CHURCHES AND MISSION AGENCIES

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Category: Mission

One of the questions which concerns me in my 'day job' is how should churches and mission agencies work together. This is obviously extremely important to an organisation such as Wycliffe Bible Translators which can only exist as long as churches continue to provide resources for the agency. There is no way that a blog post can adequately deal with this question, but I thought that I'd set out what I see as some of the key issues and then ask for comments.

1. The local church is God's primary strategy for mission. I don't think you can demonstrate this by proof texting, but I would argue that the overall narrative of the New Testament does support this concept.
2. The Church (universal) is commanded to bear witness to Christ in at home, across the home country and around the world (Acts 1:8). This means that local churches have a call to world wide mission.
3. Mission agencies have spent decades building up a huge bank of expertise in cross-cultural mission and other technical skills.
4. Mission agencies have had a tendency towards an individualist approach to the Christian community; seeking to recruit people from churches as recruits or donors. It should be said in mitigation, that most agencies, my own included, try hard to involve churches in many of their processes, but nevertheless the general remark still stands.
5. Increasingly, churches are bypassing mission agencies in their international mission work. Churches organise their own short-term trips and set up partnerships with churches and Christian communities in other parts of the world.Â In general, I would see this as a positive tendency. However, there are three obvious problems.
6. Churches who work without mission agencies are likely to find themselves repeating all of the mistakes that the agencies made and learned from generations ago.
7. Churches who work without mission agencies tend to concentrate their mission in areas of the world that are relatively easy for them to reach. I am forever coming across British churches which have partnerships in Anglophone East-Africa, but I have never come across a British Church who are running their own mission in, say, Central African Republic. I don't have serious research to back this up, but it seems to me that the work of reaching unreached, hard-to-contact peoples is still largely left to the agencies.
8. There are some mission activities, Bible Translation being one, which require specialised knowledge and skills. Churches, for the most part cannot realistically take on these activities, whereas there are a number of specialist agencies which are are well equipped to do them.

If these observations are correct, what should the way forward be? How can churches and mission agencies work together in God's mission without side-lining the Church and while making best use of the experience and skills of the agencies? As always, your thoughts and comments are appreciated