ARE AGENCIES CHANGING?

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In this short post, I consider some of the factors that indicate whether a mission agency is making the sorts of transition that will allow it to continue to be relevant in the new, emerging church and mission scene.
Category: Observations

Yesterday, I posted a link to an article by Bijoy Koshy the International Director of Interserve which suggests that our 300-year-old mission agency model is creaking at the seams because the majority of Christians and missionaries no longer come from the traditional mission-sending countries.

In this short post, I'd like to consider some of the factors that indicate whether a mission agency is making the sorts of transition that will allow it to continue to be relevant in the new, emerging church and mission scene.

Essentially, this all revolves around the place of Christians from the majority world - especially the places where the agency works - in the life of the agency.

Firstly, if your agency board has no members with roots in the places and cultures where your agency works, then you are probably not taking the changing world situation into account when you make long term decisions.

If your agency, like many others, has local branches and an umbrella international organisation, then the leadership of the international structure should be diverse. If you are to reflect the reality of the world church and the future of mission, the majority of your international leadership will not be from the European diaspora.

Agencies which are adapting to the new reality have missionaries/partners/members or whatever the appropriate term is from a wide range of cultures and nationalities. In particular, they have missionaries from the countries where the agency does its work. Crucially, these "national" missionaries have the same rights, responsibilities and expectations as their colleagues from overseas. It isn't unusual for agencies to employ local people to do the same work as their missionaries, but to treat them as "second class" because of their employed status.

The last thing that I would highlight is that agencies who are working towards the new reality have found ways to support work around the world financially, without actually controlling how these funds are used. He who pays the piper does not call the tune.

I could expand the list further, but I think that these four points capture the essential challenge.

An agency which is not wrestling with these things is not considering its place in the changing world

of church and mission. It is quite possible that such an agency could continue to attract support and candidates from within the church in the UK, after all, it will look wholesomely traditional. However, the reality is that, in a global sense, agencies which continue on as they have always done will simply not be relevant anymore. They won't matter.