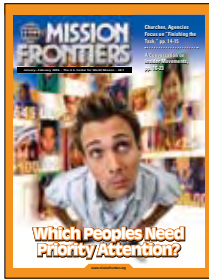
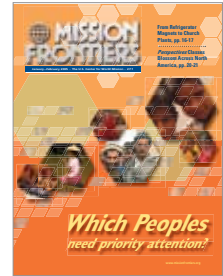


WHICH PEOPLES NEED PRIORITY ATTENTION?



Seeking Agreement on the “Core of the Core”

Justin Long



In November 2004, January 2005, and January 2006 three articles on “Which peoples need priority attention?” were published in *Mission Frontiers*. Each was written by a different set of writers, representing different research groups: Dan Scribner for Joshua Project (JP), Todd Johnson and Peter Crossing for the World Christian Database (WCD), and Scott Holste and Jim Haney for the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention. The articles described three different ways of helping decision-makers prioritize the allocation of scarce resources among the many unreached peoples, and presented a list of the people groups each method identified as priority.

Is there a difference in the differences? Is there a value in having multiple lists? Why do we have to make it so complicated? Why can't we have just one list? Why can't we all get along? And by the way, how can these lists make a radical difference in your life and mine?

I see at least two benefits to having different prioritization methods. First, it ensures no single group is likely to be overlooked. By comparing the lists side-by-side, researchers can see discrepancies that need to be investigated. Second, and perhaps more importantly, where the lists agree I believe we can see the “core of the core” or the “neediest” groups. If three different perspectives, using three different ways of prioritizing, agree upon a certain number of groups, you can be sure these groups are the “most in need” in at least three different ways. After all, “a three-fold cord is not easily broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

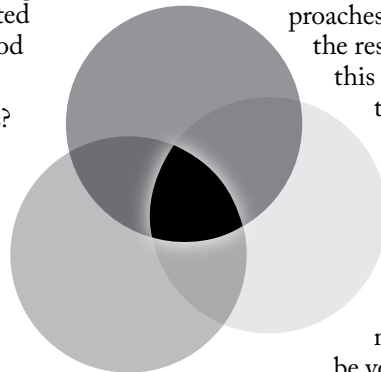
Justin Long is senior editor of Momentum magazine (www.momentum-mag.org). He was assisted in this article by Scott Peterson, Dan Scribner, and Peter Crossing.

In order to see this “three-fold cord” in action, the authors of the earlier MF articles, Darrell Dorr (managing editor of *Mission Frontiers*) and I decided to take a first stab at creating a “matched-up” list of the peoples everyone agrees are priority. Scott Peterson, Dan Scribner, and Peter Crossing were very helpful to me. Scott first took the three databases and began to match them, and then the four of us identified problem cases and found matches in most of the cases where there are matches. Because of the different approaches, matching is *not* easy! I'll summarize the respective approaches and tallies later in this article. First, though, let's look at how the lists are different and the same when it comes to methodology.

Different methods yield different lists

The concept of unreached peoples has been around since the 1970s, and most readers of *Mission Frontiers* will be very familiar with it. In 1982 a group of researchers met at a Lausanne-sponsored conference in Chicago, where they defined a people group as “the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church-planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.” By contrast, an ethnolinguistic group is simply a group of people who share common characteristics; usually, the dominant characteristics are location, culture and language, but less frequently caste, socio-political grouping, or religion further complicate the picture.

But different researchers list groups in different ways. These “different ways” are the *methodology* of research: the method that the list uses to *accumulate, group, and prioritize* peoples.



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- We *accumulate* information from academic literature and field sources, both of which are important. Seeking the balance between these two types of sources is a difficult job.
- We *group* peoples, and how we do so determines how many cultural boundaries remain to be crossed (insofar as the list is concerned). A “unimax” group is an attempt to measure the maximum size of a group through whom the gospel can spread, so the method must ask: is language a barrier? Is caste a barrier? Is culture a barrier? If we use these as “lists of the remaining task”, then it’s important to clearly understand our assumptions so if we should ever reach every single one of the groups on a list, we’d be satisfied in knowing that we’ve finished the task (or at least our part of it).
- We *prioritize* peoples because, while we believe every group is a valid target, in reality we have a finite number of missionaries to deploy. Some groups have populations in the millions: do we assign just two workers to them? How do we decide where we put the limited “talents” that we have been given to steward? Different models use different methods. If you are a small agency

or a small team, you’re probably going to pick either just one or a handful of peoples to focus on. Picking the right peoples from a priority list involves matching up your own values with the accumulation, grouping and prioritization methods of the right list.

Go back and look at the three previous *Mission Frontiers* articles in this series, and you can see the various methodologies in action. (You can find those articles by browsing through back issues on the *Mission Frontiers* Website at www.missionfrontiers.org.)

The IMB list has 11,355 peoples, with each group given a “Global Status of Evangelical Christianity” (GSEC) code on a scale ranging from 0 to 7. Level 0 is the worst off: with no known evangelical Christians or churches, or access to ministry resources. Anything less than “4” is considered unreached, being less than 2% Evangelical. *The primary distinctive of the IMB’s approach is its emphasis on evangelical Christianity and church planting.* A population that is less than 2% evangelical will always be considered unreached by this methodology, no matter how many resources (like radio broadcasting, JESUS

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Film distribution, etc.) or how many non-Evangelical Christians (generally, Catholic or Orthodox) there are.

Joshua Project began as part of the AD 2000 & Beyond Movement. Their list originated from a combination of the lists of the IMB, Wycliffe/SIL, the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse, and the radio broadcast networks, among others. In the nearly 10 years since its beginning, this list has been refined many times over. Joshua Project is a small team: it has no field researchers but relies on a large, deep network of researchers and workers around the world to contribute and refine

information. The JP list has 15,988 country-specific peoples, with each group receiving a Global Progress rating on a scale ranging from 1 to 4 (with some points between – for example, 2.1, 3.2 or 4.2). Level 1 is considered “unreached”: there are 6,572 groups in this category, representing 2.6 billion people.

Joshua Project weighs several factors, and its methodology represents a “combination” position between the IMB and the WCD. More than the other lists, the JP list incorporates factors like caste. To be at level 1, a group must have a small percentage of evangelicals (less than 2%, like the IMB) but also a small percentage of total Christians (less than 5%). Level 2 is for those groups where evangelical believers represent less than 2% but Christians (adherents) represent more than 5%.

The World Christian Database (WCD) is the online database of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, updated to 2005 figures. Unlike the IMB or JP lists (which primarily are lists of peoples and languages, with related religious information), the WCD also contains information on all religions (1900-2050), denominations (1970-2005), countries, provinces, and the larger cities. The peoples data is placed in this larger context. The WCD has 13,093 peoples – more than the IMB, but less than JP. Each people group has an estimate of “% Affiliated Christian” (the percentage of the group that are baptized members of *any* Christian tradition) as well as information on each of 40 different ministries (church planting, presence of missionaries, media, broadcasting, Scripture, literature, etc.) used to evangelize the group. The combination of these factors is used to measure the percentage of the group’s population that is evangelized, i.e., has access to the Gospel. Then the group is assigned a code – A, B or C – depending on these two percentages. A group that is less than 50% evangelized is automatically assigned to World A. These are the “unevangelized” groups (“unevangelized” which is not exactly synonymous with “unreached”

but largely overlaps). There are 4,174 World A groups, with a total population of 1.4 billion people. *The primary distinctive of the WCD is its emphasis on Christianity as a whole (all traditions, not just evangelicals) and its focus on the activity of evangelization: which groups have ‘not heard’ (World A).*

Database	Total Peoples	Unreached Peoples	Unreached Population
IMB	11,355	6,411	3.6 billion
JP	15,988	6,572	2.6 billion
WCD	13,093	4,174	1.4 billion

On top of these three lists of “unreached peoples,” the authors of the three previous MF articles took on an even more pointed question: how can an agency decide where to invest its “talents”? Therefore, in the three articles the authors further refined their lists and identified the “least-reached” or “highest-priority” peoples.

The IMB researchers looked at their list of unreached peoples and, consistent with their priorities and methodologies, restricted the list to those groups that were not engaged by church-planting teams.

The JP list weighted nine different criteria grouped into four categories, ordered the database by the resulting index, and presented a list using an arbitrary cut-off.

The WCD already has a prioritization method: within World A, peoples are further subdivided by a Targeting code, which is a scale ranging from 1 to 10. Level 1 are those peoples which have the least amount of evangelistic (not just church-planting) effort focused on them and are therefore regarded as the highest priority. We’ll use that prioritization method for this article, although it should be noted that the WCD also allows agencies and other decision-makers to create customized queries for its database based on their particular criteria.

Database	Priority Peoples	Population
IMB	629	562 million
JP	699	928 million
WCD	926	168 million

If we compare the three “priority” lists that resulted, we find that each list has a large number of groups which are unique to it, as well as a number of peoples that each list “shares” with the other lists. At the moment, 22 peoples appear on all three “priority” lists.

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In addition, there are 92 groups that are shared between the IMB and the JP lists, 33 that are shared between the IMB and WCD lists, and 196 that are shared between the JP and WCD lists. I say “at the moment” because this is very much a “first stab” at comparing these lists; the different methods of prioritization make “matching” a difficult task. As a simple example, the WCD tally of priority peoples includes groups less than 100,000 in population, while the IMB priority list does not: thus the WCD has many groups which (simply because of their size) aren’t shared with the IMB, even if these peoples appear on the fuller IMB database of all peoples.

Using the Lists

So, which of the 22 – or the several hundred where at least two lists agree – should you focus on? How should you create your own lists of prioritized peoples? There are several different methods that are possible, but let me highlight just three scenarios.

A church mission committee member deciding on criteria for pioneering investments. You might consider these 22 groups. How can you impact them? Are there any in countries where you have tradition-

ally supported workers or sent short-term teams? Or you can look for groups where two or more lists agree and which are in areas of your special interest. In addition, consider your own values and which priority list best matches them. Are you more interested in churches? You might consider the IMB list. Are you interested in what you can do to support proclamation or pre-evangelism, perhaps by sponsoring specific types of ministry or through short-term teams? You might consider the WCD or JP priority lists.

A small mission agency attempting to set priorities. Again, you need to consider your own vision and values. Are you called to a specific area of the world, and are there any peoples on the lists that are in this area? Are you called to a specific language or a specific ministry, or to any peoples on the lists that are in need of those ministries?

An individual lay Christian seeking a passion for the lost. Start with the core 22 and find out everything you can about them. Build a short list of prayer points. Use this to intercede for these 22 each day of the month. The last few days of the month you could use for general prayer. Or, if you feel a passion for one particular region of the world, highlight all the groups in that

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A GOOD PLACE TO START

Peter Crossing

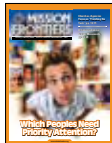
On 1 July, 2007, just after midnight, 1,850,401,827 people will be unevangelized. Beyond the number, consider that these are not people who have some vague perception of Jesus from Sunday School days, nor people with a token Bible on the shelf, nor people who can flick over worship services on television, nor people who work with Christians and avoid them. These are souls completely removed from any form of Christian witness. This is mission frontier.

The figure of 1.4 billion unevangelized in 2005 is the lowest, the most conservative, of the three estimates given here which range all the way up to the IMB’s 3.6 billion ‘unevangelical’. The point being that in everyone’s terms the priority task is far larger than the 22 people groups on this “core-of-the-core” list. All agree that there are millions

of other souls, just as least-reached, who need our prayerful attention and action. These 22 are not the whole of the core, but they are a good place to start.

Each of the three internally-consistent lists will benefit from the highly technical process of comparing between the lists (please God, send the right people to do this), and in turn this will benefit the users of each list. As new prayer and ministry flow to some of the least-evangelized people groups, other groups will rise up the priority lists for particular ministries. Populations and indicators are constantly changing, but beyond the indicators, God our Savior wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. In this we are united. 🌐

Peter Crossing is Data Analyst for the World Christian Database.



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particular part of the world and pray for those. I'm sure others will come up with other options, and I'd really like to hear about them.

I hope by now you see the value in having multiple lists. As with any discussion of an important issue, there is wisdom in "many counselors."

Obtaining all the counsel you can, understanding it, coming to grips with it, and meditating on it can help you become more effective in blessing the peoples of the world. But the most important thing is that you select a people group and find some way to bless this people. I, and those who helped me prepare this article, pray that each MF reader will do this, beginning today. 🌐

THE FRUIT BOWL OF MISSION RESEARCH

Scott Peterson

Apples to oranges to bananas? Sometimes, it seems the various people group lists, let alone separate *priority* people group lists, constitute just such a comparison. However, in the fruit bowl that is mission research, we are often simply comparing varieties of apples – Red Delicious to Granny Smith to Macintosh. As Justin Long has so adequately stated the issue, the referenced *Mission Frontiers* articles illustrate how differing goals, interests, and callings shape and distinguish priorities between organizations.

The authors of all three articles acknowledged the ultimate priority or goal as commanded by Christ, to "make disciples" of all of the world's peoples. Various organizations and individuals are called to be obedient to the command by contributing in different ways. Some produce resources and need to know where resources are lacking, be they Scripture translations, audio or video resources, resources for oral communicators, etc. Others focus on seed-sowing or discipleship. Still others focus on church-planting. It is this last category for which the International Mission Board's *Global Status of Evangelical Christianity* is most useful as it attempts to identify the peoples that are engaged by groups with a church-planting strategy and those who are not.

In addition to contrasting priorities between

22 Priority Peoples Appearing on JP, WCD, and IMB Lists

Country	People Group	Language	Population
Afghanistan	Baluch	Balochi, Western	382,000
Afghanistan	Laurowan	Pashayi, Northwest	224,000
Algeria	Tajakant Bedouin	Arabic, Algerian Spoken	1,369,000
Ethiopia	Juba Somali	Maay	353,000
Indonesia	Gayo	Gayo	214,000
Indonesia	Kerinci	Kerinci	365,000
Indonesia	Lembak	Lembak	172,000
Indonesia	Rawas	Rawas	172,000
Iran	Khorasani Turk	Khorasani Turkish	816,000
Iran	Takistani	Takestani	324,000
Libya	Nefusa Berber	Nafusi	156,000
Mali	Moor	Hassaniyya	401,000
Nepal	Kathoriya Tharu	Tharu, Kathoriya	104,000
Pakistan	Kho	Khovar	296,000
Pakistan	Kolai	Shina, Kohistani	387,000
Pakistan	Wanetsi	Waneci	121,000
Pakistan	Western Baluch	Balochi, Western	1,212,000
Saudi Arabia	Bedouin Arab	Arabic, Najdi Spoken	931,000
Turkey	Dimli Kurd	Dimli	1,228,000
Uzbekistan	Crimean Tatar	Crimean Turkish	267,000
Uzbekistan	Kyrgyz	Kirghiz	455,000
Uzbekistan	Turkish	Turkish	150,000

organizations, the articles and accompanying lists can assist in distinguishing various priorities within a single organization. The priority list as presented by my colleagues and supervisors, Scott Holste and Jim Haney, focused on the unengaged, unreached peoples with a population larger than 100,000. However, as their article expressed, the IMB has a primary focus of seeing *all* unengaged, unreached peoples engaged. For the IMB, it is a question of where to begin. We are striving to see the largest of those groups, identified as those with a population of at least 100,000, engaged by 2008. Thus, the list becomes a guide for where to deploy *new* church planters.

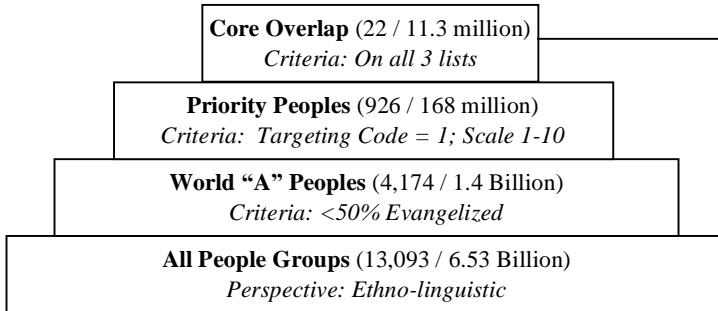
There is much left to be done, and whatever your ministry calling, we pray that God will use you in reaching all peoples. Regardless of your variety of apple, either sweet and juicy or tart and tangy, we all eventually need to reach the core. 🌐

Scott Peterson is Associate Director of the Global Research Department for the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention.

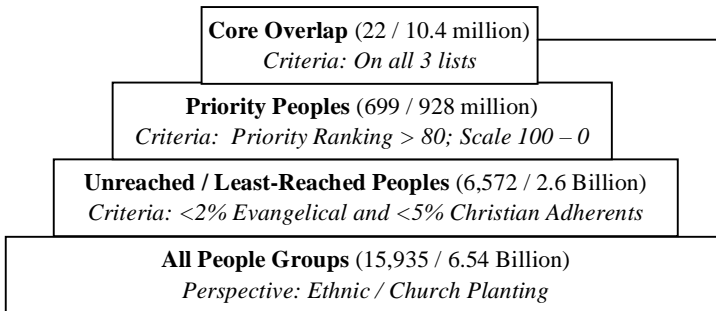
VISUAL COMPARISON OF "PRIORITY PEOPLES" LISTS

Dan Scribner, Joshua Project

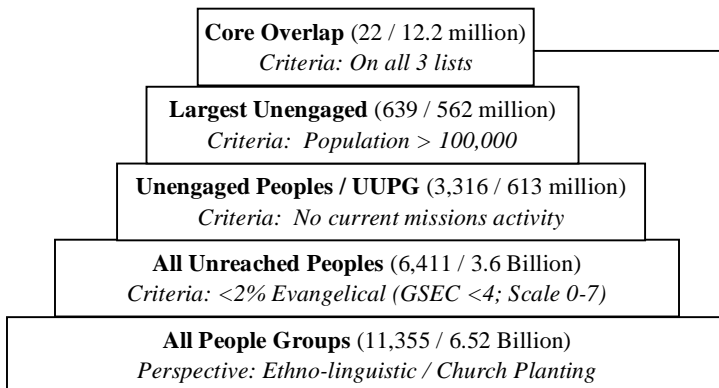
World Christian Database
www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/



Joshua Project
www.joshuaproject.net



International Mission Board – SBC
www.peoplegroups.org



Country	People	Language
Afghanistan	Baluch	Balochi, Western
Afghanistan	Laurowan	Pashayi, Northwest
Algeria	Tajakant Bedouin	Arabic, Algerian Spoken
Ethiopia	Juba Somali	Maay
Indonesia	Gayo	Gayo
Indonesia	Kerinci	Kerinci
Indonesia	Lembak	Lembak
Indonesia	Rawas	Rawas
Iran	Khorasani Turk	Khorasani Turkish
Iran	Takistani	Takestani
Libya	Nefusa Berber	Nefusi
Mali	Moor	Hassaniyya
Nepal	Kathoriya Tharu	Tharu, Kathoriya
Pakistan	Kho	Khowar
Pakistan	Kolai	Shina, Kohistani
Pakistan	Wanetsi	Waneci
Pakistan	Western Baluch	Balochi, Western
Saudi Arabia	Bedouin Arab	Arabic, Najdi Spoken
Turkey	Dimli Kurd	Dimli
Uzbekistan	Crimean Tatar	Crimean Turkish
Uzbekistan	Kyrgyz	Kirghiz
Uzbekistan	Turkish	Turkish

Visual representations are often helpful to understand data relationships. Here is an attempt at a visual comparison of the three lists that Justin Long has helpfully described in this *Mission Frontiers* article. The "pyramids" in the diagram might better be envisioned as concentric circles since each "step" in the pyramid is a subset of the previous level.

- Dan Scribner, Joshua Project