

COUNTRY PROFILE

Introduction

Understanding a country—its peoples, cities, villages, culture and varied characteristics, is not an easy task. Most approach the formulation of a country profile as an outsider looking in; that's exactly where you may find yourself at this moment. The goal of a country profile, however, is to look at a country from the inside out.

It may be interesting to note that the International Mission Board has seen two extremes related to “a country.” In our earliest days, it seemed that the vision of Southern Baptists went as far as a desire to have a missionary in every country. Interestingly enough, many missionaries learned only the official language of the host country and worked through interpreters for translations and understanding of the culture and its nuances. It was easy enough to justify one's focus on reaching a whole country because no one would dare consider limiting the scope of outreach to any one particular group.

The mono-ethnic or homogeneous church planting concept challenged the country approach to reaching the multitudes through a multi-group approach. Some called these “scatter-gun” approaches an attempt to put churches everywhere so that churches would flow out into other languages and peoples. Growth pole churches would be started in a provincial or district capital with the hopes that as a strong church developed, the gospel would filter down into the villages and hidden peoples. For the most part, this did not happen—people wanted to worship in their own language and tongue. Even those who did reach out into the hinterlands with best intentions, managed little more than transporting their “foreign” worship to new places. These preaching points were often conducted in the same language and worldview found in the town which so eagerly exported their gospel. On top of all of this was the feeling that a church in every major city would mean the claiming of the nation for Christ.

Which nation were these people trying to reach? They had a geopolitical mindset, working to reach the nation-state or geopolitical boundaries rather than the nations (ta ethne) of which the Great Commission speaks.

The next step came when attention turned to the languages of the country. Many raised objections that the church, as couched in the lingua franca, was not reaching the many languages of the country. Bible translations and translations of materials and films were earnestly increased. The new call came for a church for every community in the language of the location where the church was located. It was no longer good enough just to drive down a stake to claim a country for Christ, but it became necessary to look into all the languages spoken in that country. As translators and missionaries focused on languages, another barrier became evident.

Within each of these language groups were various peoples and segments. One need only to look at America to understand this. Is America one people simply because everyone speaks the same language, for the most part? No. It has been said that “America and Great Britain are two countries separated by a common language.” In short, you and I can speak the same language but are from different people groups or segments of the same people groups.

Then came the waffle. The waffle? Yes, the waffle! No one knows who, but someone was pouring syrup on a waffle one day and thought to himself. “The world is not a pancake where syrup flows freely from the middle to the edge; it is a waffle where the syrup must be deliberately added to each segment for the whole waffle to be “reached.” In that moment, the real challenge of the gospel task became evident. You don’t reach the world by focusing on the world, a country, or even a language group; you reach the world by focusing on a people, a people who become your people. Then you give your life to your segment of it (people group, mega-city, social segment, etc.) until they have it in their tongue, heart, family, life—in short, it runs throughout that people group and churches spring up like weeds—good old hardy weeds that seems to be everywhere.

The country is the waffle. It is composed of many peoples and segments. For the gospel to flow into each segment, the gospel must be poured directly into that segment. How many strategies, teams and approaches will it take to finish the task in a country? That can best be answered with another question—how far does a gospel presentation permeate a population before it comes up against a natural barrier and ceases to flow? When a people-barrier is reached and the next person who hears senses something “foreign” in the message, a new approach is needed. What is a people? One segment of the waffle. Just as one knows that the people on the other side of the mountain are not his people, that same person can look upon another and say, “He is not us.” What is a people? A people is a group who can answer the question, explicitly or implicitly, “Who is us”?

Who are you? Who are your people? Worship must be brought to the people level, and to the extent that it is not brought to a people-level, one may say, “That may be a gospel, but it is not mine.”

With all of this said, a country profile may be useful in discover some affinity between people groups. Certainly the people of a country have things in common that the same people group, across the national boundary, do not share. National boundaries, like living cells, have various degrees of permeability. Sometimes you can walk across a border and there is little or no difference; you don’t even know you’re in another country. At other times, that border might as well be the Berlin wall—nothing is going through that boundary. To the degree that the latter is true, the same people will develop differently over time and may come to the place where they themselves feel that they are no longer the same people as those across the border of common ancestry.

Well, are they same people? Only they can tell you, and you may not know until you have been with them for quite a while which ties remain and which are gone.

For all of these reasons, each boundary to the flow of the gospel in a country needs to be examined. A country profile may shed some light on this, but the caution should be clearly stated, your goal is to understand a country as an insider would describe his country. Would you describe your home state by saying, “Well what is really cool about my state is that it is 235,005 square miles.” I didn’t think so. You would share what is important to you about your state. However, be careful, some values and views cross language and people groups within a state, but other differences, even within a state, are fiercely defended. Just think of the universities in your state, and I can tell you,

people attending TCU know who they are and those attending Baylor know who they are. They may both play football, but they will both defend that “we are not them.”

Use the template to seek out the insiders view. Test it by speaking to an insider if possible. Think of things that might be important to the peoples throughout a country. Think of things that might only be important to one affinity grouping or cluster of peoples. Finally, when you stumble upon something that might be important to just one people group, city or special place, take note of it—that unique characteristic could become a key and certainly a recognition for a possible beginning point in reaching a people.

Lets look at the country where your people are centered.

Use the template only as a beginning point. A country profile is not a demographic document about a country. You can fill out the country template in detail and still not have a country profile. Think of the template as your resource for writing the country profile as the next step. You will certainly want to ask someone from your people group to read what you have. They may help you by underlining something to suggest it be given more weight. They may help you by striking out something that is not important or simply wrong. Use the country template, test it, and then write a final draft of your country profile.

If your people group is found in more than one country, choose the country where you will be working primarily or the country which would contain the ethnographic core for your people group.

Country Profile Template

Introduction

The profile of _____ (country name) is a description of the country as seen through the eyes of a typical _____ (people group or mega-city) living at the ethnographic core of the country, which happens to be in the area of _____ (general location). This country profile is meant to help the reader understand the way a _____ (people group or mega-city) would see his/her _____ (country name).

Official Name of Country: _____ Capital: _____

Major Cities: _____

Geography

Describe the location of the country in relationship to the region:

Area:

Terrain:

Climate:

Land Use:

Environment:

Population Data

Population: _____ Population Density: _____ per square _____
Annual Growth Rate: ____% Average Annual Growth Rate: ____%
Doubling Time: ____%
Projected Population by 2025: _____ by 2050: _____
Birth Rate: ____ per 1000 population
Infant Mortality Rate: ____ per 1000 live births Death Rate: ____ per 1000 population
Life Expectancy at Birth: ____ Years Urban Population: ____%
Average Annual Growth Rate of Urban Population: ____%
Percentage of Population in Standard Age Categories: ____% are over 65
____% are between 15 & 65

____% are under 15

Economic Data

Per Capita Gross National Product: \$ _____
Average Annual Growth Rate of GNP: ____%
Average Annual Rate of Inflation: ____%
Total External Debt of Country: \$ _____
Population in Absolute Poverty: ____%
Consumer Price Index: _____ (1980=100)
Owner-Occupied Housing: ____%
Central Government Expenditures
 Defense: ____%
 Education: ____%
 Health: ____%
 Housing, welfare: ____%
 Economic Services: ____%
 Other: ____%
Total Expenditures: ____% (% of GNP)
Overall surplus/deficit: ____% (% of GNP)
Gross Domestic Product: \$ _____

Human Development

Human Development Index Value: _____ Global Ranking of HDI: _____
Life Expectancy at Birth: ____ Years
Access to Safe Water: ____%
Daily Calorie Supply as a % of Requirements: ____%
Adult Literacy Rate: ____%
Primary and Secondary Enrollment Ratio: ____
GNP per capita (\$US): \$ _____
Real GDP per capita (\$US): \$ _____
Labor Force % of Population: ____%
Women % of Labor Force: ____%
Distribution of Labor Force
 Agriculture: ____%
 Industry: ____%
 Services: ____%
Unemployment Rate: ____%
Earnings per Employee, Average Annual Growth Rate: ____%
Urban Crowding
 Urban Population % of Total Population: ____%
 Urban Population, Average Annual Growth Rate: ____%
 Houses without Electricity: ____%
 Population in the Largest City: _____
 Major City with the Largest Population Density: _____
 Density: _____ per square _____

Communications

Adult literacy rate: ____%

List the methods of communication available in the country and the % of people who can access these methods?

<u>Method</u>	<u>%</u>
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____

Are there prohibitions regarding the sharing of the Gospel? ____ Yes ____ No
Explain:

Current Political and Economic Situation

This country ranks ____ of ____ countries on the Political Rights Index.
This country ranks ____ of ____ countries on the Civil Rights Index.

Describe the current political and economic situation:

Bibliographical Sources

AFTER THE COUNTRY PROFILE TEMPLATE HAS BEEN COMPLETED, WRITE A COUNTRY PROFILE NARRATIVE. REMEMBER, AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, WRITE FROM AS AN INSIDER WOULD SEE THIS COUNTRY.