

How Shall They Believe? -

Evangelical Missionary Deployment vis-à-vis the Least Reached Peoples

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15 May 2005

Man needs to hear the Gospel to believe and find salvation in Jesus Christ (Romans 10,14). Therefore messengers have to be sent to all peoples, especially those who have never heard the Good News. Yet 20 years ago only 1-2 %¹ of the global mission resources were directed towards the “unreached peoples”². We are greatly indebted to the Lausanne movement, AD2000 Movement and the U.S. Center for World Missions (USCWM) which have persistently reminded us of the unfinished task. They have challenged the global church to focus on the neglected peoples and redirect their mission resources to this very end. With the help of missiological concepts like “Adopt-a-people”, “10/40 Window”, “Gateway Peoples”, “Joshua Project” etc. the vision and passion have steadily grown. But where are we today at the beginning of the 21st century? How many resources are today directed towards evangelism and church planting among the unreached?

In 2003 the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission (WEA-MC) launched a comprehensive mission study “ReMAP II” (Retaining Missionaries, Agency Practices). Executives of sending agencies in some 22 countries around the globe were asked about their organisational ethos, practices, structures and for data about their personnel deployment, missionary attrition and retention. The study was limited to long-term³ cross-cultural⁴ evangelical missionaries and some 600 sending agencies with more than 39900 long-term missionaries participated. Methodology and some results have already been presented elsewhere⁵; here we focus on deployment of long-term missionaries in evangelism and church planting among least reached peoples.

The term “unreached peoples” is defined as “the absence of a viable, culturally relevant church movement”. For practical reasons many researchers have associated it with a maximal percentage of evangelical believers in that people group⁶. Such a mechanical definition, however, is not undisputed so that I will use the term “least reached peoples” in the following. In the ReMAP II study⁷ a percentage of less than 1% evangelical believers was used as indicator. Yet “evangelism and church planting among “unreached” peoples” was just one of the 5 groups of personnel deployment and some of the other types of ministries are also

¹ David Barrett & Todd Johnson, 1990, *Our Globe and how to reach it*. Birmingham: New Hope

² Socio-linguistic groups where there is no viable indigenous community of believing Christians with an adequate potential to evangelise their own people.

³ Expected to serve for at least 3 years

⁴ Serving in a culture other than their own (so that major cultural adjustment and/or language learning was required) within their national borders or abroad.

⁵ D. Bloecher, *Good Agency Practices: Lessons from ReMAP II*, EMQ 41(2), 228-237 (2005); Detlef Bloecher, *ReMAP II Affirms the Maturation of the Younger Mission Movement of the South*. *Connections* Oct 2003, 48-53

⁶ Joshua-Project, IMB and others use a percentage of less than 2 % Evangelical believers and less than 5% church attendance as indicator. With this definition, however, most European peoples fall into this category which appears unsatisfactory. If everyone is unreached, then anything is “mission to the unreached” and the definition becomes meaningless. Therefore a narrower definition (of 1%) was used in the ReMAP study.

⁷ Mission executives of sending bases were asked to assign each of their missionaries to one of 5 different groups of ministries: “Evangelism and church planting to “unreached” peoples (with less than 1% evangelicals)”, “Evangelism and church planting among peoples with more than 1% evangelical believers”, “Support to existing churches (Bible teaching, pastoral etc.)”, “Social and community work (agriculture, medical, relief, development etc.)” and “Services like translation, MK education, aviation, admin etc.”. The percentages of the total mission force were calculated which added up to 100 %.

directed towards the least reached peoples, such as social and development work, linguistics and Bible translation etc. Therefore the percentage of “missionaries serving in evangelism and church planting” is in fact an underestimation of the personnel deployment among the least reached peoples⁸.

Table 1 (column 2) gives the national percentage of missionaries⁹ serving in evangelism and church planting among the least reached peoples. The data show that more than a quarter of the global evangelical mission force is directed to the least evangelised. This constitutes a tenfold increase over the past 20 years and proves the success of the missiological concepts and initiatives mentioned above towards in the mobilisation of the global church and the re-focusing of human and financial resources.

Some countries have a much higher emphasis on evangelism to the least reached peoples, in particular Argentina (45%), Hong Kong, Philippines, Ghana, Nigeria and Singapore. This result shows that the front-runners are no longer Western countries (who developed these missiological concepts) but the new sending countries (NSC) of Latin America, Africa and Asia. With great passion and at high personal costs they have dedicated their work force to the least reached peoples. From the participating old sending countries of Europe and North America (OSC), Australia had the strongest focus on evangelism to the least reached (32% of their missionaries serving in this role), followed by Canada and USA, while Europe, New Zealand and South Africa trailing behind. European agencies give a stronger emphasis on medical, social and development projects, possibly to escape an allegation of proselytism. Cooperation with National churches is their paradigm of the day and they have not really caught a passion for the least reached peoples.

In several countries, denominational agencies (column 3) give higher emphasis to the least reached than interdenominational agencies (column 4), e.g. Hong Kong, India and the Philippines. These are all Asian countries that have experienced spiritual revival in their churches. But in other countries like Australia, Great Britain, New Zealand, Argentina, Ghana, Nigeria and Korea denominational agencies are less involved. They have often chosen to serve National churches and work under their leadership – which may have their own ministry priorities. It appears that a number of them may have lost some strategic edge to interdenominational agencies.

In some countries, the local church based mission movement has recently grown which sends out their missionaries independently of mission agencies, and it often shows a higher commitment to the least reached peoples than denominational and interdenominational agencies, e.g. in Argentina (59%), Philippines (46%), Malaysia (34%) and South Africa (31%) as well as for NSC in general (48%), but not for OSC (31%)¹⁰. This result indicates that the named missiological concepts may have had a larger impact on the new local church-based mission movement in the South.

In each sending country there are mission agencies specialised on evangelism to the least reached peoples while others are more involved in other types of ministry. Table 1 column 5 gives the percentage of the National evangelical missionaries that serve in agencies with little emphasis (less than 10% of the agency’s missionaries) on “evangelism to the least reached“. As the low percentage shows we found hardly any of these mission agencies in

⁸ They may be Animists, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims or Atheists.

⁹ The survey response covered between 25% (Korea) and 90% (Germany) of the national evangelical mission force, so that the sample can be considered representative, in some cases even the complete sample.

¹⁰ This local church-based mission movement has not grown in all countries alike nor has ReMAPII provided sufficient data on this movement in all participating countries to give a reliable percentage of their ministry priorities.

Argentina, South Korea, Nigeria and the Philippines, but many in New Zealand (53% of the national mission force), Great Britain, Ghana, Australia, Netherlands, Sweden and Hong Kong.

Yet there are also mission agencies specialised in evangelism to the least reached (with at least 60% of their work force, column 6) and we find them particularly in Argentina (57% of the National mission force), Hong Kong, Ghana, Australia and Singapore, but not in Sweden, Costa Rica, Brazil, New Zealand, Korea and USA.

Some countries have many mission agencies with a high degree of specialisation (either very high or very low personnel allocation) regarding evangelism to the least reached peoples (e.g. Ghana, Hong Kong, Great Britain, Australia, Argentina and New Zealand), while Korea, Costa Rica, Nigeria and Brazil have many agencies with little specialisation: they are involved in various types of ministries besides evangelism to the least reached. This diversity of mission agencies is graphically depicted in figure 1 for a few typical examples. Many agencies in Argentina, Ghana and Hong Kong are specialised regarding evangelism to the least reached so that their curve in the diagram has a steep slope. NSC, OSC and India, on the other hand, are less specialised regarding the least reached and their curve shows a moderate slope. These distinctions indicate the diversity of National mission movements and these cultural and ecclesiastical differences need to be considered when missiological concepts are transferred to another culture and may need cultural adaptation.

In summary, the massive ReMAP II database shows the tremendous focusing of the global mission movement towards the least reached peoples. This gives much hope that God, the Lord of missions, will use our human resources and commitment to usher lots of fruit into the Kingdom of God from the very ends of the earth.

Table 1: Percentage of evangelical missionaries serving in evangelism and church planting among the least reached peoples (less than 1% Evangelical believers)

1	2	3	4	5	6
	Percentage of evangelical mission force (\pm standard error)	Denominational agencies	Interdenominational agencies	Percentage of the Mission force serving in agencies with little (<10% of their missionaries) / high (\geq 60%) involvement in evangelism among the least reached peoples	
				Little (< 10%)	High (\geq 60%)
Global	28.4 \pm 0.2	27%	29%	23%	8%
NSC	31.5 \pm 0.4	26%	33%	14%	13%
OSC	26.9 \pm 0.3	27%	27%	27%	8%
Asia	29.9 \pm 0.5	20%	33%	16%	11%
Europe	21.1 \pm 0.6	9%	23%	40%	9%
West Africa	35.5 \pm 0.9	31%	46%	13%	12%
Latin America	31.9 \pm 1.0	28%	19%	8%	20%
Argentina (AR)	45.5 \pm 2.0	24%	42%	1%	57%
Australia	32.2 \pm 1.3	8%	39%	41%	24%
Brazil	25.1 \pm 1.2	9%	32%	12%	2%
Canada	29.8 \pm 1.0	28%	31%	11%	15%
Costa Rica	30.8 \pm 4.7	20%	33%	6%	0%
Germany	22.2 \pm 0.8	16%	23%	29%	10%
Ghana (GH)	36.1 \pm 2.0	26%	59%	47%	30%

Great Britain	19.4 ± 0.9	3%	23%	53%	10%
Hong Kong (HK)	42.9 ± 3.2	64%	34%	30%	38%
India (IN)	32.2 ± 0.8	56%	32%	28%	12%
Korea (KR)	22.5 ± 0.8	15%	36%	0%	5%
Malaysia	33.6 ± 4.3	25%	33%	19%	7%
Netherlands	24.1 ± 1.7		24%	40%	9%
New Zealand	19.8 ± 1.7	9%	23%	53%	5%
Nigeria	35.4 ± 1.0	32%	43%	4%	8%
Philippines	38.1 ± 1.9	49%	35%	7%	18%
Singapore	35.1 ± 2.6		38%	24%	25%
South Africa	19.2 ± 1.1	18%	17%	25%	5%
Sweden	16.7 ± 1.7	18%	3%	38%	0%
U.S.A.	28.7 ± 0.4	30%	27%	23%	5%

