

Global Coordination Task Force: Status of Unreached People Engagement and Inter-mission Cooperation to Finish the Task

To the Greater Glory of God: An Opening Perspective

After the flood, Noah's descendants became nations and spread all over the world. At first, they spoke the same language, but seeking to make a name for themselves, God confused their language and caused them to separate and spread out over the earth. After this, God looked for a faithful man; not one bent on making a name for himself but one submitted to God's making:

The LORD said to Abram:
Go out from your land,
your relatives,
and your father's house
to the land that I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation,
I will bless you,
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
I will curse those who treat you with contempt,
and all the peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.¹

It is not a bad beginning point for us to stop and consider that the unfinished task is God's business. God will finish His task, and He will receive the glory. He does not guarantee us another day, and he does not guarantee that the nations will hear of Him on our watch or at our pace or through our strategies. He has His time, and there will be a time, His time, when he calls the nations to his side. He even has his own database—the Lamb's Book of Life.

Concerning the times, we may have a better understanding of the peoples of the world today than ever before. We are blessed with computers, transportation, communication and many breakthroughs that have resulted in globalization with new markets, strategic alliances and vast networks—the world is flat indeed.

While it is flat, it is not yet full—full of the glory of God. There are competing forces for God's glory among the nations, and these forces race to the edges of our world along with us. As we look at our world, it's trends and drivers; it is easy to be swept away by over-optimism or to be paralyzed by signs of impending doom. We look to research, fruitful practices and an increasing knowledge base that enlightens our partnerships and networks, but let us be cautious in our stewardship of what we know and what we say for an over-reliance on ourselves and may lead analysts over-estimate trends and under-estimate God².

¹ Gospel Communications Network. Bible Gateway. (Muskegon, MI: Gospel Communications International, 1995), <http://www.gospelcom.net/bible>, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%2012&version=HCSB> (accessed March 30, 2010).

² Samuel Marinus Zwemer, *The Unoccupied Mission Fields of Africa and Asia*. (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1911), np.

In L'envoi to the Readers of "Edinburgh 1910," the official message from the conference delegates to the members of the church in Christian lands, those delegates, now long gone, remind us of their hopes, later to be greatly affected by the outbreak of World War I and followed by the Great Depression. Their words inform us today:

Dear Brethren of the Christian Church,

We members of the World Mission Conference assembled in Edinburgh desire to send you a message which lies very near to our hearts. During the past ten days we have been engaged in a close and continuous study of the position of Christianity in non-Christian lands. In this study we have surveyed the field of missionary operation and the forces that are available for its occupation. For two years we have been gathering expert testimony about every department of Christian Missions, and this testimony has brought home to our entire Conference certain conclusions which we desire to set forth.

Our survey has impressed upon us the momentous character of the present hour. We have heard from many of the awakening of great nations, of the opening of long-closed doors, and of movements which are placing all at once before the Church a new world to be won to Christ. The next ten years will in all probability constitute a turning-point in human history If those years are wasted, havoc may be wrought that centuries are not able to repair. On the other hand, if they are rightly used they may be among the most glorious in Christian history

But, it has become increasingly clear to us that we need something far greater than can be reached by any economy or reorganization of the existing forces. We need supremely a deeper sense of responsibility to Almighty God for the great trust which He has committed to us in the evangelization of the world. . . .

The old scale and the old ideal were framed in view of a state of the world which has ceased to exist. They are no longer adequate for the new world which is arising out of the ruins of the old

God is demanding of us all a new order of life, of a more arduous and self-sacrificing nature than the old. But if, as we believe, the way of duty is the way of revelation, there is certainly implied, in this imperative call of duty, a latent assurance that God is greater and more loving, nearer and more available for our help and comfort than any man has dreamed. Assuredly, then, we are called to make new discoveries of the grace and power of God, for ourselves, for the Church, and for the world; and, in the strength of that firmer and bolder faith in Him, to face the new age and the new task with a new consecration.³

One hundred years later, our own declaration will undoubtedly echo the voices of these humble delegates. Let our approach to research be of no less heart and humility than those who informed their mission:

Otis Cary, *A History of Christianity in Japan* Julius Richter, *The History of Missions in India* Robert Sloan Latimer, *Liberty of Conscience Under Three Tsars* Annie L. A. Baird, *Daybreak in Korea* Charles R. Watson, *In the Valley of the Nile* Francis E. Clark, *The Continent of Opportunity* Samuel Zwemer, *Islam, a Challenge to Faith; Studies on the Mohammedan Religion and the Needs and Opportunities of the Mohammedan World from the Standpoint of Christian Missions.*

³W. H. T. Gairdner and John Raleigh Mott. *Echoes from Edinburgh, 1910.* (New York: F. H. Revell Company, 1910), 277-279.

The Languages and Dialects of the World

We have reminded ourselves of God's call to Abram and his faithfulness to that call. We have listened once again to the echoing voices of the delegates of Edinburgh from near-recent history. Now, we find ourselves in a task that is both sobering in its scope and celebratory in its advance. In research, we realize that our understanding of the nations is partial; in our walk with God, we need a deeper sense of responsibility to almighty God for the great trust which He has committed to us of identifying the nations He loves.

When we consider the peoples of the world today, we must acknowledge the vision of Wycliffe Bible Translators who for many years have taken up the task of bringing God's Word to the peoples of the world in the aftermath of Babel. With Pentecost came the compelling vision of the nations hearing God's Word in distinct languages, and many have gone before us to learn languages and dialects while living among people groups to engage them with Scripture. Today, we are grateful for the listing of languages that is available to us in SIL's Sixteenth edition of the *Ethnologue*, which started humbly in the form of 10 mimeographed pages in 1951 and included 45 languages. With this, the Church takes up the challenge of communicating the Gospel to the people groups of the world who speak 6,909 living languages and are referenced by three-letter ISO 639-3 codes⁴.

When it comes to dialects, there is even more room for divergence and dialects are just that: divergent speech varieties⁵ that may have considerable overlap with each other within a language. For this reason and others, it seemed wise to drop the dialect extension formerly associated with languages that were coded with a three-letter, two-number code known as the ROPAL (Registry of People and Languages) code. Today, Global Recordings International maintains the ROD (Registry of Dialects)⁶ while working to assure that whenever a people group cannot understand a previously recorded Gospel presentation, they will provide one in the new dialect.

The Peoples of the World

People groups are not the same as language groups, although many people group names and language names are identical or similar. Because some people groups speak multiple languages and because some languages are spoken by multiple people groups, they must remain distinct facts. Today, there are three primary global lists that account for the peoples of the world—the CPPI (Church Planting Progress Indicators, IMB), the JP (Joshua Project), and the WCD (World Christian Database). All three lists are available online and are updated as their editors discover new information. In addition, the WCD is published hardbound as the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, second edition. The three lists trace their beginnings to David Barrett, formerly of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (today, IMB). According to Patrick Johnstone, WEC International, each of the three lists has their “specific assumptions, emphases, ministry foci and informant networks, and each aiming to develop and maintain a high degree of information-sharing and correlation⁷.” Since each is edited differently and contains different factual material, the lists are somewhat different in their coverage or segmentation of the world's peoples. The following table shows how each of the list accounts for the peoples of the world.⁸

⁴ Paul M. Lewis, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. (Dallas: SIL International, 2009), 7, <http://www.ethnologue.com/web.asp>

⁵ Lewis, 9.

⁶ Harvest Information System Website, <http://www.harvestinformationsystem.info/>, <https://extranet.imb.org/sites/HIS/registries/Registry%20of%20Dialects/Forms/AllItems.aspx> (Accessed March 30, 2010)

⁷ Patrick Johnstone, “Affinity Blocs and People Clusters: An Approach Toward Strategic Insight and Mission Partnership,” *Mission Frontiers*, March-April 2007, 9, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdf/2007/02/200702.htm> (Accessed March 30, 2010)

⁸ People groups website, www.peoplegroups.org (Accessed March 15, 2010); Joshua Project website, www.joshuaproject.net (Accessed March 15, 2010); World Christian Database, query by Peter Crossing, (Received March 31, 2010). From a confluence of the three lists by Jim Haney.

Count of People Groups by Affinity Blocs for CPPI, JP and WCD

	CPPI	JP	WCD
Arab World	508	573	581
East Asian Peoples	330	454	471
Eurasian Peoples	956	1,970	1,901
Horn of Africa-Cushitic Peoples	164	160	189
Iranian-Median	237	273	261
Jews	81	181	226
Latin-Caribbean Americans	1,096	1,127	1,110
Malay Peoples	847	1,018	999
North American Peoples	334	369	457
Pacific Islanders	1,477	1,563	1,605
South Asian Peoples	1,401	3,718	966
Southeast Asian Peoples	471	615	546
Sub-Saharan African	2,742	2,994	3,182
Tibetan / Himalayan Peoples	548	770	658
Turkic Peoples	217	311	291
Unclassified	174	254	232
Grand Total	11,583	16,350	13,675

Although each of the lists accounts for the peoples of the world differently, it is interesting to note that each list shows nearly identical populations for the world and the countries of the world. Segmentation preferences account for these differences in the list, and simplistically speaking, this is somewhat like three people who each buy a loaf of bread in the market, and each cuts the loaf of bread in a different number of pieces. Each list may be used separately, but list holders who edit the CPPI, JP and WCD urge users to compare similar information from each list for greater depth of understanding and to use the unique facts that each list provides to the user.

Because each of the lists is segmented differently, list holders code their people group lists with three levels of ROP (Registry of Peoples) codes so⁹ that they may be joined and compared. On the highest level, the peoples of the world are coded to show their affinity bloc (ROP1). Affinity blocs are further subdivided into people clusters (ROP2). Finally, people clusters are divided into people groups (ROP3). People group population segments, like dialects are divergent and overlapping, so the lists do not attempt to provide (ROP4) coding, but this is not to say that the segmentation of any people group is not important—it is very important at the level of ministry teams as they look at unengaged or unreached portions of their people group, such as those living in particular cities, classes, castes, and clans.

For further information about the three lists, see “Which Peoples Need Priority Attention,”¹⁰ a back issue available from Mission Frontiers online, and see “A Comparison of Global People Group Lists”¹¹ on the Joshua Project website.

⁹ Harvest Information System Website, <http://www.harvestinformationsystem.info>. (Accessed March 15, 2010)

¹⁰ Justin Long, “Which Peoples Need Priority Attention? Seeking Agreement on the ‘Core of the Core,’” Mission Frontiers, March-April 2007, 18-23, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdf/2007/01/200701.htm> (Accessed March 15, 2010)

¹¹ <http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-list-comparison.php> (Accessed March 15, 2010)

Additionally, we call on our partners to continue to sharpen what we know of people groups through diligent regional and local research initiatives so that our knowledge of our world will grow. If partners choose to maintain their own databases, we urge that they key their data to the language, dialect, people, geography, religion and resource registries found at the Harvest Information System website.¹² Our goal is not to create a single global super-database, but to connect what each organization tracks and is important to them.

People Group Priorities

Joshua Project

The Joshua Project Progress Scale provides an estimate of the progress of church planting among a people group or country. The scale is derived from a comparison and integration that looks at the following sources¹³ as they relate to each people group:

- Percent Evangelical
- Percent Adherent
- Church Planting Indicator (CPI)
- Global Status of Evangelical Christianity (GSEC)
- Morelia Scale
- World Christian Encyclopedia Classification (World A-B-C)
- Other Progress Indicators.

The resulting integration of the data from these sources results in three distinct stages, each of which is subdivided.

Stage	Level	Level Description
Unreached / Least-Reached Less than 2% Evangelicals and Less than 5% Christian Adherents	1.1	Very few, if any, known Evangelicals. Professing Christians less than or equal to 5%.
	1.2	Evangelicals greater than 0.01%, but less than or equal to 2%. Professing Christians less than or equal to 5%.
Formative / Nominal Church Less than 2% Evangelicals and Greater than 5% Christian Adherents	2.1	Very few, if any, known Evangelicals. Professing Christians greater than 5%.
	2.2	Evangelicals greater than 0.01%, but less than or equal to 2%. Professing Christians greater than 5%.
Significant / Established Church Greater than 2% Evangelicals	3.1	Evangelicals greater than 2%, but less than or equal to 5%.
	3.2	Evangelicals greater than 5%.

Out of 16,350 people groups on the Joshua Project list, 6648 are classified as “Least Reached.” For more information on how the Joshua Project determines priority people groups, see “A Model for Determining the Most Needy Unreached or Least-Reached Peoples,” by Dan Scribner, Joshua Project.¹⁴

¹² <http://www.harvestinformationsystem.info/> (Accessed March 15, 2010)

¹³ Joshua Project website, <http://www.joshuaproject.net/definitions.php?term=12> (Accessed March 15, 2010)

¹⁴ Dan Scribner, “A Model for Determining the Most Needy Unreached or Least-Reached Peoples,” *Mission Frontiers*, November-December, 2004, 6-13, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdf/2004/06/200406.htm> (Accessed March 15, 2010)

World Christian Database

In the January–February 2002 edition of *Mission Frontiers*, Todd Johnson and Peter Crossing offered a methodology for determining priority by the presence or absence of 24 basic Christian ministries within each people group of the world.¹⁵ They defined an “untargeted people” as one with less than 15 basic ministries, and they gave these a code beginning with 1 and a decimal number for the number of basic ministries each people group had. So, a people group that had five of the 24 basic ministries achieved a T rating of 1.05. At that time, there were 815 people groups with a T rating of T 1.0 to T 1.15.

The 24 basic ministries are as follows:

24 Basic Ministries and Entry Points

Local affiliated Christians or church members, %

"Jesus" Film in mother tongue or related language

Audio scriptures

New Reader Portions (NRP) or Scriptures (NRS)

Scriptures available in Braille

Scriptures available in Sign Language

Personal evangelism by Great Commission Christians

Work among

Cross-cultural mission

Mass evangelism

Mission agencies at work

Portion/gospel only published in mother tongue

Near-portion/gospel (in related language within cluster)

New Testament published in mother tongue

Near-NT (in related language within cluster)

Bible published in mother tongue

near-Bible (in related language within cluster)

Portion/gospel available via a majority's second language

NT available via a majority's second language

Bible available via a majority's second language

Denominations present

Alien Christians resident with one or more churches

Countries transmitting Christian radio

Evangelism hours per capital per year

¹⁵ Todd M. Johnson and Peter F. Crossing, “Which Peoples Need Priority Attention? Those with the Least Christian Resources,” *Mission Frontiers*, January–February 2002, 16-23, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdf/2002/01/200201.htm> (Accessed March 15, 2010)

In the January—February 2005 edition of *Mission Frontiers*, the number of untargeted peoples had grown to 926 because of the addition of new people groups to the database. While still affirming the validity of this approach to determine priority, Johnson and Crossing recommended a wider use of their data, especially in light of the advent of the online version of the WCD. In this article they suggested a customized approach for using the WCD¹⁶. They suggested that users come to the vast amount of data with their own priorities and determine for themselves how WCD data informs their mission. For example, someone with a heart for the providing Braille Bibles for people groups could go to the online database and use the query tool to get a list of those people groups who are still without Braille Bibles.

Today, out of 13,675 people groups in the WCD, 1197 are classified as “untargeted peoples.”

Global Status of Evangelical Christianity

The Global Status of Evangelical Christianity, IMB, is a model that describes the progress of the Gospel among the peoples of the world by considering three main conditions:

- Percent Evangelical
- Accessibility to the Gospel
- Church Planting Activity within the Past Two Years (none, localized and widespread)

Based upon these criteria, each people group receives a GSEC Status. Unreached people groups or people groups who are less than 2% Evangelical have a GSEC Status of 0-3. Unlike the Joshua Project, IMB does not consider % Adherents in determining unreached status. Unreached people groups who have not had at least one new Evangelical church started among them in the past two years are considered Last Frontier People Groups. These have a GSEC status of 0-1. People groups equal to or greater than 2% Evangelical are no longer considered as unreached.¹⁷

Status	Description
0	No evangelical Christians or churches. No access to major evangelical print, audio, visual, or human resources.
1	Less than 2% Evangelical. Some evangelical resources available, but no active church planting within past 2 years.
2	Less than 2% Evangelical. initial (localized) church planting within past 2 years.
3	Less than 2% Evangelical. Widespread church planting within past 2 years.
4	Greater than or equal to 2% Evangelical
5	Greater than or equal to 5% Evangelical
6	Greater than or equal to 10% Evangelical
7	Unknown

Diagrammatic annotations to the table:

- A bracket on the left side groups rows 0 and 1 under the label "Last Frontier".
- A bracket on the left side groups rows 0, 1, 2, and 3 under the label "Unreached".

Today, out of 11,583 people groups on the CPPI list, 6661 are classified as unreached. For more information on how IMB determines priority people groups, see “The Global Status of Evangelical Christianity—A Model for Assessing Priority People Groups,” by Scott Holste and Jim Haney, IMB.¹⁸

¹⁶ Todd M. Johnson and Peter F. Crossing, “Priority Peoples: A Customized Approach,” *MissionFrontiers*, January-February 2005, 8-14, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdf/2005/01/200501.htm> (Accessed March 15, 2010)

¹⁷ People Groups website, www.peoplegroups.org, (Accessed March 21, 2010). For a full explanation of these and other terms see FAQs on this site.

Engaging the Peoples of the World with their Initial Church Planting Team

We have shown that from Edinburgh 1910 to Tokyo 2010, the call to make disciples of all nations is as strong and compelling as ever. Still, with all that has been done to work among people groups throughout the world, there are many unreached people groups left. Why is this? There is no easy answer to this question.

In many cases, faithful people have labored long giving their entire lives to seeing just a handful of new believers emerge. Other Christian workers seem to have been at the right place at the right time and seen a mighty outpouring of God's Spirit. Looking across time, generations have come and gone in some areas of the world causing the Church to weaken, struggle and die. In other areas of the world, those who dwelt in darkness have experienced an awakening, and today they are part of a mighty movement of God.

Today, we need strategies for reminding the Church of its mission. Without mobilization, new partners will not understand or sense the compulsion of the unfinished task and their part in it. Once mobilized and committed to the harvest force, new teams must have a sense for the priority of unreached peoples, particularly those that are unengaged, having no church planting methodology underway among them.

Engagement is a serious step. When a man and a woman share the news of their engagement to be married, they are telling family, friends and others that they are making a life-long commitment to each other. When missionaries engage people groups, a similar commitment is warranted.

Jeff Liverman, of Frontiers, says that engagement is characterized by four criteria:¹⁹

- An apostolic effort in residence
- A commitment to work in the local language and culture
- A commitment to long-term ministry
- Sowing in a manner consistent with the goal of seeing a Church Planting Movement emerge

When Jesus entered the world, he came to engage the world, and engage he did. In John 17, he has a heart-to-heart talk with the Father:

I have glorified You on the earth
by completing the work You gave Me to do.

I am no longer in the world,
but they are in the world,
and I am coming to You.

Holy Father,
protect them by Your name
that You have given Me,
so that they may be one as We are one.

I pray not only for these,
but also for those who believe in Me
through their message.²⁰

¹⁸ Scott Holste and Jim Haney, "The Global Status of Evangelical Christianity: A Model for Assessing Priority People Groups," *Mission Frontiers*, January-February 2006, 8-13, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdf/2006/01/200601.htm> (Accessed March 21, 2010)

¹⁹ Jeff Liverman, "Unplowed Ground: Engaging the Unreached," in John Dudley Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims*. (Pasadena, Calif: William Carey Library, 2008), 23.

²⁰ Gospel Communications Network. Bible Gateway. (Muskegon, MI: Gospel Communications International, 1995), <http://www.gospelcom.net/bible>, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2017&version=HCSB> (accessed March 30, 2010) John 17:4,11,20

Paul Eshleman of the Finishing the Task initiative has reminded the Church for many years that it is just not fair that some people groups have never had an opportunity to hear the Gospel and believe. Jerry Rankin of IMB often asks: “What reason can any of us give for depriving any people group of their first opportunity to hear the Gospel.”

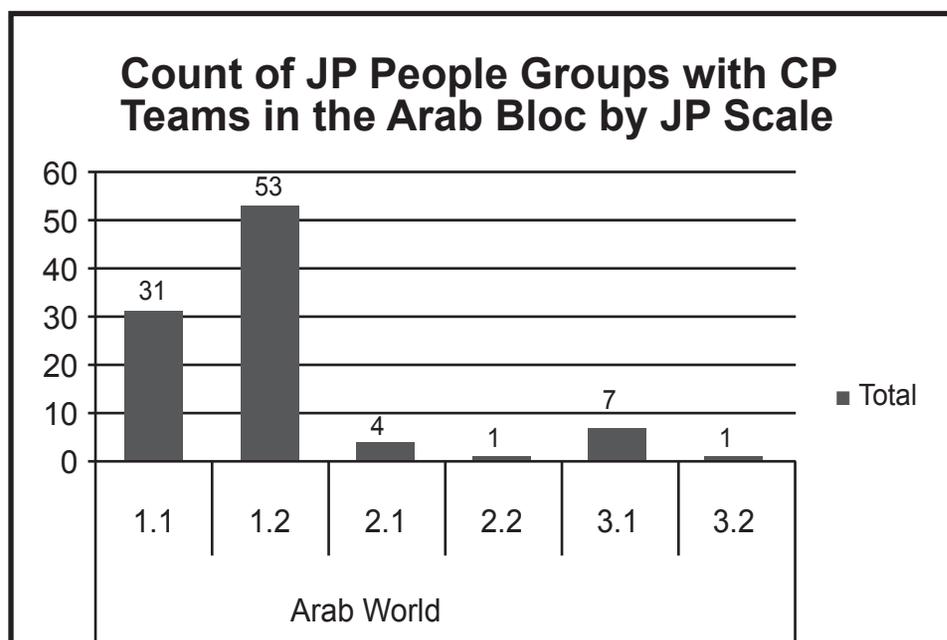
Still, with 2000 years of Christian history behind us, there are 3,706 people groups (CPPI) today that are not engaged with a single church planting team on the ground and implementing a church planting strategy; 495 of these have a population of at least 100,000.²¹ Certainly, they must be engaged with their first church planting/disciple making teams as soon as possible!

Establishing the Engaged Peoples of the World in Christ

Certainly mobilizing the Church to go, partner and initially engage the unengaged people groups of the world is a compelling starting point, but there is much to be done after engagement teams arrive. The task of the engaging team is to sustain their effort and see their witness spread through multiplying teams of disciples and churches so that the Church is established within that people group.

So beyond the list of unengaged people groups, what can we say about under-engaged peoples—those that are perhaps newly engaged or barely engaged? We have already provided some hints about this in the “People Group Priorities” section where the JP, T, and GSEC scales were discussed. These scales are based on data found in the spreadsheets offered by the list holders. In addition, each list affords additional facts that can help us understand both the provisions and the needs of the under-engaged.

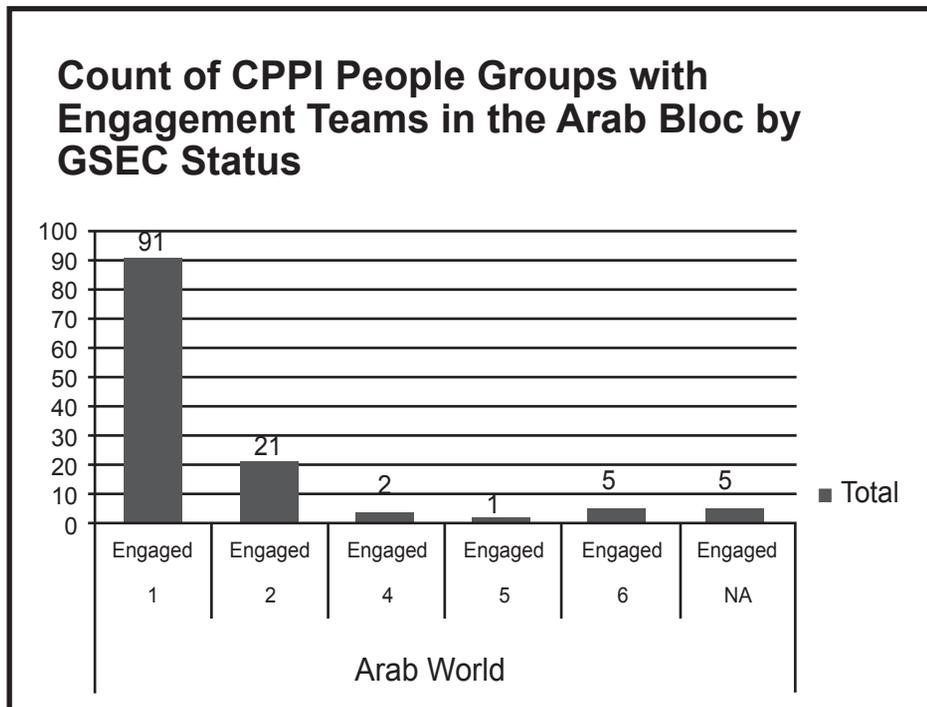
For example, let’s say that you want to use the JP list to compare the conditions of various under-engaged people groups. First, download the JP list from their website, open it and find the CPTeam column. Choose Y, and the list will show you only those people groups that have church planting teams. Next, look at the JPScale column, this will tell you the status of these people groups. Even though they all have church planting teams, they have different JP Scale values. Let’s say that your focus is on the Arab Bloc; filter the Affinity Bloc column for the Arabs. You will find 84 least reached people groups (Levels 1.1 and 1.2), which have at least one church planting team but are still considered to be least reached.



²¹ People Groups website, www.peoplegroups.org (Accessed March 15, 2010)

Beyond this, the JP list provides additional information under the following column headings: AudioRecordings, BibleYear, Church100, CPI, GospelRadio, GSEC, JF, LeastReached, NTYear, PCChristian, PCEvangelical, Population, PortionsYear, PrimaryReligion, RankMinistryTools, RankOverall, RankProgress, Language.

Using the CPPI, the picture is similar. Using a listing of engaged people groups in the CPPI, we filter it for the Arab Bloc people groups only and then show these by GSEC scale. You will find 91 unreached people groups that have some Evangelical resources, but have not had a new church planted in the previous two years (Level 1).



Beyond this, the CPPI list provides additional information under the following column headings: Population, Language, Religion, Congregations, Evangelicals, Percent Christian, Engagement Status, Evangelical Presence, Written Scripture, Audio Scripture, Jesus Film, Radio Broadcast, Gospel Recordings, Bible Stories, Physical Exertion, Freedom Index, Threat Level. (Some of this information is restricted or modified for sharing with partners for research and strategic purposes.)

Using the WCD, we can look further to find the status of each of the 24 basic ministries or entry points. Using information collected by FTT (Finishing the Task), which seeks to see at least one missionary placed for every population segment of 50,000, we can discover how many missionaries are in place and how many more are needed. In addition to all of this, we have the knowledge base of frontline engagers²² who can tell us even more about the extent to which a people group is engaged.

As a team continues to engage a single people group, their goal is to multiply disciples and see the church established according to the harvest that God brings. Statistical indicators are useful to help us know the extent to which each people group is progressing.

But let's think further. Surely, if our engagement of a people group results in significantly establishing them to the point that they are least 2%, 5%, 10% or even a 100% Evangelical, they have countless evangelists and church planters among them, and they have their basic ministry needs met, our job is done; or, is it?

²² Frontliners; "boots-on-the-ground," those who live among the people for which they provide information

Enlisting the Established in Christ in the Harvest Force

To put it bluntly, unless those we engage and establish emerge as harvest force partners to join us, we have not gone far enough! This message started with an echo from Edinburgh from the delegates to the members of the church in Christian lands. They challenged the churches in those nations to engage fervently.

But who would have thought that movements to Christ would happen in non-Christian lands?! Amazingly, those same delegates who gathered 100 years ago were taking note of breakthroughs in non-Christian lands—those that had been engaged and were now engaging others. With many reports on the emergence of new partners in unlikely places, they penned “The Official Message from the Conference to the Members of the Christian Church in non-Christian Lands²³,” as follows:

Dear Brethren in Christ,

We desire to send you greeting in the Lord from the World Missionary Conference gathered in Edinburgh. For ten days we have been associated in prayer, deliberation, and the study of missionary problems, with the supreme purpose of making the work of Christ in non-Christian lands more effective, and throughout the discussions our hearts have gone forth to you in fellowship and love.

. . . [N]othing has caused us more joy than the witness borne from all quarters as to the steady growth in numbers, zeal, and power of the rising Christian Church in newly -awakening lands. . . . We thank God for the spirit of evangelistic energy which you are showing, and for the victories that are being won thereby. . . . This example is all the more inspiring because of the special difficulties that beset the glorious position which you hold in the hottest part of the furnace wherein the Christian Church is being tried. We rejoice to be fellow-helpers with you . . . and to know that you are being more and more empowered by God’s grace to take the burden of it upon your own shoulders. Take up that responsibility with increasing eagerness, dear brethren and secure from God the power to carry through the task; then we may see great marvels wrought beneath our own eyes.

And with this sentiment, we must ask of the new harvest force, “Who are your harvest fields, and who has God prepared you to reach?” Unless the established Church emerges and becomes part of the harvest force in engaging others, they remain unfinished themselves.

As we track the number of home missionaries and foreign missionaries these new partners send out, let us go ahead to record who these missionaries are engaging in their own countries and beyond.

Confirming the State of the Unfinished Task

In the early 1990s I was a church planter in Northern Ghana. I planted churches and conducted lay pastoral training among the Frafra, Tampulma, Kusasi, Bimoba, Mamprusi, Fulbe, and Konkomba people groups. Along the way, I worked with the Assembly of God, Evangelical Presbyterians and Evangelical Lutherans to survey Northern Ghana and look for unreached people groups in unchurched places.

As we conducted our work, I remember discussing together the possibility of bypassing an area of the North that we knew to have Christian missionaries in three separate stations. Ultimately, we decided to make the trip, and it was good that we went, even though the area was hard to reach and we had to dig our four-by-four out of the mud more than once. After some time, we arrived at the first of the three mission stations.

²³ Gairdner, 280-281.

At the first mission station we found a brilliant but rather reserved translator who was working on a mother-tongue literacy project. He told us all about how he had learned the language, developed orthography and was teaching the locals how to read their own language. We were quite excited to hear of the progress, and asked him how he was using this ministry to share the Gospel with this unreached people group. The translator gave us an odd look and added that it was not his intention to share the Gospel through this means or any other because his assignment did not include that, and if he were to do that, the Muslims would make him leave.

As we continued our survey, we reached another mission station late the next morning. We met up with a very zealous young man who had taken up shovel and dynamite to provide hand-dug wells for his adopted people group. As much as he was able to show his progress and skills in well drilling, he told us that he had not yet brought himself to share the Gospel, and he was soon to leave for another station.

As we continued our survey to the last of the three mission stations, we met a wonderful Catholic missionary and his wife. They offered us some hand-squeezed lemonade, and it was wonderful, as were they. However, there was uneasiness to our dialogue, and he ultimately expressed his deep concern that we would try to come to his area to plant new churches, especially since the locals could ask him to leave before he would have the opportunity to finish his Ph.D. on traditional healing practices.

What does this illustration show us? It shows us that one of the reasons people groups are unreached is that believers who have lived and worked among them have not engaged them boldly with the claims of the Gospel. This is not to say that incarnational ministry is unappreciated. We must all live out our faith among others, but if we are to model our lives after Christ, we must put it all together in word and deed just as Jesus went throughout Galilee, “teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”²⁴

What does this illustration have to do with confirming the state of the unfinished task? It shows us that whether we are talking about the accuracy of a people group list or the state of the Gospel among the listed people groups, someone has to go to the field to get ground truth. For those who are unable to go to the field themselves, they must rely on the information that comes to them, evaluate the quality of that information, and decide whether they feel it is the best possible source of truth for their needs.

Concerning the three lists—CPPI, JP and WCD, various sources are used and various experts have been consulted, even within a single column of data. Some information on each of the lists changes slowly; other information changes relatively quickly. There is not space here to discuss the data sources for each piece of information for the three lists, but there is space to talk about ways to sharpen our research and improve the state of the data.

Confirming through Field Assessments

No researcher is able to personally check out everything that he gathers and reports; this is why researchers weigh various sources of information in their analysis before settling on what they are going to use. However, there are times when fieldwork is necessary, and this usually comes when a researcher receives a report that is difficult to believe. In these cases, assessment teams are formed, trained and sent out²⁵.

²⁴ Gospel Communications Network. Bible Gateway. (Muskegon, MI: Gospel Communications International, 1995), <http://www.gospelcom.net/bible>, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%204:23&version=HCSB> (accessed March 30, 2010) Matthew 4:23.

²⁵ Team composition, training that agrees upon research methodology, methodological pitfalls, logistics, and on-site conduct must be discussed thoroughly before any fieldwork is conducted so that the best information may be found without harm to the work.

We have all learned a great deal by doing field work in cooperation with other mission agencies and field workers. There have been Church Growth Strategy Studies, basecounts and surveys, and in recent years, CPM assessments. We learn a great deal about people groups in research projects such as these, and sometimes we learn a lot about ourselves. This kind of research helps to identify problems that exist as well as exciting breakthroughs that have occurred.

Field Assessments help us to see whether engagement reports are accurate; they help us to identify and understand fruitful practices; they help us to test our hypotheses before reaching conclusions, and they help us get to know great people that God is using in many hard places.

Confirming through Reporting

For the most part, research improves as it is published and used. Another way of saying this is that data accuracy is often proportional to data usage. Someone who conducts a research project and sticks it in a drawer may satisfy himself, but if his research never sees the light of day and remains untested, it is unlikely to improve. On the other hand, someone who conducts a research project and sticks it out there for everyone to see may satisfy himself, but if the feedback generated by the posting is ignored, it is unlikely to improve.

Researchers not only post results to inform others; they post results to gather new and better information, often through direct feedback. Those who provide feedback expect researchers to listen to them, take their feedback seriously, respond in a timely way, and provide an explanation as to the usefulness of their feedback. If the feedback results in a change to the data, the list holder should let the person providing the feedback know when the change will be reported. If the feedback does not result in a change to the data, the list holder should let the person providing the feedback know why the feedback will not result in a change to his research report.

IMB welcomes feedback from those who use CPPI data. Observations and suggestions are needed to improve the CPPI. When feedback is received, it is acknowledged and referred to an IMB Global Research staff liaison who discusses the feedback with one or more IMB strategy research associates on the field. IMB prefers firsthand, well-documented information whenever possible. Since changes to CPPI data are not made at the level of the global office, all feedback is referred to field workers, and it is they who must make the change to the data using the web-based CPPI reporting tool. When feedback results in changes to the CPPI, changes are reflected on the peoplegroups.org website within one to eight weeks.

The Joshua Project makes every effort to respond to questions, comments and feedback within two working days. If changes to Joshua Project data are suggested, the suggestions are evaluated against other sources, most notably the *Ethnologue*, the World Christian Database, Operation China and other books from Asia Harvest, research materials published in Southeast Asia, refined census data for South Asia, other census data, CPPI data, field input and other web searches. In addition, they will often consult their main data editors, Patrick Johnstone and Omid. If requested changes can be justified, they change their in-house master files promptly. These changes are then reflected on the Joshua Project website within approximately two weeks depending on their web update cycle.

The World Christian Database generally relies more heavily on published sources of data and information than on field sources, and hence the major revision cycles are geared towards publications such as the UN's population revisions (every two years), the *Ethnologue* (printed every few years), Bible Society annual reports for new translations, and censuses as they become available. While the ISO for example is continually updating language codes online, WCD will generally wait until a new revision of the *Ethnologue* is printed before incorporating these new languages and codes. Similarly, until a new scripture translation has reached the UBS library and is published in their annual report it will generally not appear in WCD. That said, the sheer volume of new specialist books and other

publications appearing daily on all topics of relevance to world evangelization means that the database is being continually edited, and these edits are incorporated in WCD quarterly updates. Feedback from users is welcomed, particularly where it points to published material, and will be added in the context of this research cycle.

Confirming through Virtual Conferencing

With the advent of Skype, it is now convenient to conference with people all over the world almost effortlessly. One Global Network is utilizing this new tool to confirm the CPPI list and engagement information for people groups on the list, particularly those people groups upon which the Global Network is focusing—unengaged, unreached Muslim people groups that are 100,000 in population and larger. This list is called the 247 list since there were 247 on the list when the goal to engage these people groups was initiated.

One task force that is part of the Global Network works through a feedback facilitator who follows a process for list and engagement review. The basis of the review is the quarterly 247 list report that is securely posted on a portal for the Global Network research contacts and others. When the report is viewed, feedback is generated and directed to the feedback facilitator. This feedback does not result in immediate changes to either the list or the engagement report; instead, the feedback facilitator arranges a Skype meeting so that the feedback offered can receive first-hand review from frontline engagers; usually two or more the Global Network partners take part in a review.

The frontline engagers are the main voices solicited for these meetings. As Global Network partners provide names to the feedback facilitator of those who live in the country and/or among the people cluster to be reviewed, they are provided a spreadsheet for their review at least one month in advance of the Skype meeting. This gives them time to work through the list and edit what they see.

When the day of the meeting comes, the feedback facilitator begins the meeting and confirms that the people needed are in the “room.” This includes the person responsible for CPPI edits (IMB), Global Research (IMB) and the feedback initiator and frontline engagers.

As the first pass is made through the part of the list under review, anyone can suggest the addition or deletion of people groups on the list. As this discussion takes place, the feedback facilitator notes consensus for changes to the list in the Skype chat window, which serves as a whiteboard that can be saved and distributed later. It is in this kind of environment that changes are made to the CPPI list or deferred until more research can be conducted.

The second pass through the list asks for confirmation of engagement teams on the ground. Sometimes, the frontline engagers will say that one of the people groups on the list is no longer engaged—a team was there last year, but they are no longer there. Sometimes they will confirm that a people group is engaged, and they will share more about what that team is doing. If a change to engagement status is to be recorded, consensus is needed within this group. When consensus is reached, it is noted on the virtual whiteboard.

When the second pass is finished, closing remarks are made and a follow-up meeting is scheduled for matters that have been deferred. After the meeting, the IMB field representative changes the CPPI for those items that have received consensus. Meeting notes, participant identities and locations, and identity of engagement teams remain confidential throughout the process.

Final Remarks

Research demands our best. Our best is submitted to the greater glory of God. We stand on the shoulders of many researchers who have gone before us and given their lives to understanding the unfinished task.

Research, in its many forms, provides mission critical information to inform decision making so that our activity moves toward the mandate of the Great Commission. Our research must be focused and cooperative so that we can stay the course making sure that every nation is engaged, established in the Church, and part of the global harvest force.

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