**NO CHRISTIANS, NO SCRIPTURE, NO MISSIONARIES**:  (Update to the List - November 2011)
Ted Bergman, SIL International and Bill Morrison, Joshua Project

**It is imperative for those of us who follow Christ to disciple all peoples**.  Of the many peoples that need missionaries, which are of higher priority than any others?  I believe the highest priority are the groups which, so far as we know, have no Christ-followers among them, not even one book of the Bible, and no missionaries with the intent of bringing the gospel to them.

In an earlier article[1], we listed the languages that some missionary must learn in order to witness to these highest priority peoples.  This present article is an update of that list based on further research. The result is a reduction of the number to only 110 languages!  These peoples are found in 18 different countries.  The largest number, 26 of them are in China; 16 are in Nepal and 14 in Iran.

Here is how we've gone about updating the list. Recall that the list was a combination of data from the World Christian Database (WCD) and SIL's Ethnologue.  The WCD was chosen because it could be consistently correlated with the SIL information about Scripture availability for nearly every people group in its database.  The WCD also gives corroborating information about data that a people group has no Christians, though of course we don't know for certain how accurate and current this is.

But other databases have information and sources we can use to improve our list.  For instance, the Joshua Project data often relies on Paul Hattaway (author of Operation China[2]), Patrick Johnstone (former editor of Operation World[3]), Omid (for data on South Asia[4]), and others. The IMB's Church Planting Progress Indicators (CPPI) is informed by IMB field workers.  In fact researchers from all four of the global databases mentioned work together to help each other.  There is value in having these different perspectives on the situation.

In addition to comparing data from other databases, we sought to confirm the findings by contacting field personnel who were close to the unreached peoples on the list.  In a few cases, we learned of previously unreported missionaries working with a group or some believers or in one case a book of the Bible which had recently been translated.

Another much larger list has been promoted by Paul Eshleman through the Finishing the Task (FTT) partnership.  This is also being updated, but as of July of 2011, FTT lists 1,015 Unengaged, Unreached People Groups (UUPG) with populations greater than 50,000.  To note yet another popular website, Call2All refers to 3,400 UUPG by including all groups, not just those over 50,000. Both of these begin from the IMB's CPPI data.  At first glance these might seem to target the same groups as in our list.

The biggest difference is in whether a list includes only those with fewer than 2% Evangelicals, or no Christians, that is, none that we know of. The "Evangelical or Christian" distinction is important to understand. Joshua Project takes both into consideration. To be designated unreached the group must be less than 2% Evangelical Christian and less than 5% Christian Adherents.  An Evangelical is a subset of Christian Adherents and is defined on their website.  IMB has a similar definition.  Notice that as pointed

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[1] Lausanne World Pulse. It has also been republished in Ethnê, Etnopedia, Anglican Frontier Missions and Brigada
[2] Hattaway, Paul. 2003. Operation China.
[3] Mandryk, Jason, ed. 2010. Operation World. USA and India: Biblica Publishing.
[4] Data coming from Omid is reflected in the South Asian "country" pages in Joshua Project if a state (division / zone / province) is chosen or if a smaller administrative division of the state is chosen.

out in Operation World not all Evangelicals are born again[5].  The FTT and Call2All lists count only the Evangelicals while we list here only those groups without any Christian Adherents.  Again, both perspectives are valuable.

As Patrick Johnstone points out, there ought to be some distinction made between those who have no witness whatever that is readily available to them and those who if they sought it, could find Scripture in a language they understand and a church that preaches elements of the gospel.  To take an example, Japanese people in Argentina number an estimated 50,000 and have less than 2% Evangelicals so they make the larger list. But the gospel is generally available to them if they sought it out.

Another difference in the lists is that on our list if individuals of a people group live on both sides of a national border, the language is still only listed once.  The question we are asking is how many languages will have to be learned by some missionary in order to reach these groups who have no Christians or Scripture.  We learned for instance that the Runga of Chad have no Scripture and few, if any Christians, but across the border in the Central African Republic there are a number of Runga believers.  So we have removed this people group from our earlier list.

The final difference with the FTT list has to do with the population. There is advantage to listing all peoples since God doesn't make larger groups more important or less important than the smaller ones. As He said to Israel, It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples.[6]  Nowhere in the hundreds of places where God speaks of "all nations", "all peoples," does he command going to the larger groups first. If that were his strategy, Christ might have been born a Roman instead of a Jew.

Let's advocate for all the unreached peoples as the Bible does without a distinction on size. Otherwise a missionary who feels called to a small group has to justify their ministry to the sending churches. Are they truly second class missionaries?  Are we guilty of limiting our concern, whether spoken or unspoken, to those that we as humans think to be more important?

Yes, it is true that the smallest people groups are usually more bilingual and bicultural. They may not need a separate witness. But that is a tendency, not a fact based solely on a low population figure.

So click here to view the new list.  It undoubtedly still has errors, though we asked researchers and field missionaries to review it.  There may be peoples who are not on the list and should be, and others that could be removed.[7]

The JP and CPPI do not show data for some languages but they no longer disagree on any of them.  We offer it with the prayer to the Almighty that he will send out workers to the harvest.

The authors would appreciate feedback on the accuracy of the list.

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[5] Mandryk, Jason, ed. 2010. Operation World. USA and India: Biblica Publishing. 958-9.
[6] Deuteronomy 7:7.
[7] Paul Hattaway noted in an email, for example, that there have been significant advancements among the Qiangic groups in China that are on the list, especially since the Sichuan earthquake.  These groups may now have a few believers

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**Endnotes**

A note about the population figures: those who identify with the group ethnically are included only if they speak this language as their primary language. The estimates have been extrapolated to 2011 from the last date in which there was an actual enumeration by using the growth rate of the country as a whole. Obviously this results in only an approximate size. For that reason, rather than giving precise numbers we are stating the populations as

- • Small, meaning probably fewer than 10,000
- • Small/Mid, approximately 10 to 50,000
- • Mid/Large, approximately 50 to 100,000
- • Large, larger than approximately 100,000

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