



Episode 061: The Strategic Value of Networks in Global Missions

Eldon Porter, together with his wife Becky, serves as a Consultant for Global Engagement within the Evangelical missions community. Eldon is a specialist in the area of networks. In addition to his formal role serving with [Missio Nexus](#) and [COMIBAM](#), Eldon also helps leaders around the world as they adapt their networks to this current globalized missions environment.

Take a minute please and tell us about your journey in missions, and about your current role as consultant.

- My parents were missionaries in Nigeria, West Africa. Dad was from England, and my Mother was from the US. They met in Nigeria and got married, and served there for 48 years. When I graduated from high school, I came to the US, did my undergraduate and graduate work, and met my wife from Northern Minnesota. We served with SIM in Latin America and Bolivia for 21 years, then came to the US and worked in the international office.
- We left that eight years ago to focus on the global church. I study networks and look at the ways that networks facilitate both a platform for leadership and space for anyone in the Body of Christ to participate around an issue or a geographic region.

I read a brief article that you've written called "[Networks and Global Missions: A Dance Floor and a Country Home](#)" from [Mission Frontiers](#). In this piece you described that there's been a major paradigm shift in missions. The paradigm has changed from "the West to the Rest", to now being "from anywhere to anywhere". What do you mean by this?

- We no longer are in the paradigm where the majority of missionaries were sent from western countries to the rest of the world. Today the vast majority of those that are working cross-culturally, are coming from the majority world.
- This change has been brought about by two primary factors.
- The first is the growth of the majority church and its mission's movement.
- The second factor is that of globalization and the communication factor in our world today. People can communicate with anyone, anywhere in the world. We are firmly in the paradigm of "from anywhere to everywhere".

- Related Global Missions Podcast Episodes:
 - [Episode 23: “The Globalization of Missions: from Everywhere to Everywhere”](#)
 - [Episode 55: “What’s the Role of the North American Church in Global Mission?”](#)

What are some of the issues related to this new paradigm that are affecting the Missions Movement?

- There are four macro issues.
- The first issue is just the Majority World church and its missions movement. We need to be aware that this movement is happening, and partner with the Majority World church.
- The second is the direct local church involvement. Before globalization, a local church could not do missions without working through a mission agency. Today the local church has many options for involvement globally.

Is that because there's an absence of mission agencies in those areas? Or are they avoiding agencies?

- I don't think it's the lack of structures. I think it's just the fact that today, a local church can be involved.
- The third macro issue is the global diaspora movement, with over 500 million people moving from one culture to another culture. Now we find that our backyard looks quite similar in some ways to the target that we were trying to send missionaries to in the past.
- The fourth area of the macro issue is this highly interconnected world. People can be in touch with anyone, anywhere in the world. That is freeing up and allowing people to form relationships and partnerships on a global scale.

How do you define networks? Why are they so important?

- I approach this by asking the question, "God, what are you doing? How is your church around the world coming together in an effort to cooperate and collaborate?" I started discovering all of these networks. On the website [Linking Global Voices](#), I track over 500 networks globally.
- Networks are not partnerships. A network is an open collaborative space that births partnerships. And partnerships are becoming the platform for leadership.

You have identified two basic categories of networks that exist in the missions world. Would you talk about both of those categories and give an example of each?

- The first category are geographically defined networks. For example, in North America it's [Missio Nexus](#) and in Latin America it's [COMIBAM](#). The other sub-category here is mission focus. You'll find mission networks or networks of mission movements that are focused on a particular country, or a particular region. All of those are geographically defined.



- The second category of networks are issue specific networks. This is the vast majority.

How are mission agencies are responding to this new paradigm of “from anywhere to everywhere”?

- For mission agencies, especially the traditional western mission agencies, this is a huge challenge. The entire structure was built around “from the west to the rest”. There's the whole question of internationalization - having people from different cultures of the world being part of your organization. The other is the whole issue of partnership with the global church. Agencies are really wrestling with this issue right now.

Do you have an example of an agency that is fruitfully engaging this transition?

- There are a lot of agencies that are really working on this very intentionally. One organization now has a CCO - a Chief Collaboration Officer. This person is responsible to build relationships at the horizontal level outside of their organization.

Many of our listeners are leaders or influencers in their local churches. As they're evaluating what kind of networks might be beneficial to their church, what advice would you have for them?

- I would recommend that you need to develop a network engagement strategy. You need to develop a very intentional strategy about how you're going to engage with networks.
- Before you do this, you have to identify and understand who you are as a church. You're not going to be able to do everything. God has uniquely gifted you as a local church with individuals within the church, maybe people that live around your church, maybe immigrants that have come there.
- Then you look at the world of networks. Go to [Linking Global Voices](#) and search according to the issues or regions of the world.
- You're not going to be able to engage in all of these networks. There are four levels of engagement with a network.
- The first level is like the porch around the outside of the house. You can hear the conversation going on in the house.
- The second level is to actually go through the front door and sit down in the living room, and be a part of that discussion. That's like going to an event. Go to an event.
- The third level is the dining room table, because that's where the real conversations start to happen with those leaders in the network.
- The fourth level is getting into the kitchen. That's where the leadership happens in a network.



We appreciate this time that you spent with us. If our listeners would like to contact you, how can they do that?

- I'd be happy to follow up local churches as they process this, through my email address eporter@linkingglobalvoices.com

Eldon, just as we conclude, any last thought that you'd like to share with our audience?

- When people look at change, they think that everything is changing. Networks are not agencies. There's mission structures that need to be there. The traditional agencies are still valid. You'll still want to work through them. Just remember that networks don't do anything other than facilitating the space for leadership and connectivity.

