

GHANA TO THE NATIONS: SHORT-TERM MISSIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE NATIONS

Kate Azumah

It was a day in the month of September 2012, a group of people hurriedly wove their way through Mumbai's busy airport towards the cubicles for immigration formalities. Arriving, one member presented her passport.

'What is your address in India?' The official asked.

'Bhattiprolu,' she replied.

'Where is Bhattiprolu?' he asked, suddenly wearing an impatient frown of unwanted concentration. She consulted the leader of the group and supplied the answer.

The group of seven were Ghanaians on a three-week mission trip to Bhattiprolu, a village in the Andhra Pradesh State of India. Among other things, that mission saw neighbours of different castes and faiths—Christian and Hindu—visiting each other's homes for the first time, after years of living side by side. A community whose children were known for being fatally violent became shocked at the receptivity of their own children to the message of the gospel proclaimed by the Ghanaians.

Ghanaians have been embarking on short-term international missions and making significant impact as far back as in 1978. I was part of a pre-missions scouting team to The Gambia in 2014, where we connected with various church leaders to gather information and solicit support for a future mission trip. Being the small country it is and given the willingness of the church leaders to connect us with one another, very soon we had visited many, both expatriates and indigenes. One discovery at these visits was the many references the leaders made to the impact of Joyful Way's mission trip to The Gambia in 1978. According to Pastor Chinedum Meribole, Joyful Way's 1978 visit was instrumental in bringing many young people to faith in Christ, some of whom had become leading ministers of God in The Gambia at the time of our visit.

Reading through the book of Acts, I realized that Paul and his missionary compatriots were both short-term and long-term missionaries (Short-term mission is defined here as any mission trip that lasts less than two years). Even though the cumulated time spent on some of Paul's missionary journeys spanned more than two years, as far as the individual cities or locations were concerned, his mission trips were short-term. Paul's ministry during these short-term trips were characterized by uncompromising gospel preaching about the crucified and resurrected Christ, teaching in synagogues, winning disciples, strengthening believers, building relationships, and appointing elders, along with the manifestation of signs and wonders to confirm his message.

A number of ministries in Ghana have been embarking on short-term international mission trips over the past decade. Some of them are Excellent Youth Outreach (EYO), Teens Aloud Foundation (TAF), Footworks International (FWI), and Harvest International Ministries (HIM). In all over thirty countries across Africa, Europe, Asia and North America have been visited by these ministries on short-term missions. The duration of the trips varies from two weeks to three months. For youth-focused ministries like EYO, TAF, and FWI, the short-term teams are made up of mostly university students and high school graduates, while a church like Harvest has mainly young professionals, clergy and adults. Some teams have two people sent on a trip with others having larger teams of about twenty people. A myriad of activities are carried out during the missions--one-on-one evangelism, prayer walks, Bible teachings, crusades, church ministrations, missions conferences, youth conferences, leadership conferences, sports ministry, camps, outreaches to schools, prisons, orphanages, hospitals, villages, etc.

In spite of questions and concerns in some circles about how much is accomplished by such short trips in the long haul, the impression of Ghana's

short-term missions on other nations is profound. Thousands of people have come to faith in Jesus through the preaching of the gospel at various evangelistic activities during these mission trips. As the Lord worked with the apostles and proved their message true with accompanying signs and wonders, so does the Lord with our Ghanaian mission teams. There are testimonies of people healed from all kinds of ailments: cancers, blindness, tumors, AIDS, etc. Miracles like the instantaneous restoration of deformed limbs and cripples walking are real occurrences on the mission field. Those under the bondage of Satan are set free as his demons are cast out according to Jesus' promise. As Razaq put it, he only understood fully what Jesus meant by "Go into the world..." after participating in a short-term mission trip himself. Several years ago, one Danny Santa Lucia was a short-term missionary to Ghana whose preaching was instrumental in bringing Rev. JKF Mensah to faith in Jesus. I figure it is the unfolding of time that will fully reveal the role Ghana's short-term mission trips played in God's agenda of raising many Rev. JFK Mensahs in other nations.

It is usual to see short-term missionaries sent mostly from the West to the rest of the world. The phenomenon of African youth going to other countries for short-term missions is relatively new, and it is no vain statement to declare that Ghana is a leading nation in this new move. The general reaction of individuals and groups in the receiving nations is surprise and awe that African youth (Ghanaians for that matter) are embarking on short-term missions to other nations. There are parts of Africa where young people are relegated to the background as far as ministry in the local church is concerned.

As a coordinator for short-term international missions, I have had the opportunity to debrief scores of teams on their return from mission trips. From the reports, youth in other countries are inspired when they see Ghanaians, young as themselves preaching, teaching, leading, and serving in ministry, especially cross-culturally. It motivates them to rise above timidity and a limiting mindset to deploy their potential for God's service. Steve, a Kenyan, had his first mission experience accompanying a short-term mission team from Ghana as they went about their mission activities. After the Ghanaian team left, Steve organized some of his friends for a mission trip to the northern part

of Kenya where they applied all he had learnt from the Ghanaian team. The results were tremendous; the young people could not believe God would use them that way. Since then, Steve has kept in touch with his Ghanaian friends with his interest in missions alive and growing with action.

Ghana has a rich heritage of sound Biblical teachings and resources as far as the evangelical and missional Christian community is concerned. Short-term mission trips serve as a conduit for Ghana to bless the body of Christ in other nations up close with this heritage. Churches in other nations have been stirred to action concerning the Great Commission during programs like mission conferences and seminars that form part of short-term mission activities. There are stories of young people in other nations who first learnt about Quiet Time from Ghanaian short-term teams. As teams live with families and interact with individuals on the mission field, their exemplary lives of devotion to God and Christlike character become a legacy their hosts are challenged to emulate. A family in Tanzania started a culture of having family devotions after hosting one such team from Ghana. I recently received exciting news with pictures from Angola about how one church was using the Discovery Bible Study (DBS) method to grow and increase several house churches during the covid-19 pandemic. The church, Nascidos de Novo (Born Again) first learnt about DBS from one of our short-term teams. A similar church in Sierra Leone also sent a report of how they were sending DBS to surrounding villages and its impact on the people.

Short-term missions by Ghanaians have helped to boost missionary work in other nations in a number of ways. Firstly, long-term missionaries who receive the short-termers are edified and encouraged when teams come to support their work. Secondly, short-term missions serve as an extra recruiting tool to mobilize both the receivers and those that are sent. For the receivers who have little or no awareness of missions, the activities of short-term missionaries present the needed exposure that creates the desire to get involved. In the University of Namibia, leaders of some Christian groups on the campus came together for the first time to designate some time on Wednesdays for campus evangelism. This was after a short-term team from Ghana had organized a program with them on 'Practical Evangelism'. One Namibian participant shared this testimony: "Your teaching on Friday took away my fear. At first, I

used to hide behind people during outreaches, but this time I went out all alone and won two souls for Jesus.” Those who take part in short-term missions are also more likely to consider and choose missions as a lifelong career because of their short-term experience. Following their respective short-term missions’ experiences in Kenya and The Gambia, Solomon and Issaka, two Ghanaian university graduates, went back to serve as missionaries in these countries for over two years.

There have been revivals, and the birth of churches and ministries in other nations through short-term missions by Ghanaians. Teens Aloud, Footworks and Excellent Youth Outreach all have branches in other nations through the activities of short-term missions. These branches are set up to disciple young people and to train them to also do ministry. Over the years the branches have mobilized young people in their respective countries to also go for short-term international missions. In 2019, young people from six different countries joined EYO’s short-term mission trips to other nations. For some of the people from the six countries, this was their first ever cross-cultural missions experience. In South Sudan, a church was pioneered by a short-term team from Ghana with the help of a local man of peace. With the ensuing war, the church moved to the refugee camp in Northern Uganda where it hosted another short-term team from Ghana that did a lot of work among the refugees in the camp.

In being a blessing to other nations, the Ghanaians who take part in short-term international missions are themselves impacted and motivated to do more for the sake of the gospel. Priscilla, a medical student who went on a short-term trip to Uganda in 2017 shared, “The mission was a personal call for me to focus on disciple-making and not on convert-making. Living in the Hindu-populated town of Jinja has challenged me to secure the Christian heritage I have as a Ghanaian.” After a short-term trip to Zimbabwe, Rev. Prince Achin, a senior pastor expressed that, “Missions to Zimbabwe has transformed my perception about soul-winning. The urgency and speed required was so much implanted in my spirit and ministry. My theme for the years to come is, ‘the harvest is now.’” Other short-termers, after experiencing a hurdle of challenges with respect to raising funds for the mission trips, returned with a commitment to be financiers of mission work themselves.

Ghana has a lot to offer the world in terms of a solid

gospel-advancing legacy. Short-term international missions have revealed themselves to be laden with opportunities and potential for Ghana to advance the interests of Christ in the nations. I believe our Ghanaian story of short-term international missions did not start with just the ministries actively involved in it today, other individuals and ministries have contributed to building this legacy over time in diverse ways—a school ministry here, a Bible study there, an evangelistic group here, a mission conference there, etc.

In the face of the many worthy stories of the impact of Ghana’s short-term missions, the enemy is also relentless in raising and marketing his false prophets and teachers to discredit and undermine genuine gospel work in the nations. During a recent short-term trip, I observed that some people had become unreceptive due to their wariness of false ministers. This makes it all the more imperative for us as individuals and an evangelical body to preserve our identity and calling in this regard by holding fast to and passing on the true faith entrusted to us in God’s word. If Ghana is to continue with her impact in other nations through short-term missions, then our work of evangelism and disciple-making at home must be extensive and vigorous, especially among the younger generation.

A short-term team returned from Guinea Bissau with this, “Everywhere we went, people said, ‘Ghana is so blessed! Can you send more volunteers to stay longer?’” Can God count on us to continue to be His answer to the nations’ call?

Kate Azumah has served as the Missions Coordinator for Excellent Youth Outreach since 2010. Her work involves organizing and coordinating short-term international missions. Excellent Youth Outreach is a youth ministry that runs mostly in tertiary institutions in Ghana and has branches in The Gambia, Kenya and Uganda. The ministry has sent short-term teams to over 30 countries mostly in Africa.

