

Choosing A People Group

Guidelines for churches and fellowship groups to choose an unreached people group for adoption.

by Bob Binkley and the Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse Staff

There is much to be said to the group or individual desiring to sponsor and support a people group movement. When we do this we are choosing to help bring about that which is closest to God's heart... "that none should perish, but that everyone come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) Nothing we can do on earth carries eternal consequences except what we do to work for or distract from the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But, where does one start? How does one select a people to adopt? How does one select a mission agency with whom to partner with? Does one select the mission agency first or the people group? If every church or fellowship were the same the answer would be simple and straight forward. Even so, just as every individual is unique so is each local church. However, there are some general guidelines that each church can apply to itself.

Let us begin with some definitions. A *People Group* refers to any number of individuals who perceive themselves as sharing the same culture, language and values of life. For the purpose of adoption, a people group has:

(1) A Proper Name—an identity either self-received or assigned.

(2) A Location—where significant numbers of that group can be identified geographically.

(3) A Need—which for our purposes is the need they have for an indigenous church.

In addition, a people group is considered adoptable for one or more of the following reasons:

(1) The people group has not heard the good news of Jesus. The Gospel

has not been proclaimed to them in an understandable or adequate way or form. (Matthew 24:14; Acts 19:10; Romans 10:14)

(2) The people group has not responded. They do not believe that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, or that the Bible is God's Word, nor do they live accordingly. (Matthew 7:26f; Matthew 13:19; Acts 2:37-38; I Corinthians 1:21,25; Hebrews 3:18-19)

(3) The people group does not have a church. Believers are not gathering together regularly for worship, teaching, and outreach. A church movement has not yet been started. (Acts 2:42-47; Acts 16:5; Romans 15:20-21; Colossians 2:6-7)

(4) The people group does not have the Word of God translated into their mother-tongue. Written, audio or visual translations of God's Word that are culturally acceptable, have not been completed. (Acts 2:6-8; 37-38; Revelation 5:9-10)

(5) The people group does not have the Word of God readily available. There are practical and/or legal restrictions to distribution. A large percentage of the people may be illiterate. (John 17:17-20; Acts 19:20; Romans 10:17; Colossians 3:16; II Timothy 3:16-4:1-4)

Basic Questions

In summary, an unreached people group is one where there are not adequate numbers of believing Christians among that people and/or resources to evangelize their own group without requiring outside (cross-cultural) assistance.

If you are committed to a particular

agency, call or write them and ask which unreached peoples have the highest priority, and the process can begin. Regardless of your situation, here are some basic questions to ask yourself and discuss within your fellowship or church.

1. What size group would you want to adopt? 1,000,000 or more; 500,000 to 1,000,000; 100,000 to 500,000; 50,000 to 100,000; under 50,000 people

2. Do you want the people to be accessible to your church? Surprisingly, many unreached peoples are accessible to outsiders. Would you ever want to send a tour group, prayer team, or short-term mission to your adopted people? Many unreached peoples aren't accessible to Westerners due to location and political restrictions. However, even though an unreached people may be inaccessible they still need to be adopted.

3. Do you want to adopt a Bible-less people? Do you want the challenge of seeing a people group reached who is also Bible-less? Or, do you want to adopt a people who already has a written language and/or have the Word of God available in part or in whole?

4. Do you want to adopt-a-people that lives in the 10/40 Window? Most of the unreached peoples there are very resistant and culturally difficult to reach. They are referred to as the "core of the core" of the unreached peoples.

5. Is there a particular part of the world you are drawn to? Is there a particular part of the world or a country where you already have connections? Many of the unreached people groups live outside of the 10/40 Window.

6. Is there a particular type of people

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you are most interested in? The unreached peoples can be grouped. There are Chinese, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Animist (tribal) peoples.

7. Do you want to adopt a people which already has missionaries working among them? Some may want to adopt a people where there is no or very little Christian mission activity. Others may want to adopt where the mission process is well under way. Your church or denomination may already support missionaries/tentmakers working with an unreached people.

8. Are there any natural church ties? Do you have any natural business ties with an unreached people? For example, if some in your church are employed by an oil company, then they might be able to secure jobs in the Middle East among an unreached people. If there are medical personnel in your congregation, they might be able to go overseas using their medical profession. In one church, the pastor's brother was working among an unreached people, so the church chose that group for adoption.

Conclusion.

Finally, in this process of selecting a people group to adopt, always keep this in mind: An unreached people group is one that does not have enough Christians within it to cause the expansion of the gospel to occur there without outside help. A people group adoption then would be the introduction of life

and growth in which the gospel of Jesus Christ would be taught, churches planted and on-going Christian work established and supported. The goal is for the local people of the unreached group to grasp the vision and begin to carry out the work themselves. Therefore,

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the work should eventually become autonomous, indigenous and self-perpetuating.

There are many mission options open to local churches. Almost always it will take many different mission approaches to reach a people group. The effort may require Bible translation, radio broadcast, literature and Scripture distribution (audio or written), evangelism and discipleship training, Christ-centered relief and development, and of course church-planting. Churches and fellowships may want to develop relationships with several mission agencies. Each one specializing

in a particular type of work. Again, our goal is to initiate an autonomous, indigenous and self-perpetuating church-planting movement, not to support mission agencies. The mission agencies exist to serve the church in its mission to fulfill the Great Commission among the unreached people of the world.

If a large number of Christians already reside within the proposed people group, likely a healthy Christian evangelical movement can be started there. This is the key consideration, as the people will respond far more openly and eagerly to their own kind than they will to "outsiders"; even their fellow countryman who are not of their tribe are regarded with suspicion.

There are many factors when considering choosing and adopting a people group. Remember to keep focused on the ultimate goal of sharing the love and hope of Jesus to a lost and dying world. Ask the Lord of the harvest to direct your every step. Together we will see every nation, tribe, people and tongue brought before the glorious throne of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. May it happen in our generation!

Written by Bob Binkley and the staff of the Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse located in Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA.

New Prayer Cards!

The Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse is making available six new prayer cards. The following people groups are featured: Kazakhs of Central Asia, Khmer of Southeast Asia, Moors of Mauritania, Pushtun of Afghanistan and Pakistan, Tibetans of the Tibetan-Buddhist world, and Tuaregs of North Africa.

Three of the cards were funded by churches and two of the cards were initiated and funded by a mission organization. At least three more cards are scheduled for printing in the first half of 1995 on the Wolof of West Africa, Kirghiz of Kirghizia, and the Tajik of Tajikistan.

For more information and requests for prayer cards contact:

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Sustaining a People Group Movement

Unreached people have neither accepted the Gospel nor rejected it—they simply haven't heard the Good News! Starting and sustaining people group movements for Christ radically changes all that!

by Gene Davis

The following are a few key concepts designed to implement and sustain a People Group Movement (PGM). Prayer, research, finding key people, strategies, evaluation, and communication are needed. We will examine each of these items as they relate to the active process of becoming an activist or supporter of a PGM. First, let us briefly restate our goals and underlying mission philosophy in the overall process of reaching the unreached.

Purpose: To bring the gospel of Jesus Christ, who saves for today and forever to every segment of every society.

Method: Remembering that we can do nothing, but Christ in us can do all things. The unreached people are His people whom He loves perfectly; we love them imperfectly.

Goal: That Jesus Christ might be glorified among them.

The Foremost Requirement

Without belaboring the point, let me say that prayer is the foremost requirement when considering involvement in starting a people group movement. Lest we overrate our importance, we must remember that the Holy Spirit is capable of this task with or without us. We must be certain that we are operating under His power rather than our own when taking on a ministry such as this. His yoke is easy and His burden light. *Let that truth be our guide throughout our ministry involvement.* If possible, keep an on-going group of prayer warriors updated on how to specifically pray through each step of the movement.

Research

During the early stages of the

process, the support team needs to do extensive research on the people group they have selected. This is an extremely critical aspect, yet it is the most neglected one of reaching a people group. It is important to discover who they are, where they are, how they earn their income as well as learn their language and understand the basic tenets of their religion. Contingent to our strategy is adequate understanding of their social and cultural structures, their worldview and concept of life, their decision making methods and their marrying practices. These last two items are very important, as we shall see later on.

It is imperative to know the people in order to assess their needs and how to best meet those needs. In addition, history proves that every culture has something within its practices or beliefs that paves the way for the gospel. We must be on the lookout for so-called *redemptive analogies* and ask God to open up the doors of opportunity to make the gospel cross-culturally relevant. These steps are critically necessary when strategizing how to best reach a people group and start a Christ-ward movement among them.

Key People

Early in the process of adopting a group it is advisable to find key people who can maintain a successful work among the adopted people group. This is key in creating a “nerve center” among the support team. Generally it is centered around an individual who can serve as the People Group Advocate (PGA), who then serves as the liaison between the people group and the support team. This person must be fully com-

mitted and equipped to carry out a variety of tasks and administrative responsibilities.

Of equal importance is a key person from within the people group itself. This can happen after the first converts have been disciplined. It is important to find a man who is full of faith, has common sense and is of a good reputation. (Acts 6:3) He needs to be a man who has been touched by God, and is capable of being the leader of the movement among his own people. His role is to work with the support team, be involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the programs. He is, in fact, the national leader. Obviously these two key people will need to work closely with each other.

Strategy

Mission strategies are only as good as the team is in hearing the Holy Spirit's leading and allowing His freedom and creativity to be released. There are some basic guidelines to consider. However, let us first discuss the two worst possible strategies and their alternatives.

1.) A support team must never pre-determine the needs of the people group and create a plan or program based upon those perceived needs. The support team would do well to work with national leaders or “insiders” in conjunction with their research, to help determine the best plan of action. Nationals will understand the needs of their culture, they can also experience far greater acceptance among their own people than can a worker from outside their people group.

They can approve and can participate in the new plan. In addition, this link

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creates an immediate structure within the group that can later become the basis for authority and order as the movement grows, as well as eventually laying the groundwork for an autonomous work.

2.) The other inappropriate approach to be avoided, is giving large amounts of money to the national leaders and expecting them to handle it responsibly. Many of the people are not experienced at handling money nor large gifts, such as vehicles and equipment. The most responsible use of the money is for the PGA to work closely with the national leader to determine the financial needs and appropriate the funds accordingly. Annual budgets and goals should be set with timely evaluations throughout the year to determine if the team is moving according to the plan and budget. This kind of accountability naturally sets up the national workers for evaluation. It is good for them to help evaluate the effectiveness of the overall ministries. In requiring fiscal accountability, it is very important to convey a feeling of trust and to be careful not to give the appearance of being interested only in money.

An important strategy from the outset is to budget for a local training program. New pastors can be recruited in this manner. A graduated system of training, coupled with outreach and leadership responsibilities along the way, needs to be created. For example, have a three day seminar on how to run a Vacation Bible School, or something similar for their context, then send them out to run one in a nearby village. Practical experience allows them to evaluate giftedness prior to going on to the next level of training and responsibility. Evaluations serve to guide each trainee into the most effective place within the Body of Christ. Evaluations allow the trainee to test him/herself at every level of training. Just as a baby must learn to walk before running, men and women must be able to prove they can

effectively witness and proclaim the gospel prior to being given an assignment of reaching out to other villages or peoples. There are a number of excellent training programs already in use that have produced great results, ranging from three day seminars to three year seminary training.

Children's work needs to be an essential thrust. It is known that 85% of all Christians come to Christ before they are 14 years old. Reaching the children with the gospel is extremely effective as an approach to reaching other villages. It is also a very cost effective use of funds. A two week long Vacation Bible School makes a tremendous impact. Most parents are open to their children being involved in a Bible program and often one or both parents will stay during the teaching sessions to discover what their children are being taught. Often the children will commit their lives to Christ and begin praying for and witnessing to their parents. In this way, Bible programs frequently reach whole families with the gospel and they set the groundwork for other later approaches.

Helping host a conference for all the Christians in the village is an excellent method of accomplishing unity of the brethren as well as serving as a huge public evangelistic thrust. In a two to three day conference, as many as eight to ten thousand Christians may attend. The resultant blessings and encouragement are almost incomprehensible to the Western mentality. The Western experience with its abundant freedoms and opportunities often obscures the potential impact of such a conference.

Consider the following benefits to the emerging church holding a missions conference:

1.) It changes their self-image, from thinking of themselves as second-class citizens without a voice, to giving them courage and strength to go home and live victoriously—often openly, in a hostile environment.

2.) It also unites and gives opportunity for them to organize—giving them a broader vision (a greater awareness than that of their own village or their spouses) and a new found strength in numbers, a necessary ingredient to being able to make a stand and be credible especially where Christianity has been quietly put down or openly attacked.

3.) It also trains them to think evangelistically—giving them the opportunity to worship collectively and see the power of the Holy Spirit poured out on them. It gives them an arena to celebrate Christ and baptize new believers.

The list goes on. My experience shows that often the greatest number of attendants to these conferences come from the villages where Bible School programs have been held. It is important to recognize that many approaches can be used, just as in our churches. I would encourage the support team to attend these conferences. It brings an awareness to the villagers of the global Body of Christ as they begin to understand that there are people who care and who pray for them. Incredibly, the greatest blessing is probably received by the support team as it gets an opportunity to experience Jesus cross-culturally.

It is important to learn how decisions are made and how marriages are arranged. It is significant how these things are handled, because often they reveal the authority structures within the community. These things have been key factors to draw whole villages to Christ. We must tailor our evangelism program to these practices. If decisions are made and marriages are arranged by the chief, he must first be presented with the gospel. If he chooses Christ, it is likely the whole village will follow suit. The same is true in families; if the father is the central decision maker, the whole family will likely come to Christ. This is consistently true and we must recognize that our earthly relationships are a pattern of our spiritual relationships. With Christ as

our true husband, we will often select Him in the same manner we select our earthly spouses.

Be certain to consider cost effective, culturally appropriate ways of getting the Gospel to the people. In non-literate people groups, or places where there is not a written language, cassette tapes and radio broadcasts are effective. Consider all the needs and all the mediums of communication available. For the communication of the Gospel, God's Word, is necessary for growth and maturity. Christian discipleship is greatly compromised if not altogether impossible without it.

These are some basic considerations in the strategizing process. Ultimately, we must strive to empower national workers so the work can become autonomous, indigenous and self-perpetuating. There are endless approaches, and there is not a "right or wrong way" for every people group. I encourage flexibility in our methodology, which will help us to be open in hearing from God. Allow the creativity of the Holy Spirit to guide throughout the on going planning, strategy and deployment.

Evaluation

Evaluate! Evaluate! Evaluate! This is key! We must never stop the evaluation process. It is imperative at every level to assess the effectiveness of the local leadership, as well as the on going effect of the Gospel. Annual reports must be solicited from every individual in leadership. This creates the opportunity for them to ask of themselves: "What did I accomplish this year? Am I doing what I set out to do?" The People Group Advocate should meet with the local leaders at least annually to help set goals for the next year. There are sev-

eral questions which should be considered in these annual evaluations. Who is our target group? Are there pockets of unreached peoples? Is it time to begin a work among the women? How can we effectively reach the children? What are the responses to our programs? Are lives being changed? What could we do differently to be more effective and

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culturally relevant? Is it time to become involved in church planting, here or elsewhere? Does that mean we need buildings or should we plant more home/cell churches? Shall we create Bible Institutions and include the wives in the training process? The questions are endless. Evaluation of the programs and workers must be an on-going process with implementation of new thrusts and revisions of the old.

Communication

Communication is important to every area, whether we are discussing prayer, research, strategies or evaluation. The People Group Advocate and the national leader are in the best positions to assure that good communication occurs at every level. Accurate information must be relayed to all the participants in the movement. The support team needs to know what they are praying for and working toward, and if their finances are effective. The PGA needs to express prayer needs and also

encourage the support team to visit the work. In short, good communications can make the difference in causing all the parts to work as a whole.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by saying that we are asked to be fruit inspectors. The fields are waiting to be harvested and the

Lord of the harvest has given us the privilege to participate.

This requires constant assessment of the fruit. Is it green or ripe? Is it ready to be harvested? Have we allowed it to over-ripen because we were not prepared for harvest? Children's work provides a great medium to inspect the fruit for the whole family. This is what a People Group Movement is all about. We must assist the people in putting off the old

religion, beliefs and values, and encourage them in every aspect of their new lives. Our goal is to help them make a proclamation of the Gospel among their own so they can grow in number and speak the truth boldly in love. They will then be able to declare openly that knowing Jesus is the norm: there is no apology for choosing to serve Him and no one is able to reach their full potential without Him as their Lord and Savior.

May we all work together to reach the unreached so that we will no longer hear the words spoken by a Banjara man in India in 1993, "We've neither accepted nor rejected Christ. We've never heard about Him."

Dr. Gene Davis is a veterinarian by vocation. He serves as the coordinator of South Asia for the Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse in North America and the Serve-A-People office in Asia.

Within Their Reach

Assisting National Believers to Reach the Unreached through People Adoption.

by Bob Savage

“Our church wants to adopt an unreached people group,” the caller said. “We’ve chosen the Chakma people of Bangladesh. Do you have a work among them?” It was a good choice. The Chakma are Buddhist, militant, and very unreached.

“We assist a ministry in Bangladesh that works with many unreached groups there. One of them is the Chakma,” I said.

I explained how Partners International links churches in the USA with grassroots ministries around the world. I also described our partner ministry in Bangladesh.

“I’d like to tell our committee about this,” the person said. “Can you send me some information? We meet next Tuesday night.”

I looked through our files, selected appropriate information and faxed it to the church.

This kind of dialogue is a typical beginning to an adopt-a-people relationship between a church and a national ministry.

Many national believers are already effectively reaching unreached people groups. The ministry in Bangladesh used in the example has workers among 27 unreached people groups and has planted 71 churches in the last year alone. This is not uncommon. I have counted 164 unreached people groups among whom the indigenous ministries, assisted by Partners International are working. That represents just a small sampling of what national believers are doing around the world.

It is sometimes said that national believers are “only reaching their own people,” and have no vision for unreached peoples. This may be a fair characterization of certain non-Western churches that have become ingrown over the

years (like many Western churches!). However, many non-Western churches do not fit this description, and even fewer national ministry organizations do. Only 12% of the ministries that Partners International assists work exclusively among their own people, and in those cases it is understandable, since their own people are largely still unreached themselves.

A key piece of the strategy

In our example, Bangladeshi believers have already successfully begun planting churches among the unreached Chakma. Overlooking their efforts would miss a very key element of what God is already doing there. This will be especially true in countries that limit the access of foreign missionaries. Even if Westerners are able to go to these countries as tentmakers or through other creative-access strategies, circumstances force their presence to be limited.

However, we can let the pendulum swing too far. Yes, national believers know the culture and language of their own people. Also often they know the culture and languages of unreached peoples near them, or at least a trade language that both of them understand. And yes, it is cost effective to support them, which can be especially helpful to small or middle-sized churches that have few additional mission dollars to allocate towards reaching an unreached people.

Most Western agencies who send out North Americans are making an excellent impact too. They can bring needed skills, experience or technologies that non-Western agencies often lack. Partners International is in a number of partnerships with other agencies where what we “bring to the table” is con-

tact with national workers, and experience in training, Bible translation, radio, or other specialties.

Patience is needed

Information-hungry Western churches enter a new world when they work with national believers. The reports they need can be provided, but the process isn't simple. National ministries don't have Americans on staff who understand why the church is asking such “strange” questions. Perhaps only a few of them read English. They don't have the equipment the Western missionary has: no laptop, no fax, maybe not even a phone. As one of our workers put it (in his own words): “The reason of my letter delaying sometime is due to lack of transportation. At the time to go to the post office, if no money, I walks and from where I am living to the post office is three hours and thirty minutes.”

For some, their manner of thinking precludes understanding the questions that an “adopting” church is asking, especially if they haven't had much contact with Westerners. This is seen in the table on the following page. What do national believers want from “adopting” churches?

Our prayers

This is first and foremost. Right now, some of the church planters we assist are in detention by authorities in certain countries because of their ministries. Others are dealing with death threats. Many are just plain overworked.

Most of us have little experience in living amidst huge numbers of people, whether they be Muslims, Hindus, or atheists, that are actively opposed to the Christian message. It is easy to underestimate how much a national believer wants our intercession.

Within Their Reach

Our giving

In unreached places, usually the churches are very small and their task is very large. They are not idly waiting for someone from the West to support them. In most cases, these are believers who are giving all they can, making do with the little they have—but it isn't enough.

Our Involvement

National believers are encouraged to know that they have churches from around the world that care about them! Letters are appreciated. Sometimes arrangements can be made for a worker from the ministry to visit the supporting church, which deepens the relationship and really ignites that church's missions conference! Or, the church can send its pastor or members from its missions committee to visit the field. In areas where the presence of foreigners won't draw unwanted attention from those opposed to the gospel, your church can arrange to send a short-term team to work side-by-side with the national workers you are helping.

Things to keep in mind when working with a ministry in the non-western world: Try to see it from their side. Sometimes we fail to realize how strange our requests can seem. Reversing the situation can help us to understand.

Suppose your church has an inner-city ministry. A church from another country hears about it and contacts you, asking for a lot of information, perhaps sending a long questionnaire. What would you think? Wouldn't you want to know more about that church? What

they are going to do with all this information? Whether they intend to help you, and if so, how? And, from your busy staff, who will you assign to track down the answers to their questions?

Be careful about taking control. National believers, whose cultures can be more deferring than that of the more aggressive Westerners, can interpret even suggestions as being demands. They can also let Westerners do most of the

of grief later on.

Be fair in your reporting. Don't offend non-Western ministries by writing about them in ways that make what they are doing sound like "your" work.

Follow any security precautions exactly. In some places, Christian workers are watched and their mail read. They take a huge risk by even communicating with Westerners. You need to know how not to jeopardize their work.

Purpose of Church's Question	Perspective of National Workers
To ask for goals and statistics to help track the progress in reaching their adopted group.	They're asking so many questions because they don't trust me.
To ask a lot about the national worker's family, including children's names, birthdays, anniversary date, etc. to know the family more personally and to remember them at special times.	Embarrassed at getting questions that in their culture are considered very personal.
To ask for results being achieved in order to let their members know that their investment is worthwhile.	Being overly specific about results is boastful and taking credit away from the Lord.

Everyone Wins

Christian ministries in the non-Western world want and need your involvement. We in the West need them, too. The job of reaching the nations will

never be finished without them. talking. Their point of view isn't heard, and the Westerner goes away mistakenly assuming that consensus was achieved.

Be careful with money. All kinds of jealousies can be created if your church's funds are causing certain workers or certain field projects to be more well funded than other deserving opportunities under that ministry. It is best not to directly fund individuals. Let the ministry's own authority structure that is already in place recommend how to distribute funds.

Don't make promises you aren't ready to keep. In many cultures, even if you ask several questions about something it is assumed that you are committing yourself to do something to help.

Reach an agreement. We all like to claim to be "equal" partners, but what does that mean? What does your church expect from the national ministry, and what do they expect from you? Working this through, in writing, can save a lot

never be finished without them.

The beauty of the Adopt-A-People strategy is that it takes a huge goal—world evangelization—and makes it simple—bite-sized. You can't do everything, but you can do something. Why not help just one national ministry reach just one other unreached people? The unreached peoples are within their reach!

Bob Savage has served eight years in the International Operations department of Partners International, helping to monitor their partnerships in 50 countries. He coordinates Partners International field information and has visited many indigenous ministries. He is also the representative for Partners with the Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse. He and his wife Martha live in San Jose, California.