gradually spreading outside Nigeria. We earnestly believe that the task of reaching the remaining unreached nations of Africa is achievable. Just imagine what could happen if a fraction of the human and material resources locked up in the African church is released for cross-cultural missions globally. Certainly, no ethnic group would remain unengaged, as all would be ultimately reached with the gospel.

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Conclusion

We believe that every Christian has something to bring to the table. The salary earners and big-time businesspeople bring in their contribution, the small fish farmer brings in the proceeds of his fish farm, the petty trader brings in her small income. A little of this and a little of that, and gradually something substantial is raised for the furtherance of the gospel in the mission fields.

Through simple but strategic ways, MSL members are touching the world by doing global missions in their local chapters. It is these little drops of water dotted all around the globe that will transform into a mighty ocean, and the knowledge of the glory of God will cover the earth as the waters covers the sea. (Hab. 2:14) 

