A Simple Guide to People Group Lists

How many people groups are there in the world? How many are unreached? Which numbers are correct and which list of people groups is "right"? The varying answers to these questions can cause confusion in the missions community. The Lord has graciously provided the global missions community with several sets of people group information. Each has great value and none is entirely right or entirely wrong. Each list has unique perspective, definitions, criteria and sources which cause variation between the lists. These variations cause a degree of disagreement between the lists which encourages healthy dialog. The following provides some basic definitions, a brief history, and an overview of the comprehensive global people group lists, several subsets and other important collections of missions data.

SOME DEFINITIONS

People Group: A significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity with one another. For evangelization purposes, a people group is the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.

Christian Adherent: Any one who claims to be a follower of the Christian religion in any form. This definition is based on the individual's self-confession, not his or her ecclesiology, theology or religious commitment and experience. The term embraces all traditions and confessions of Christianity and includes: Protestant, Roman Catholic, Other Catholic, Orthodox, Foreign marginal and Indigenous marginal.

Evangelical: All who generally emphasize the following: 1) The Lord Jesus Christ as the sole source of salvation through faith in Him. 2) Personal faith and conversion with regeneration by the Holy Spirit. 3) A recognition of the inspired Word of God as the only basis for faith and Christian living. 4) Commitment to biblical witness, evangelism and mission that brings others to faith in Christ.

Ethno-linguistic - An ethnic or racial group defined primarily by language. Groupings of individuals based on language spoken, but with the possibility of sub-divisions based upon dialect or cultural distinctives. Using this method, one language group equals one or more ethnic groups. This assumes that the "understandability barrier" to the gospel message is higher than the "acceptance barrier."

Engaged: a people group is considered engaged when it meets the following criteria: 1) A pioneering effort is in residence, 2) There is a commitment to work in the local language and culture, 3) There is a commitment to long-term ministry and 4) Sowing is occurring in a manner consistent with the goal of seeing a church planting movement (CPM) emerge.

PEOPLE GROUP LISTS BACKGROUND

The foundation of all the global peoples lists is the excellent language research of SIL over the last 70 years. In addition, much of the content of the ethno-linguistic peoples lists is derived from the work of David Barrett. We acknowledge his significant contribution as the original editor of the World Christian Encyclopedia. The CPPI (Church Planting Progress Indicators) database had its beginnings in the World Christian Database in the early 1990s and has been significantly modified since by IMB (International Mission Board of Southern Baptist Convention) field staff. Joshua Project was birthed in 1995 and owes much of its genesis to Patrick Johnstone and his connection with the WCD, Omid research of South Asia, and Hattaway research for China and the Buddhist world.

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COMPREHENSIVE GLOBAL PEOPLE GROUP LISTS

World Christian Database (WCD) (www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/) – The World Christian Database provides statistical information on countries, cities, languages, world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups. Data sources for the WCD include published and unpublished sources, field work, interviews, questionnaires and officially published reports of government-organized national censuses. The WCD peoples list is ethno-linguistic, meaning that a people group is primarily defined by language and then by ethnicity, and then by country of residence. Within a language group other factors such as race, tradition, history, and culture sometimes define a subsection of peoples. The WCD classifies peoples by Worlds A, B and C. World A peoples are groups with over 50% of the population unevangelized. The WCD is available in print or online by annual subscription. Suggested updates can be submitted to <info@globalChristianity.org>.

IMB / CPPI (http://www.peoplegroups.org) – The IMB / CPPI peoples database is a global list of ethnic people groups from a church planting perspective. A private, secure online system is used by regional and national IMB researchers to gather and submit people group data to the IMB central database. The CPPI list is generally ethno-linguistic and allows for subdivisions of language based upon cultural or dialect distinctives. In some cases other criteria such as religion are used to define a people group. "Unreached" is defined as less than 2% Evangelical; % Christian Adherents is not considered. A key feature of the CPPI is the tracking of unengaged people groups - peoples without any active church planting occurring. A people group is considered engaged when church planting methodology is underway or being implemented. Suggested updates for review by IMB regional and national staff can be submitted to <gric@imb.org>.

Joshua Project (JP) (http://www.joshuaproject.net) – The Joshua Project database is a global ethno-linguistic and ethno-cultural people group database from a church planting perspective. Joshua Project is an open system, gathering data from a variety of sources such as field missionaries and researchers, national and regional initiatives, census data and published sources. People groups on the Joshua Project list are defined by language, religion, culture and caste primarily based on on-site definitions. "Unreached" is defined as less than 2% Evangelical and less than 5% Christian Adherent. A distinctive of the Joshua Project list is defining people groups in South Asia primarily by caste / community and religion rather than by language. South Asia people group data is available at the country, state and district levels. Suggested updates can be submitted to <info@joshuaproject.net>.

	World Christian Database	**CPPI (IMB)**	**Joshua Project**
People Definition	Globally ethno-linguistic	Outside South Asia ethno-linguistic South Asia mixture of language and caste	Outside South Asia ethno-linguistic South Asia by caste
Unreached Definition	Less than 50% evangelized	Less than 2% Evangelical	Less than 2% Evangelical and Less than 5% Christian Adherent
Unreached Measures	Exposure	Response	Response
Sources	Census and academic reports Denominational reports Ethnologue	Primarily field staff Regional and national researchers Ethnologue	Regional and national researchers Networks, individuals, other data sets Ethnologue
Philosophy	Adds groups when documented in published research	Adds groups once verified by field staff	Assumes worst case, adds all potential groups, removes if verified as not existing

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WHY THREE GLOBAL PEOPLES LISTS?

How many countries are there in the world? The answer depends on who you ask. Should there only be one list of countries in the world? Different perspectives on the same situation are a healthy thing. Looking at a picture from several angles often yields greater appreciation. Using different definitions and criteria can help clarify a task and highlight areas needing further research. People group database compilers are confronted by questions such as: Is language always the primary definer of a people group? Should caste be considered when defining a people group? Should Christian Adherents be considered when setting the criterion for unreached? Should unreached be defined by exposure or response to the Gospel? What are acceptable sources for input and edits? The three global peoples lists answer these questions slightly differently and thus provide different but valuable perspectives.

ENCOURAGING COOPERATION

In the last several years there has been a significant increase in the communication and cooperation between these three global peoples lists. Initiatives such as Global Trends Fruitful Practices / GTFP (see below) have provided the impetus for what has emerged as a peer-group of researchers and collaborative efforts to share and adjust information as much as possible. May the Lord continue to enhance and strengthen the developing connections between the World Christian Database, the IMB Global Research Office and Joshua Project.

COMPREHENSIVE GLOBAL LANGUAGE LIST

Ethnologue (http://www.ethnologue.com) – The Ethnologue is a listing of the languages of the world. It provides language information by country and includes estimates of the number of speakers, alternate names, dialects and general language background information. It is the compilation of SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) field staff research. The three-letter Ethnologue language codes have been adopted as the ISO and Registry of Language (ROL) standards. The global people group lists use the Ethnologue extensively for their language information. The World Christian Database (WCD) also uses the Dalby language system. The current Ethnologue is 17th edition and the 18th edition is anticipated in early 2016. Suggested updates can be submitted to <editor_ethnologue@sil.org>.

OTHER IMPORTANT LISTS AND SUBSETS

Finishing the Task (FTT) (http://www.finishingthetask.com) – Finishing the Task is an association of mission agencies and churches who want to see reproducing churches planted among every people group in the world. FTT uses a subset of the IMB / CPPI peoples list exclusively focusing on the unengaged, unreached peoples greater than 10,000 in population. Statistical data on the FTT list is updated mainly from the overall CPPI list. Engagement status is gathered from the CPPI list, national networks, denominations and other sources. FTT defines unreached as less than 2% Evangelical and not Christianized. The FTT list use the IMB / CPPI definition for "unengaged" meaning no active church planting movement is occurring. Suggested updates can be submitted to <info@finishingthetask.com>.

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HIS Registry of Peoples (ROP) (http://www.harvestinformationsystem.info)– The Harvest Information System Registry of Peoples is an effort to standardize *coding* (but not content) of ethnic people groups. ROP is a code set whose purpose is cross-referencing and is not intended to include extensive information about people groups. A six-digit code is assigned to particular people groups without reference to countries. ROP had its origin in Joshua Project and is now managed by the IMB. ROP coding is used in the CPPI and Joshua Project lists to facilitate cross-referencing. The latest ROP release was Sep 2010 and currently has very active updating. Suggested updates can be submitted to <JCourson@imb.org>.

Etnopedia (http://www.etnopedia.org) – Etnopedia is a wiki-based, multi-lingual people group profile system online. Etnopedia is an editable website for the global Christian community to translate ethnic people profiles into other languages. Many research efforts and researchers representing different ministries and organizations contribute to the information found on Etnopedia. In general, Etnopedia uses people group information from field inputs and Joshua Project data. In some cases information from the IMB and WCD peoples lists is also used. Suggested updates can be submitted to <info@etnopedia.org>.

Call2All (http://www.call2all.org) is a worldwide movement calling the church to a renewed, focused collaborative effort to fulfill the Great Commission. The Call2All congresses are primary mobilization efforts to recruit workers. At its congresses, Call2All uses a subset of the IMB / CPPI peoples list primarily focusing on the smaller unreached people groups as well as lists of groups over 5,000 in population in the geographical region of the congress. Call2All uses the same criteria as FTT defining unreached as less 2% Evangelical and not Christianized. One of the Call2ALL objectives is to help recruit workers for all unengaged people groups. Contact email is <info@call2all.org>

Global Trends Fruitful Practices (GTFP) – GTFP is a network of mission organizations focused on pioneer church planting among unreached Muslim people groups. The current GTFP list of people groups is a subset of the IMB / CPPI peoples lists focusing on the unengaged and unreached Muslim people groups over 100,000 in population. According to GTFP, a people group is considered engaged when a people group meets the following criteria: 1) A pioneering effort in residence, 2) Commitment to work in the local language and culture, 3) Commitment to long-term ministry and 4) Sowing occurring in a manner consistent with the goal of seeing a church planting movement (CPM) emerge. Suggested updates can be submitted to <jhaney@imb.org>.

YWAM (Youth With A Mission) 4K Project (http://www.4kworldmap.com) – 4K is a system that uses geographic areas to provide a lens to understand the overall mission task. Approximately 4,000 geographic regions called "Omega Zones" have been identified based on civil divisions using an "ABC – 369" system. World "A" Omega Zones are 3 million in population and are where the gospel is widely unavailable, World "B" Omega Zones are 6 million in population and are where the gospel is moderately available and World "C" Omega Zones are 9 million in population and are where the gospel is widely available. The focus is on where the gospel is most needed. 4K seeks to gather and provide geographic, demographic, language and people group information by Omega Zone. 4K uses people group data from the three global lists. Contact email is <info@4kworldmap.com>