

## 'Nnobia' mission concept

### A proposal for strategic cost-effective mission and church planting in Ghanaian communities

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#### Abstract

This article made a case for the use of a cooperative mission approach for mission and Church planting. The *nnobia* mission concept was developed from cooperative farming which thrives through trust, communality, and reciprocity. The paper argues that the church (body of Christ) is endowed with spiritual, physical, material and social capital that when brought together can help various local churches to achieve their missional agenda. The article discusses the *nnobia* concept and the *nnobia* mission concept. The concept was further discussed in light of the early church's communal living as well as how the 'nnobia' mission concept can be used for cost effective mission and church planting. Although the purpose of the article is to propose a missional model for churches in Ghana, its implementation can be adopted by churches in other parts of the world.

**Keywords:** *Nnobia* mission concept, cost-effective mission, church planting, mission, *missio Dei*, local council of Churches

## 1. Introduction

The nature of the church is missional. The church is to engage a world without Christ in such a way as to expand the kingdom of God by drawing people into a life-giving and life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ (McRaney, 2003:73). The focus of mission is derived from God, not the church. The church only participates in the mission of God (Woodward, 2012:27).

According to Bosch (2011:331), most mission societies understood mission predominantly as *conversio gentilium*—a conversion of individual persons. These societies had been preaching a gospel without a church. Their concern was individual conversion rather than church planting. In Wagner's view, planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology (Wagner, 2010:1). Church planting is defined as an exhausting but exciting venture of faith that involves the

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process of beginning and growing new local churches, based on Jesus' promise and in obedience to his Great Commission (Malphurs, 2004:19). It is the creating of new communities of faith as part of the mission of God to express his kingdom in every geographic and cultural context (Hopkins & White, 1995:3).

Mission is about the capability of the Christian faith to enter new contexts, connect different groups, inspire new generations, and impact societies. The mission of the church is much broader than evangelism. It embodies the total impact of the church on the world: its influence, its involvement with the social, political and moral life of the community and nation where it is placed (Green, 1990:9).

From a personal observation, most established churches spend a huge amount of money in mission and church planting. This sometimes discourages smaller churches from engaging in mission and planting new churches. Furthermore, some churches complain about lack of funds as one of the major issues affecting their agenda to participate in the *missio Dei*. This paper, therefore, seeks to use the *nnoboa* concept of farming to develop a missional concept that would help churches to plant daughter churches in a cost-effective manner. *Nnoboa* is a form of cooperative farming which thrives through trust, communality and reciprocity. The understanding of 'strategic cost-effective mission' in this article refers to how churches can use limited available resources to achieve desirable mission and church planting by employing *nnoboa* as a missional model for mission and church planning.

## 2. Overview of 'nnoboa' concept

*Nnoboa* is a word in Ghanaian Akan language which means cooperative. It is a concept usually used in Akan rural communities in Ghana for cooperative farming and fundraising.

*Nnoboa* cooperative farming thrives through trust, communality, and reciprocity. In this approach, farmers come together and make arrangements to help each other, throughout the year, without any cash payment. This is achieved through rotational labour programme to raise their standard of living. They do this so that each farmer would benefit from the collaborative effort of the entire group. In this way, whether it was a cash crop or plantation, they are able to create synergy from the yearly income. In effect, a communal spirit is activated for sustainable community development and farming (Oppong-Afriye, 2015:48-60). The ultimate purpose of the *nnoboa* farming concept is to reduce problems in accessing labour, especially during the planting season when most rural households are liquidity-constrained.

It is worth noting that the *nnoboa* concept is also sometimes used for fund raising. In this approach, some members of the community may decide to mobilise money for a particular purpose for a member of the *nnoboa* group. This is usually done in a reciprocal and proportionate manner. In light of this culture of mutual

interdependency, members are able to sustain a good livelihood and enhance their economic development. Members of the *nnoboa* groups are selected based on their interest and goals (Ayogyan, 2013:33).

In view of the above, the *nnoboa* concept was therefore adopted in this research to propound a missional concept that would help churches engage in mission and church planting at a lower cost.

### 3. 'Nnoboa' mission concept defined

*Nnoboa* mission concept is defined as mobilising effort of a community of Christians (laity and clergy) and churches in fulfilling Christian mission and church planting. In this regard, ecumenical partnerships are enforced for the purposes of participating in the *missio Dei* (Greenway & Mashau, 2007:167). The World Council of Churches is of the view that unity in mission must be the basis for the visible unity of the churches. Churches must develop global missional connections in different contexts (2012:268).

According to the World Council of Churches (2005:31):

Christians and their communities are called to be accountable to each other with respect to their ethical reflections and decisions. This interconnectedness is manifested in their commitment to the reciprocal partnership of giving and receiving (Philippians 4:15). As churches engage in mutual questioning and affirmation, they give expression to what they share in Christ. Christians engage together in service to the world, glorifying and praising God and seeking that full fellowship (*koinonia*), where the life which God desires for all people and the whole creation will find fulfilment.

Every Christian receives gifts of the Holy Spirit for the building of the church and their participation in the *missio Dei*. These gifts are given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7), and place obligations of responsibility and mutual accountability on every individual in the church.

*The nnoboa* Mission concept has to do with how the total membership of the church is mobilised in various denominations with the purpose of fulfilling the *missio Dei*. In doing this, well established and endowed churches can adopt smaller churches to help them to become self-sustaining, self-propagating and self-reproducing.

### 4. The early church and 'nnoboa' mission concept

Studying the missional life and approaches of the early church, one could see *nnoboa* (cooperative mission) being exhibited. The believers recognised themselves as brothers and sisters in the family of God, they shared all they had so that all

could benefit from God's gifts (Acts 2:44-45). Their activities (teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers) were in corporate manner (Acts 2:42). The competitive "me first" attitude of the disciples is gone (Mark 9:34, 46; 10:35-40). The early believers were generous and were not claiming anything as their own; they sold their personal properties to meet the needs of others (Acts 4:32). This, therefore, resulted in the advancement of the gospel and God's agenda.

## **5. Implementation of 'nnobia' mission concept for cost-effective mission and church planting**

If the church is to take the gospel to every tribe, nation, and to pursue cross-cultural discipleship and church planting in the least-reached corners of the world, it must step outside the box (Lai, 2005:5). The purpose of Christian mission is to thoroughly root the church in various cultures and societies that it serves as an instrument to salvation and good (Hibbert, 2009:316-331). Churches that follow biblical patterns and practices of God's mission are more likely to see new converts and new churches among unreached peoples (Bailey, 2006:20).

Malphurs (1998:21) defines church planting as a planned process of beginning and growing new local churches. Inherent in his definition are three key concepts: Church planting is an intentional activity which involves planning and discernment; church planting is a dynamic process; church planting involves both starting new churches and helping those churches grow. White and Acheampong (2017:3-4) posit that discernment is one way we connect with God. It is a part of spirituality that opens us to God's movement in our lives. It flows out of a larger commitment to yield our attention, agenda and action towards God. Also, effective management and planning are needed in the area of missions. They are imperative for various churches to set goals and then plan to effectively manage both the human and capital resources available to them as they participate in the *missio Dei*.

The subheadings below would discuss how the *nnobia mission concept* could be adopted to enhance mission and church planting.

## **6. Formation of local council of churches**

The issues of mission and unity of the church have always been intertwined throughout the history of the modern ecumenical movement, of which the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910 has become the symbolic beginning. If the church is defined by mission, then the unity of the church and mission are deeply interrelated (John 17:21). The church as the sign of the kingdom of God should be structurally congruent with the nature of God's kingdom, characterised by divine love and trust (Balia & Kim, 2010:200, 202).

As explained earlier, *nnoboa* strives on cooperative, trust, communality and reciprocity, churches that want to implement the *nnoboa* concept must first of all start with the formation of local council of churches. The local council of churches should be community-based as being done in the *nnoboa* farming model. This also sometimes calls for affiliation of the local council of churches with churches that can be of help in diverse forms.

The call for the formation of local council of churches would foster networking among church leaders of the community concerned and their members. It also builds trust and confidence in one another as well as the opportunity to dialogue and learn from each other's experiences and strengths.

It should be noted that responses to globalisation also affect how individual, collective and institutional identities are being formed and loyalties are being constructed. For this reason, groups and societies based on community values experience strong pressure in the context of globalisation and they—in turn—resist individualism. The unity of the church, of humankind and the future of all life on earth, are intrinsically linked with each other (Lorke & Werner, 2013: 8-9). This in effect means that all efforts should be aimed at promoting the unity of the church and all initiatives in which Christians seek to participate in God's healing of creation are fundamentally related.

The church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose. Evangelism also summons us to unity, because our oneness strengthens our witness (John 17:21). Further to the above, unity in mission should be a unity in diversity, nonetheless it must avoid creating divisions. Unity and diversity, enrichment and division are examples of the dualities that are likely to remain a central focus in discussions concerning structured unity in the practice of mission and evangelisation (Balía & Kim, 2010: 210).

This implies that as local churches attempt to establish local council of churches, they should also appreciate and accept diversity. The formation of the local council of churches will strengthen the missional life of churches concerned and serve as a platform for the implementation of the *nnoboa* mission concept in their localities and beyond.

## **7. Missional financing using 'nnoboa' mission approach**

One of the greatest challenges missionaries face is not the mission field but their ability to mobilise funds for their mission work. In spite of the fact that it is the duty of Christians to participate in the *missio Dei*, funds for mission and church planting should be mostly raised within the Christian community.

Local churches/denominations have more than enough to raise money for mission and church planting every year. If each member of a local church/denomination with a congregation of about 2000 congregations donates GHC 2.00 every

month into their mission and church planting fund, the church will raise GHC 4000 per month. When this is done consistently for twelve (12) months the church will have GHC 48000 for church planting and mission. With this, churches can plant at least one church every year and train more ministers.

Even with fewer amounts and lesser congregations, through this way churches can raise the needed funds for mission and church planting. In so doing, there should be enough publicity and teaching directed at creating awareness within the Christian community about the need to support mission and church planting activities. Each member contributing a small token on its own may be insignificant but the communal attitude of *nnobia* would make such contributions huge enough for churches to undertake mission activities and plant a new church every year.

The importance of letting people know the details of the need for Christian mission and church planting will let them respond with more than enough to finish the work just as God showed Moses and he did accordingly (Exodus 25:1-9; Pitman, 2017). Christian churches, particularly Independent Pentecostal Churches in Ghana, must work closely together to facilitate the best approaches to raise mission funds as well as the use of mission funding in a mutually accountable manner.

As the believers in Macedonia and Achaia made contributions for the poor saints who were in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26), so this can be demonstrated in our contemporary times. Financially strong churches could also adopt a struggling or a new church and help it to grow. Most times small congregations may not have the resources to do much. However, if they were to receive support from another church it could do much better. The income of a small church, for example, may not be able to meet the basic needs of their pastor as well as putting up a church building. Therefore, stronger or mother churches can adopt some of these small churches and help them grow and to acquire the needed resources for growth and capacity building of their members.

Quarshie (2014:38) argues that urban churches should be the primary instrument for mission. He argues that churches in the cities are presumed to be stronger churches which should help the struggling or small churches. In an interview with Bishop Bruce of the Lighthouse Chapel International, Bantama, Ghana, he submits that in their context, the sending church provides some basic items such as a banner, sticker, ushers sash, a plane ticket (if the missionary is moving outside the country), and approximately \$300.00 United States Dollar as spending money. In this way, the mother church supports the setup of new churches and monitors their progress. When these new churches are well established, they are expected to reach out to their community by establishing other church branches. All these branches stay in touch so that if there are any challenges the mother church is able to assist (Bruce, 2017).

## 8. Capacity building using 'nnoboa' mission approach

Training is one of the keys to biblical Christian mission and church planting. Mission training is more than just a transfer of information. It is the knowledge and skills that transform our character and affect our behaviour pattern. For the purpose of this research, mission training is viewed in terms of knowing, being, and doing. Training for missionaries and church planters may require more mature churches and church leaders to offer training to new or small churches to help their leaders build the right capacity for mission and Christian discipleship at no cost.

In the early church, when the church in Jerusalem heard of the new believers in Samaria, Apostle Peter and John were sent to them. They provided the impartation of the Holy Spirit and discipleship (Acts 8:14-15). This act by the Apostles gave Samaritan believers full assurance and incorporation into the family of God. With the outpouring of the spirit on the Samaritans, a new nucleus of the believing community was established, and the gospel could now radiate out in power from this new church (Bruce, 1990:15-29). Paul also through impartation helped the church in Rome to be established (Romans 1:11-12).

According to Peters (1984:225), no local church is the complete body of Christ, therefore, it will need support from other churches to help in the fulfilment of the mission of God. Indeed, no one lives for himself; there is strength in the proper mobilisation and coordination in the interdependence of churches which results in unity of purpose and action. Churches that want to produce effective Christians must teach them the necessary skills for Christian living and ministry (Warren, 1995:359).

Churches with better resources can then help train and build the capacity of leaders and church workers in smaller churches. The Lighthouse Chapel International in Ghana does well by organising training programmes such as the Art of Leadership Conference and Church Growth Conference to help train church leaders and workers for effective ministry. The Anagkazo Bible School in Ghana also gives scholarships to Christians from different countries and churches to be trained and sent out as missionaries. These go a long way towards building the capacity of church leaders to become effective in Christian mission and church planting.

## 9. 'Missio Dei' at the heart above individual understanding of mission

The *nnoboa* mission concept looks at selflessness and the greater good rather than individual achievements. Placing God's mission at the heart above individual understanding of mission is what most churches have not been able to do successfully. Denominationalism has eroded the fact that all churches are pursuing the same thing—*missio Dei* (God's mission) instead of individual church mission. It

is only when we all share God's mission which emanates from his nature and character that we can impact the world's ethno-cultures with the gospel. The goal of the mission of God is that all people become joyous and delighted worshippers of our Father, through Christ our Lord (Wright, 2013:533).

*Nnoboa* mission concept focuses on churches putting God's mission ahead of their individual mission. This approach is about interconnection in the body of Christ (the church) and each individual seeing him or herself as part of the body that contributes to the holistic missional performance of the church. With this missional understanding, churches can then assist each other on the mission field in order to achieve a greater harvest. Churches can assist each other through the *nnoboa* mission concept by providing or making its resources available to assist another church in their pursuit of fulfilling the *missio Dei*.

As in many communities in Ghana, churches come together for fun games; this can be replicated towards mission and church planting. Thus, churches within a particular community can come together to organise a crusade once in a year, and the souls won would be distributed among the various churches. This missional approach would minimise the cost for funding crusades and will go a long way to enhancing the fulfilment of God's mission in that particular community. By these acts, churches put God's mission ahead of their personal mission.

In John 17, Jesus concluded his repeated plea to "be one" with the words, "that the world may know that you (the Father) sent me" (John 17:21, 23). It is clear that only in our unity can the world see a true demonstration of the power of the gospel. The unity of the church of God is the greatest advertisement for God's power and grace. Our shared commitment to mission can bring unity (Gustin, 2005).

## **10. 'Nnoboa' mission concept and tent-making**

*Nnoboa* mission concept looks at ways by which the Christian mission and church planting becomes self-supporting and self-sustaining. One of the means to do this is through tent-making ministry. Tent-making ministers are Christians who use their business or employment to further the work of evangelism, church planting, and other services for God. In this approach, tent-making ministers support themselves financially while they plant churches (Tent-making Missionaries, 2002:5). For the purpose of this research, the *nnoboa* mission concept could also be approached in the form of tent-making ministry.

According to Siemens, a tent-making ministry provides entry into hostile countries that forbid missionaries. It provides natural, sustained contact with non-believers in restrictive and open countries (like Japan, less than 1% evangelical). It conserves scarce mission funds for missionaries who must have support. It multiplies personnel, as we mobilise the laity for missions. It supplements Christian radio

and television ministry by incarnating the gospel for millions who have never seen a Christian. It can reduce the attrition rate of missionaries who do not finish their first term or return for a second one. It legitimises mission agencies before increasingly difficult governments. It makes good use of the vast global job market which God has designed to help us finish world evangelisation (Siemens, 1997:121).

The Lighthouse Chapel International model for mission and church planting is usually approached through tent-making ministry. The responsibility of financing oneself on the mission field is on the missionary. This is one of the reasons why most of the missionaries sent out by them come from their First Love churches (mainly consisting of university students). Most of these missionaries are trained professionals. This, therefore, makes it easier for them to be professionally engaged, as well as fulfilling their missionary mandate.

### **11. Relevance of the 'nnoboa' mission concept**

The Pauline churches were self-governing. Paul did not bring in foreign pastors but appointed local house church leaders and believers for effective witness in their world. Paul's churches were self-supporting. The churches were never dependent on any foreign funds. Everyone worked during the pioneer stage, including the house church pastors. Paul's house church leaders kept their jobs (Acts 20:33-35). By the time growing congregations required more full-time leadership, it was clear which house church leaders had the respect and confidence of the community's Christians, as well as of its non-Christians (1Timothy 3:7, Siemens, 1997:122). This affirms the *nnoboa* mission concept of how it could help in mission and church planting; making churches self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating.

*Nnoboa* mission concept proposes the mobilisation of the entire membership of the church for Christian mission and church planting and also churches assisting each other in the fulfilment of *missio Dei*. In the 21st century, most companies (secular) do not support Christian mission and church planting, therefore, Christian mission and church planting must be supported and pursued by Christians themselves.

### **12. Conclusion**

This article discussed how the *nnoboa* concept for farming in Ghanaian communities can be used as a missional model for cost-effective mission and church planting. The article started with the definition of the *nnoboa* concept. This was followed by the conceptualisation of *nnoboa* as a missional model for mission and church planting.

The study also looked at some of the practices in the early church that were in line with the proposed *nnoboa* mission concept as well as how the *nnoboa* mission concept can be employed and applied as a missional model for cost-effective

mission and church planning. The study argues that *nnobo*a should be seen from the perspective of *missio Dei* rather than the individual or denominational understanding of mission. The study concluded with a discussion on the relevance of the *nnobo*a mission concept.

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