



Integrating Women into the Leadership of Christian Missions Agency

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.23>

Abstract

Christian Missions Agency is an organised body of Christians that are making efforts to propagate Christianity among those who have not come into contact with the faith. Christian mission activities need a diversity of thinking and experience in a leadership team. Missions' agencies also need leadership that meets a new set of societal needs and circumstances. One easy and obvious step toward diversity in such a body is incorporating women into all levels of the organisational leadership matrix, particularly in the top leadership positions. This paper is not to be construed as a campaign against male leadership; instead, it seeks to increase the equal representation of women and men as part of the mission work teams and within the leadership of a Christian missions organisation. There is a need to create a space for all voices to be heard since all are created equal in the sight of God. An effective mission organisation needs to view women and men as equal contributors to the kingdom's growth and to general social progress. It also aims to encourage women to take on different roles and ensure their skills do not go unnoticed in broader society. Leadership in missions should not in any way be gender-biased. Organisations that do not intentionally create a space for women with leadership gifts to be able to use their gifts for the good of all, will ultimately lose those women's valuable contributions. Some of the reasons commonly cited to explain why women, either married or single, cannot be considered on the same footing as their male counterparts are unwarranted. These are inter alia gender barriers that hinder them, identity challenges, and a perception that a woman is primarily responsible for only family care and thus gains cultural acceptability. The paper concludes with suggested ways of integrating women into leadership of Christian missions as a critically important addition to them.

Keywords: Christianity, mission, leadership, integration, women.

Introduction

Christian Mission Agency is an organised body of Christians that are making efforts to propagate Christianity among unreached people. Missions involve sending people or groups of people called missionaries, across boundaries, most commonly across geographical boundaries, to carry out evangelism or other social activities, such as educational or health work in the name of Christianity. Christian Mission activities needs a diversity of thinking and experience on its leadership team. Missions' agency requires leadership cohort that meets a new set of needs and circumstances in a changing world. One easy and obvious step toward diversity is incorporating women into all levels of organisational leadership, particularly in the upper echelon leadership



positions. Evidence from the world of business studies continue to show that gender diversity in leadership improves business productivity and financial performance (Northouse, 2007, 270). Some studies show profit gains of thirty-five percent and more as women advance into senior management roles (Frankel, 2007, 5). With benefits like these, the reason to include women in business leadership is evident. What about the mission organisation? The context of the complex, mobile, educated, and interconnected world is the same. Missionaries around the world are facing challenging social questions and pressing issues as they labour to evangelise people who have never heard of Jesus Christ, and some who have heard and rejected the faith, and there are some who have been “innoculated” against it through various social aspects.

This paper is not a campaign against male leadership; instead, it seeks to increase the equal representation of women and men as part of work teams within the leadership of Christian Missions organisation. We need to create a space for all voices to be heard. This means paying greater attention to equally gendered experiences, including those who have access to power and whose voices are valued over others in society. An effective missions’ organisation views women and men as equal contributors to the kingdom’s growth and progress (Omoyajowo, 1995, 3). The paper additionally aims to encourage women to take on diverse roles and ensure their skills do not go unnoticed where they are sorely needed.

The Concept of Leadership in Christian Missions Agency

Women have contributed much to the Christian Missions throughout its history. However, their leadership role in this area has never been free from controversy. Today, some mission agencies are discussing the place of women in their ministries. According to Arthur Schlesinger, leadership is the capacity to move, inspire, and mobilise masses of people (Schlesinger, 1986:20). Leadership is a great ability and a great opportunity employed. Leading a Christian missions organisation requires that the person occupying the leadership position should be able to guide or direct the activities of the organization in an efficient and excellent way.

Ajayi and Ayantayo (2015: 215) opines that leadership is the natural and learned abilities, skills, personal and interpersonal conduct designed to influence people to take “the desired action”. The most fundamental dimension of leadership in mission is the ability to nurture a set of values and beliefs that will answer the question of why? Why do we do what we do? Why do we seek support? Why do we choose a particular mission field and reject another (Ikenberry, 1986: 2).

Leadership in missions involves persuasion, and is the process by which a leader induces an organisation to take actions that are in line with shared purposes (Gardner, 1990: 15). The story of the Israelites Exodus from Egypt fits this scenario. The people of Israel desired to be freed from Egyptian bondage, but they lacked the power to effect this purpose until Moses, the God-chosen leader came to the scene. Likewise, Nehemiah’s leadership also fits the description of a solid leader. In Nehemiah chapter two, he returned to Jerusalem and effected the completion of the God-given task he had. It could be deduced from this story that God’s people desired to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, but the task remained undone until this leader came to the scene.

It is important to note from these accounts, that Moses and Nehemiah did not impose themselves on the people; instead, they provide pieces of evidence for the groups about how God has called and equipped them for their task. Moses could share his desert



experience, including his encounter with the living God in the burning bush episode. Nehemiah could share how king Artaxerxes of Persia had endorsed his mission in response to God's answered prayer.

Leadership in missions should not be gender-biased. That one belongs to a feminine gender should not disqualify a person from any leadership position. Holding a position of status does not make one a leader. What makes a leader is the ability to provide appropriate directives for the team one leads. As the popular saying goes that, "what a man can do a woman can do better". A leader of feminine gender could lead a team to accomplish a task as well as a masculine leader could do this. As has been observed, to be a leader, one must have followers. In this context, what it takes to be a leader is the ability to motivate the followers to accomplish an agreed task in an efficient manner.

Effective leadership involves having a clear vision and a strong strategy for implementing changes. In the case of women leadership, this means developing a women's mainstreaming strategy with clear objectives that identify women considerations in cross-cultural settings (St-Pierre, 2019). Such a strategy should include women mainstreaming as part of policies, programmes, the conduct of personnel, as well as all needed training.

Inclusiveness of Women in Missions Leadership

Leadership provides direction and should spontaneously create a supportive environment for worker goal attainment (Blanchard, 2011: 23). Visionary leaders transform organisations to thrive. Kotter (2001: 67) defines leadership as vision setting exercise coupled with motivation meant to inspire followers. Leadership influences followers to an identified destiny and justifies why both need to be there. Inclusive leadership underscores this perception and illuminates the argument for women's leadership in strategic positions in mission organisations. Atewologun (2015: 26) observed that inclusive leadership encourages creativity where the leadership potential is drawn from a wider pool of players whose competencies and capabilities are varied. Women are no longer disenfranchised in monoculture male-dominated societies.

Effective leadership thus implies an interchangeable and collaborating alliance of both genders as opposed to a single gendered paradigm (Duerst-Lahti, 2010: 67). The theory of inclusive leadership suggests a neo-clear culture that promotes female leadership (The Economist, 2015). Evidence suggests that more female leaders continue to demonstrate the capacity and desire to lead, despite the cultural, political and economic manoeuvres that undermine these improvements and initiatives (Duncan, 201: 35).

Women Missionary Engagement

Both historical and geographical shreds of evidence reveal that the involvement of women in the work of missions can be quite fruitful. Carol Davis of Global Spectrum states that women often make the best church planters (Davis, 2007: 17). In the early 20th century, about 40 evangelical missionary organisations were led by women (Cunningham, 2000: 32). In missions, women indeed 'shine.' The expansion of British female mission workers in the late nineteenth century transformed the nature of British evangelism by challenging assumptions of mission work as a necessarily male endeavour (Ubah, 1998:3). When the Protestant missionary societies needed to reevaluate their missions strategies because of the threat posed by Islam and Catholicism to



the evangelisation moment in Africa, Women were key players in addressing this concern, both as missionaries and converts: societies sent women into the mission field because they believed women alone could bring indigenous women and their families into the Christian fold (Prevost, 2008:11).

Numerous women missionaries went out, not only evangelising but also establishing hospitals and schools (Ma, 2014: 22). Moreover, they have done this in harsh, remote places. As one writer observes, 'The more difficult and dangerous the task, the higher the ratio of women to men.' God has used countless Asian women. For example, in Malaysia, for more than 20 years, Susan Tang has been pioneering and pastoring churches in Sabah. Her commitment to God's work has led to not only countless converts to Christ, but also trained pastors and evangelists. Another woman, Teo Kwee Keng, has pastored a flourishing church in Batu Pahat, Malaysia for 14 years, establishing at least four other churches in the area during that time, and serving at many preaching stations. Women missionaries were important figures in Africa social history in the Nineteenth and twentieth centuries, shaping ideas about gender relations, family and kinship, marriage and motherhood. Kristin Mann's book about the marriage choice of Christian elite in Colonia Lagos (1985: 31) has shown this to still be the case, and more recent books by Meredith McKittrick (2002: 4) and Phyllis Martins (2010:16) show the same. Numerous women are working as cross-cultural missionaries and teach in Bible Schools in many nations.

Women tend to exhibit more substantial commitment and often more profound sensitivity to human suffering with incredible tenacity (Glasser, 1978:89). Mission history is full of testimonies to women's gifts for God's Kingdom. Due to their innate sensitivity, women missionaries are more open to the holistic expression of God's mission. Also, as they can easily approach and engage with fellow women, they tend to have a more accessible inroad to local minds. Even in language learning, women missionaries out-perform male missionaries (Tucker, 1987:15). In many places, they began to translate the Bible /for hundreds of language groups and established Bible schools, involved in holistic ministries among the tribal groups the encountered (Tucker, 1987). In many communities, it was women who were actively leading congregations and they were able to research on various aspects of their culture, its interaction with Christianity, and the transformative impact of the gospel on community life in often very specific social contexts.

Integrating Women into Leadership Positions

What can women offer in missions? What could be the results if women's voices were heard in the top leadership levels of mission organisations? Women offer strong relational connections and are embedded in the host culture. Whether by nature or nurture, women are likely to form strong emotional ties with the people around them. Relational networks may develop through:

- Taking children to school and interacting with other parents.
- Buying and selling in the local market.
- Teaching vocational skills to disadvantaged people in the community.

Women usually connect with the host community. This kind of connection gives women something akin to insider information which can be extremely useful to a mission organisation as it sets out its strategy, makes plans, and chooses directions for the future projects. Women bring an additional perspective to social and mission issues. Mission organisation with a desire to reach all people for Christ cannot afford to ignore the reality of their workforce place or target audiences. Including women in positions of leadership can help broaden the understanding of the context



and needs of others. This will help in the formulation of an effective organisation plan and set a stronger strategy to reach all the people of their host culture.

Women who have leadership gifts will put those gifts to use, one way or another. Lois Frankel observes that women with leadership skills had three options: keep silent, work elsewhere, or leave the business completely (Frankel, 2007:9). Investigations into women in mission organisations suggest that the same phenomenon is true today. Organisations that do not intentionally create a space for women with leadership gifts to use their gifts for the good of all will lose those invaluable women's contributions. The woman may stay silent for a certain period, trying to deny or suppress her passion. Often, she will find another venue to use her gifts and passions. That may mean working with a different ministry organisation. It could mean seconding to another mission or changing organisations. Unfortunately, it may mean leaving missions altogether and that would be a great loss.

In every one of these cases, it is the organisation that loses the benefit of her wisdom, experience, and passion. God designs us to use the gifts given to us and work according to our passions. Trying to be someone or something else is not sustainable in the long term and can lead to burn-out, depression, and leaving the field. It is important to notice that the problem is not the individual woman, but the environment that has no space for her to be as God made her.

Obstacles to Integration

Why do some mission agencies find it difficult to enlist women into leadership positions? There are several reasons commonly cited to explain why women, either married or single, cannot be considered on the same footing as their male counterparts. Although both men and women acknowledged that women were indeed qualified to lead in the missions, the gender barrier hindered or prevented women from doing the job effectively. For many women, the identity challenge was a significant obstacle; instead of 'hitting the nail on the head', many women have retreated to traditional gender roles (Rose, 1987). From the traditional perspective of the church, women were expected to serve men, be silent, follow their husbands' teachings, and not occupy a leadership position (Culver et al., 1989). Munroe (1984) suggests that men should not see women as inferior, but rather opines that women should have equal dominion and partnership. He viewed male leadership as positional power (order of creation, desires to be announced or recognised, and has primary responsibility for his family). He considered women's leadership as influential power (the ability to affect the emotional, mental, spiritual outcome of people and situations). Both types of leadership are necessary in the task of world evangelisation.

Another obstacle observed is the perception that a woman is primarily responsible for family care, a view that is not supported by scripture, which enjoins fathers to good parenting just as much as mothers. The traditional role for women had often been described as the "helper," which meant support or administrative role in the church. In the homes, it meant maintaining the home, caring for their children, and assisting the husband in any way necessary (Munroe, 1984). If women were only pegged to this definition of "helper" both at home and ministry, it would confirm existing research data that pointed to the fact that women are undervalued and underutilised at church and in a range of church-related organisations (Barna, 2012).

Cultural acceptability also poses a significant hindrance to women's leadership. Since most cultures are patriarchal, women's leadership offers suffer rejection by the host culture. Sometimes, a missionary must submit to the host culture's views on the status and role of women to gain acceptance. It can be much more challenging for the missionary to distinguish between the



biblical view and the cultural view of women's leadership. A careful reading of scripture shows that Jesus was not willing to be limited by cultural views for women. He had women travel with him, support him out of their private means, sit at his feet as disciples, and bear the first witness to His resurrection. He revealed His full divinity to both Martha and the Samaritan woman, who incidentally became one of the most effective evangelists recorded in the New Testament.

Steps to Women's Integration

A complex world demands that mission agencies need diversity of thinking and experience in their leadership teams. More importantly, a lost world means mission agencies need every person, both male and female, fully engaged, using their gifts to the fullest for the cause of Christ's kingdom on earth.

However, women's leadership development is an interplay of cultural, socio-political, and personality factors. Certain competencies and personality traits are necessary for developing acceptable societal values. Western (2013:12) advocates a multidimensional approach to developing leaders. Both individual traits and interpersonal interactions are critical in the formation of an effective leader. Effective leadership styles that command the capacity to motivate, develop and build others tend to generate results. Hellriegel et al. (2014: 6) views leadership development as being experiential and to be supported by training initiatives, underscoring the strength of guiding, coaching, and mentoring. Western (2013:12) augments that such capacity-building initiative is multi-dimensional and comprehensive. Nicolaidis (2015) stresses that employees are agents who have immutable rights and an ethical and quality driven value alignment that plays a key role in defining a business and what it stands for and this applies to women as well as to men. The same author states women and men are called to be servant leaders as they develop themselves and others. Furthermore, in Matthew (20:27.28) Jesus informs us that: whoever wishes to be the great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve (Nicolaidis, 2020). In any event, Christian women should have a major role in evangelizing and be able to serve because they share the same objective as Christian men: to fulfill God's commandments.

Some mission agencies appear to overlook their valuable human resources: the women workers and leaders God has already placed in their organisations. Half the world is female, and more than half of our missionary workforce is also female. Mission organisations' cannot afford to ignore the diverse human resources God has entrusted them as they carry out the Great Commission.

Below are some guidelines for mission agencies looking for capable and competent women.

a. Find them

The mission force continues to be sixty to sixty-five percent female, meaning that every agency already has an abundance of faithful women, some of whom have leadership gifts. One ought to make a deliberate effort to find them and train them (Dzubinski, 2010: 155). They probably will not look like their male counterparts. They may be single. If they are married, they may be ready to lead when their children become teens, or they may be ready to lead when the children are small and may have already built a family structure that supports their leadership aspirations.

b. Train them

They may not sound as confident or assertive as their male colleagues, having been socialised to hold back. One ought to create a safe, encouraging space for them to share



their dreams and aspirations. Providing mentors for them is vital—both male and female. Make sure women are participating in the organisation's leadership training.

c. Support them

It can be doubly devastating for a woman who takes the risk of accepting a leadership job if she lacks the needed support in doing her job (Gascho, 2008). Having chosen to put a woman leader in a position, one need not change her title to make the men on her team more comfortable. If she is the leader, she leads, period. If she is married, let her spouse be adequately be informed about her job expectations to carry increased family responsibilities, and make sure that is just as true for a woman leader as for a man leader. Do not allow a double standard to creep in which undermines her confidence and her ability to do the job well.

d. Clarified organisation Policy

If the organisational policy is that only men can lead, be clear about this from the first day of recruiting. Better to help a sister in Christ find an alternate place to use her God-given gifts than bring her in and cause frustration for her and the organisation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has succinctly argued for the inclusion of women in the leadership of Christian Missions organisation. The author opines that equal representation of male and female gender in the leadership team will help the mission agencies to effectively use the potentials that God has entrusted to their care in order to advance God's kingdom on earth. Since God has equipped both genders with the ability to lead, women should not be undervalued or underutilised in the mission agencies. To achieve this aim, some recommendations for the missions' organisations to consider are:

- a. Christian Mission organisations should be intentional in placing women into leadership roles and positions of responsibility and support them when they do their job.
- b. Expand ministry definitions to recognise the relational type of work typically done by women.
- c. Organise regular leadership training for women.
- d. Make sure that women training and participation of women in all aspects of mission life are funded adequately.
- e. Be deliberate about empowering women workers and reaching women in the target audience. Encourage women to be deliberate about how they invest their time. Communicate that what they do is important and strategic.
- f. Think carefully about your single women. Ensure that receive adequate attention and support. If they get married, make adequate preparation for them and their spouses.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: *The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*



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