

This edition of Educare contains the first of two articles on the theme of African missionaries and their families. We are privileged to have been given the opportunity to see the mission field through African eyes, thanks to the material provided by Dupe Kashimawo. Dupe is an experienced missionary and MK educator who has international responsibility for member care and MKs in her organisation.

Part One looks at general attitudes to missions, terms of service, faith and finance, family life, children's education and language learning. We hope that this information will be both challenging and helpful for those of us who work with, recruit or come across missionaries from Africa.

Gill Bryant

Understanding Missionaries from Africa

by Dupe Kashimawo, CAPRO Kenya

The content of this presentation is a combination of personal experiences and persuasions, as well as information gleaned from CAPRO and other missionaries

General attitudes to missions

There are big variations between different African countries culturally, economically and in terms of church size and type, but there is a unique but vast similarity in the way Africans perceive and respond to missions. The age of the church and level of mission awareness (missions as an indigenous responsibility of the church) in the different African countries also impacts on their attitude and response to missions. Countries where the gospel was preached and discipleship taught have the tendency to be more responsive to missions. Places where the gospel was preached more from a social transformation approach tend to be perpetually dependent even as mature congregations.

For example, a lot of evangelistic work and teachings and revival crusades gave rise to spiritual awareness in the churches and student movement that has

impacted the mission drive of the Nigerian church. Today, 2020, there are 150 independent mission organizations in the Nigerian Evangelical Mission Association (NEMA). In Benin, Nigeria's immediate neighbour, there are only 9 mission organizations with only one indigenous to Benin: others are foreign African missions operating in Benin. Burkina Faso has 10 mission organizations. For several African countries, mission is still seen as a Western responsibility to the rest of the world, not only because there is no knowledge of the need to actively engage in missions but because they are not able to generate enough local or foreign resources to run and to support missions and missionaries. The Africans giving services within non-African mission agencies are generally not considered 'missionaries' within their African communities, and so rather than support them, it might be expected that they are in a more financially favoured position, as the Western missionary is perceived to be.

Although these are general tendencies, when Africans respond to missions they do so with passion. Whenever and wherever there is exposure through awareness to the call to missions, Africans generally respond with absolute resolve to serve God. Speaking from my CAPRO and Nigeria background, I can confidently say they respond with a reckless abandonment to the call to serve as missionaries. The response to missions is basically a devotion to God: hence for many what the sending organization or church has to offer is generally secondary.

How many families do you have serving cross-culturally in CAPRO?

CAPRO has 725 missionaries drawn from mainly African countries and serving in 35 countries around the world. We have 241 families (couples) and 629 Missionary Kids (MKs). As at December 2018, CAPRO has 43% serving in cross-cultural church planting while 57% are in support ministries.

In Nigeria alone, CAPRO has 306 serving missionaries, of whom 209 are serving cross-cultural church planting locally and in foreign countries.

How are their terms of service organised?

CAPRO missionaries sign up for a four year cycle (term) of service. They go to the field with a very clear vision in mind: the making of disciples, the planting of churches, raising indigenous elders and handing over the church leadership so that the planted church becomes self-governing and self-propagating. From the onset, they are generally wired to stay in their host countries or

community until this is accomplished except when they see their posting strategically as a beach head leading to other locations.

CAPRO missionaries serve several years in host countries or communities and will only come out for short breaks after a long period, usually tied into fund raising or other official business rather than holiday. Every four years, there is a provision for a year of furlough for those in foreign countries or quadrennial leave for those serving within their country, although many go for years without taking any leave. There are provisions for an annual leave of 30 days which is not compulsory, but some have to be required to take it by the leadership when it is apparent that they need the break.

Our experience in CAPRO is that the quality of heart of mission candidates and our mission training generally incline CAPRO missionaries to a hard, rugged and dogged pursuit of their vision. Personal drive and faithfulness to the call generally draw our missionaries to long term service often to the sacrifice of their personal or family comfort.

Our member care research showed that most of the CAPRO staff serving on the field rarely take annual leave. The reasons given were always the same in the following order: much work on the ground, no one to cover in my absence, no funds to travel, no place to go for the period with my family. Taking leave without adequate funds, accommodation and mobility makes many CAPRO missionaries, particularly those with families, wary of taking holidays. The same can be said for other missionaries from African mission agencies.

Finance

We are aware that CAPRO is a faith mission. How common is this approach amongst African missionaries?

Most African indigenous missions operate financially on a faith mission basis, so the missionaries joining such organisations embark on absolute faith in God for their personal support. Even those serving with church-based missions can be said to also operate on faith, due to the often insufficient financial stipend received from the church. Mission ventures amongst the unreached peoples need to be differentiated from Pentecostal prosperity-preaching city pastors.

African missionaries often embark on missions out of sheer obedience to God and in defiance of what may be regarded as common sense. They are often

viewed by their families and associates as extremists or fanatics in the expression of their faith, because of their seemingly senseless abandonment to suffering (choosing a path of suffering).

CAPRO started as a response of young university graduates posted for national service to northern Nigeria. The level of spiritual exposure and the realisation of the spiritual conditions and limitations to evangelism in the north spurred them to evangelistic action, seeking to proclaim Christ in the north of the country. The experience of resistance and hostility to the gospel in their first radical attempt led to the establishment of a mission agency. From that beginning most of CAPRO's missionaries have been graduates with first and second degrees, several called from their very lucrative businesses, careers and professions. So, it is always with a clear implication of the life of absolute trust in God for their sustenance that they come to join the mission force. Some come into missions as singles, some come with their families. In CAPRO, missionaries are expected to trust God for financial provision not only for their personal sustenance but also for their specific work and CAPRO work in general.

“God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply”. [Hudson Taylor]

I can safely say for many African missionaries that their financial support is the story of lean times and abundance, and in between these times there is the 'sufficient' daily bread. Like Paul.... they learn very quickly what it means to abound and to be abased.

Generally the African missionary going to a foreign field is looking much more to the basic essentials to entering the field. Even when the cost of living in the field is more expensive than in the home country, coming up with a budget that is higher than the average living cost may not be considered appropriate for missionaries. There is a general expectation that to be a missionary, you have agreed to living a very modest life. Missionary life in the African experience is generally that of sacrifice and suffering.

In CAPRO the intending missionary is expected to make a pre-entry visit (the cost for this also has to be raised by the missionary) to the host country to ascertain expenses in the following areas.

- Travel costs (Return tickets)

- Rent, food and utilities
- School fees, medical insurance
- Any statutory demands of the host country e.g residence or work permit, student pass etc

Leisure (holidays and recreation), clothes and shoes and general furniture or accessories are generally not calculated. There is a general expectation that God will provide their other needs on the go. For example, if He provides for the rent, He will provide the furniture etc. African missionaries are trained to expect and to experience God's faithfulness rather than burden the church or partners at the onset of going to the field.

What are the challenges involved in raising support?

The major challenge with raising support for most African missionaries is that of the perception of missions itself as a vocation reserved for the Western Church.

This challenge also comes from the way that some older missions or missionaries have lived and carried out missions over the years in some African countries. In the bid to have access and impact, some engaged in giving aid ranging from the least level of need to major projects, with or without securing the spiritual commitment of the people. When an African decides for missions the relations and church expect that he would be rich like the Western missionaries and he or she is not expected to resort to the host Church or Christian community for financial support.

For many years and to a large extent up until now, many African communities do not understand why an educated and skilled able-bodied man or woman should embark on such a lifetime of service with no salary. After all, this is why you went to school. Many African missionaries today are educated people with high academic achievements. Some are from elite and wealthy families where the expectation is for them to be self-sustaining, and to use their skills to help others in the community to attain financial independence. Because of this, it is generally a challenge to solicit for financial support from family. Hence the more responsible way to convey the financial implication and needs of the work they have been called to do is to solicit for prayers. Some view those going into mission service as people with low academic background in search

of a livelihood, or as just being lazy to improve their earning power or get a paid job. Hence they would not support. Some African missionaries have to move far away from their families from the onset of their mission career, just so that the family do not observe any lack or suffering that could lead to pity or reprimanding etc. It is generally very hard and challenging for the African missionaries at the beginning of their missionary career, but they usually experience God coming through.

The largest percentage of those supporting missionaries and missions in general in Africa are individuals - independent givers, who give in support of missionaries or mission projects out of their personal persuasion. The African churches - again not equally true for all countries - are spiritually aware and blessed with a discipleship attitude when it comes to giving to the Lord and His work (thanks to the sound foundational teachings of early mission work in some of these countries). Countries like Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria in particular have a large number of evangelical Christians, many of who are aware of the need for missions and are responsive to it.

The African church has the potential for supporting missions and missionaries, but of course there are many that are not able to do this adequately, due to the economic conditions of their country. But again, there is the general African generosity and spiritual awareness that spur individuals who become persuaded of missions to generously give to missionaries and mission projects. The Nigerian church is very rich in spiritual and financial resources and over the years over 80% of CAPRO's financial support for all our missionaries and for our countries of operation has come from the generous giving of the Nigerian church (individuals from within and outside the country).

The modern and prosperity teachings that have infiltrated African churches have also diverted the emphasis of some of the churches to the perception that 'missions' is defined as everything you do for the denominational church growth. Hence, funds are limited for church planting in remote rural unreached people groups, but available for activities such as crusades in cities and the hosting of invited evangelists for a church mission week. Good as this church multiplication need may be, many churches miss out on being financially committed to sending or supporting independent missionaries reaching the unreached.

Family life

In general, we understand that the extended family is much more central to daily life in Africa and Asia than in the West. When a missionary family leaves to serve outside of their country they become a 'nuclear family'. How does this affect them and what challenges do they face?

African missionaries often experience loneliness, not because they are alone but much more because there is trepidation as they relate with other missionaries, especially in asking for help. Visiting, fellowship and sharing needs could be wrongly perceived. Hence the fear of being misunderstood, being misjudged, being labelled by a blanket perception of Africans, especially perceptions based on negative personal experiences (stories passed on about Africans) can make the missionary hold back from what could have been a family experience.

Also, the general perception by the rest of the world facilitated by the media is that Africa and Africans are very poor and are always craving for whatever they can get from the rest of the world. This tends to influence the Western missionary to presume on or to suspect the motive of their African colleagues in missions. However, they are unaware that a good number of African missionaries have come from educated and financially comfortable families. One of several examples is a missionary whose father was a diplomat. He had travelled to several countries with his family on his father's official assignments. His family were highly disappointed when upon graduation from the university he chose to go and live up on a mountain among unreached peoples. For such a missionary, shabby and suspicious treatment by missionary colleagues could be emotionally disturbing.

What are their expectations regarding their children's education?

The educational expectation for the children of African missionary families is usually a journey of faith. It is a faith trip which even the children are made aware of from the start. African parents would usually sit the children down to the lecture of what the call of God on their lives would demand (especially the possible suffering). They encourage the children to embrace the call as a family call and they involve the children in praying as they prepare to go.

Some church-based missions will adopt the MKs into the homes of church members or give scholarships for a boarding house in church-owned schools.

However, most African missionaries would rather have their children with them than relinquish them to the care of relatives or well-wishing church members. But where this is a challenge to the higher call, they often take the difficult path, trusting the child or children to the Lord under such circumstances.

African missionaries would generally want a good school for their children but would resort to public school, for their children to continue to receive some sort of education. Many CAPRO missionaries home school their children with whatever materials they can find until they find a school for them. For sub-Saharan African families in countries where policies are entirely grounded on the state religion, the education of children from such families is a challenge. The main challenge is that in such countries, study of the dominant religion is obligatory in the public schools, which are reasonably affordable in comparison to international schools. Furthermore, the local private schools are mandated to make religious studies compulsory for all students. Parents who do not want their children to be subjected to these mandatory classes are left with only two options, i.e. home schooling and international schools. These two options are difficult. On the one hand, many educational ministries in countries south of the Sahara do not have the structure and provision for home schooling. Home schooled children may find it very challenging to gain entrance into universities both in their home country and overseas. On the other hand, opting for international schools requires huge financial provision, which is usually out of the reach of many African missionary families. Home schooling materials and distance learning are not affordable for them. Co-operative schools run by a group of missionary parents are not common due to the thin spread of missionaries on the field.

There are very few MK Schools in Africa that are accessible or affordable for the African missionaries. MK schools within the continent are patronised mainly by Western missionary families and the very wealthy believers in the countries where they are located. African MKs privileged to attend such MK schools are often being sponsored by foreign donors. African missionaries who send their MKs to these schools are often under severe financial pressure to cope with the fees and charges as well as the requirements for frequent visits. It was the challenge of this situation that led CAPRO to begin her missionaries' children's school, 'The King's School' in Jos, Nigeria in 1991. The school grew to the point of admitting children of missionaries from other mission organizations as well as those in full time ministries such as pastors in remote rural fields. [Note: this school is now closed due to the political instability in the area].

Languages

How do families handle the challenge of operating in a multi-lingual context?

Language learning is very crucial and is expected to precede ministry. CAPRO missionaries are expected to learn the heart language of the people group they are reaching even if they already have the market or trade language. This is pursued with intentionality and is assessed. This tested ability and readiness is a requirement for engaging a foreign field in particular. CAPRO missionaries often serve in a local cross cultural context before embarking across geographical borders. Right from the point of training (field contact and field experience of 2 to 8 weeks), they are expected to demonstrate a readiness and ability to learn new languages.

To what extent are parents aware of the linguistic and cultural challenges faced by their children?

Parents are usually very aware of these challenges. Depending on their age at the time of entrance, children are generally shy initially but quicker at language learning and adapting in a multilingual environment. Parents may not be able to help their children much especially where their personal educational level or foundation has been poor in the primary medium of communication.

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Educare is a ministry of WEC International