

Christ's Missional Challenge

*50 largest UPGs
A Case Study for South Asia*

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Adapted from Bill Morrison, Joshua Project

The Case for Focus on South Asia in the Remaining Task

Of the 50 largest UPGs, 26 are in South Asia. Total population for the 50 largest UPGs is 1.365 billion, of which 732 million are in South Asia. Roughly half are in South Asia, measured by either the count of people groups or count of individuals.

For the world, Joshua Project lists 7,075 UPGs, totaling to 2.897 billion individuals. Of these, 3,487 are in South Asia, totaling to 1.533 individuals.

About half of the remaining task is in South Asia, if by “remaining task” we mean each people group will have at least 5% professing Christians and at least 2% Evangelicals, enough to perhaps carry the Gospel to their entire people group.

Not only in terms of the number of UPGs and individuals, but probably by other measures as well. Complexity of the task comes to mind. South Asia is very complex, in terms of caste / tribe groupings, languages, and religions. Another measure might be entrenched spiritual opposition (consider the “pirs” in Pakistan).

Does the missions community fully recognize the attention that South Asia deserves? It could be argued the bulk of attention in the days ahead should be directed toward:

1. South Asia
2. Middle East and North Africa

Of these two, South Asia may very well need more resources.

The Complexities of South Asia

Joshua Project data for South Asia comes from Omid, South Asian researcher. Each people group (caste or tribe) usually speaks a number of languages. Each language subdivision of a people group may require a separate church planting project, although sometimes one CP

project may serve more than one language subgroup, because of a high degree of multi-lingualism. Joshua Project data for South Asia overly simplifies the magnitude of the church planting task if we imply only one CP project is needed for each people group.

Omid's data for India shows about 22,000 combinations of people group and language. These would be the people groups of India if we defined that term such that each people group includes (a) only one caste / tribe, and (b) only one language spoken. This would be a desirable way to define people groups in India, because this way the barriers of acceptance and understanding are both minimized within each people group.

And a similar thing can be said for Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

However, about 6,000 of these 22,000 people groups have populations that are very small, less than 100. So let's say these could be ignored in the Joshua Project database, leaving about 16,000 people groups in India alone.

If Joshua Project defined "people group" in South Asia to mean each caste / tribe speaks only one language (the most granular way to do it), it would surely overwhelm both people viewing the website and browsers displaying the website. Instead of 2,600 people groups in India (which bogs down the display as it is), there would be perhaps 16,000 people groups. Of these 16,000 people groups some 13,000-14,000 would be marked as UPGs. Just in India. It's not feasible from a practical point of view.

Even though the Joshua Project treatment of South Asia presently seems complex, it's not nearly as complex as the reality. Many more evangelism and church planting projects will be needed than a casual examination of the data might suggest.