

# A COMPARISON OF COMMON TERMS FOUND IN GLOBAL RESEARCH, JOSHUA PROJECT, AND WORLD CHRISTIAN DATABASE

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This document attempts to compare the commonly held definitions used across the three major people group databases. Knowing how terms are used by these three data stewards is a critical part of understanding the data and information they share publically. Global Research (IMB), Joshua Project, and World Christian Database provide the global Christian community with a wealth of data for use in strategically deploying personnel and fiscal resources. These three organizations have a difference in approach and focus which leads to different assumptions when gathering data. Each of these organizations share a high level of commonality in some definitions and on other items the difference is more pronounced. Each has specialized terms used only for their specific data set.

The primary source for definitions was found on the respective websites with the understanding that the application of any particular term may be interpreted differently in casual usage. References are included in the endnotes. The organizations are listed in alphabetical order.

## HARVEST FIELD TERMS

### ***AFFINITY BLOC***

#### ***Global Research, IMB***

The IMB follows the Affinity Blocs as outlined by Patrick Johnstone in the 2007 Missions Frontiers article referenced in the Reference List. Affinity Bloc – A large group of people related by language, history and culture, and usually indigenous to a geographical location.

#### ***Joshua Project***

All people groups, who either live in a particular region or have similar cultural roots. Peoples are broadly grouped into 16 blocs with affinities based on language, culture, religion, and politics. In nearly every Bloc there are widely dissimilar and unrelated linguistic minorities, but often there is one particular culture that is dominant.

#### ***World Christian Database***

This term is defined as ROP1 Affinity Bloc and comes from the HIS Registry of Peoples ROP1: Affinity Bloc.

## ***AFFINITY GROUP***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

Affinity Group – A large group of people related by language, history and culture, usually indigenous and includes their diaspora to other geographical locations. Affinity Group is an internal IMB term used as an administrative and strategic grouping of people groups and personnel.

### ***Joshua Project***

This term is not used or defined by the Joshua Project.

### ***World Christian Database***

This term is not used or defined by World Christian Database.

## ***PEOPLE CLUSTER***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

IMB follows the people clusters as outlined in the Harvest Information System Registry of Peoples (ROP2). A smaller grouping of peoples within an affinity bloc, often with a common name or identity, but separated from one another by political boundaries, language or migration patterns. People cluster from the Registry of People (ROP2) is used from the Harvest Information System. Additionally, the same term “People Cluster” is used as an internal administrative division within the IMB.

### ***Joshua Project:***

Within each Affinity Bloc are a number of more closely related peoples which, for strategic purposes, may be clustered together. These relationships are often based on a common identity of language and name but sometimes on the basis of culture, religion, economy, or dominance of one group over another.

Almost all People Clusters have total populations of over one million. It is likely that each People Cluster will need an international partnership of Christian churches and agencies for the effective evangelization of each constituent people group. Source: Patrick Johnstone

### ***World Christian Database***

People Cluster is defined by the Registry of Peoples (ROP2) found in the Harvest Information System.

## ***PEOPLE GROUP***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

A "people group" is an ethnolinguistic group with a common self-identity that is shared by the various members. There are two parts to that word: ethno, and linguistic. Language is a primary

and dominant identifying factor of a people group. But there are other factors that determine or are associated with ethnicity.

Usually there is a common self-name and a sense of common identity of individuals identified with the group. A common history, customs, family and clan identities, as well as marriage rules and practices, age-grades and other obligation covenants, and inheritance patterns and rules are some of the common ethnic factors defining or distinguishing a people.

A people group is the largest group through which the gospel can flow without encountering significant barriers of understanding and acceptance.

### ***Joshua Project***

A people group is "a significantly large sociological grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity with one another. For evangelization purposes, a people group is the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance."

In many parts of the world lack of understandability serves as the main barrier and it is appropriate to define people groups primarily by language with the possibility of sub-divisions based on dialect or cultural variations.

In other parts of the world, most notably in portions of South Asia, acceptance is a greater barrier than understandability. In these regions, caste, religious tradition, location, common histories and legends, plus language may be used to define the boundaries of each people group.

Joshua Project uses the terms "people", "people group" and "ethnic people" synonymously. However, others may distinguish between the terms.

### ***World Christian Database***

Peoples – An 'ethnolinguistic people group' is an ethnic or racial group speaking its own language or mother tongue.

Homogeneous unit – A population group, stratum [of] society or segment of society within which a number of characteristics or interests or customs (geographical, ethnic, linguistic, social, educational, cultural, vocational, economic, etc.) are held in common by all members, with a common self-consciousness; a culture, sub-culture, people group, ethnolinguistic group.

## ***CASTE***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

This term is not used nor defined by Global Research.

### ***Joshua Project***

The caste system is the rigid South Asian structure of hereditary social classes. Caste and social status are determined at birth and cannot be changed. Marriage is restricted to members of one's own caste. The caste system originally had four levels: Brahman - seers (priests, teachers), Kshatriya - administrators (military leaders, business owners), Vaisya - producers (skilled crafts

persons), and Shoodra - servants (unskilled laborers). Each caste is split into countless sub- castes.

Today there are four general caste levels in South Asia:

- Forward Castes (FC)
- Backward Castes (BC)
- Other Backward Castes (OBC)
- Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SC/ST)

The word "caste" is actually a corrupted Portuguese word, and the more useful term for sociological groupings is Jati. "Jati" as used in South Asia is a very close fit to the Lausanne definition for "people group" which states:

"For evangelization purposes, a people group is the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance." Source: Omid - South Asia Researcher

#### ***World Christian Database***

A social or socio-religious stratum or stratification, any hereditary and exclusive class based on socio-religious beliefs, in India, one of the 30,000 groupings, classified under 4 hereditary classes, into which society is divided in accordance with a system of rank and status fundamental to Hinduism.

## ***ETHNO-LINGUISTIC PEOPLE***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

This term is not used nor defined by Global Research.

### ***Joshua Project***

Groupings of individuals based primarily on language spoken, but with the possibility of sub-divisions based upon dialect or cultural distinctives.

Using this method, one language group equals one or more ethnic groups. This assumes that the "understandability barrier" to the gospel message is higher than the "acceptance barrier." The Ethno-linguistic people group model is appropriate for language-based out reaches of various kinds. It is more appropriate for church planting / discipleship than a strictly linguistic / language group approach, because it recognizes understandability and acceptance barriers that a strictly language-based approach may not.

However the Ethno-linguistic approach is less appropriate for church planting / discipleship activity when the acceptance barrier is higher than the understandability barrier. The Ethno-linguistic people group model is appropriate in most of the world, outside of the South Asian countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

### ***World Christian Database***

A distinct homogeneous ethnic or racial group within a single country, speaking its own language

(one single mother tongue). A large people spread across 2, 3, 4, or several countries is treated here as being 2, 3, 4, or several distinct ethnolinguistic peoples.

## ***LANGUAGE GROUP***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

This term is not used singly but in combination with ethnicity.

### ***Joshua Project***

Groupings of individuals entirely according to language spoken. One language group equals one ethnic group, using this method. This grouping of individuals is appropriate for language-based outreaches (literature distributions, radio, recordings, etc.) Also appropriate for church planting/discipleship in many cases, but not all cases. For the related article about how people groups are defined.

### ***World Christian Database***

The term used for language group indicates a grouping of idioms or dialects whose speech communities share 85% or more common vocabulary.

## ***ENGAGED PEOPLE GROUP***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

A people group is called engaged when there is a church planting methodology consistent with Evangelical faith and practice under way. A people group is engaged when there is a church planting strategy being implemented.

### ***Joshua Project***

This term is not defined by the Joshua Project.

### ***World Christian Database***

This term is not used nor defined by the World Christian Database.

## ***UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUP***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

A people group is unreached when the number of Evangelical Christians is less than 2% of its population.

### ***Joshua Project***

Joshua Project uses the terms "unreached" and "least-reached" to mean the same thing. The terms are used interchangeably on this website. An unreached or least-reached people is a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group.

The original Joshua Project editorial committee selected the criteria less than 2% Evangelical Christian and less than 5% Christian Adherents. While these percentage figures are somewhat arbitrary, "we should not underestimate the significance of the small group of people who have a vision of a just and gentle world. The quality of a whole culture may be changed when two percent of its people have a new vision." - Robert Belair, Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, quoted in Christianity Today Oct 2011: 42.

### ***World Christian Database***

An ethnic, linguistic and other group without previous contact with Christianity, who have not or not yet had the gospel brought to them.

## ***UNENGAGED PEOPLE GROUP***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

A people group is called unengaged when there is no church planting methodology consistent with Evangelical faith and practice under way. A people group is not engaged when it has been merely adopted, is the object of focused prayer, or is part of an advocacy strategy.

### ***Joshua Project***

An unengaged people group is one which has no active church planting underway. According to the IMB Global Research Office "A people group is engaged when a church planting strategy, consistent with evangelical faith and practice, is under implementation.

In this respect, a people group is not engaged when it has been merely adopted, is the object of focused prayer, or is part of an advocacy strategy." At least four essential elements constitute effective engagement:

1. apostolic effort in residence;
2. commitment to work in the local language and culture;
3. commitment to long-term ministry;
4. sowing in a manner consistent with the goal of seeing a Church Planting Movement (CPM) emerge

Joshua Project marks as unengaged only those unreached people groups that are also in the International Mission Board's list of people groups. Source: IMB Global Research

### ***World Christian Database***

The term "unengaged" is not listed in field definitions, dictionary, or glossary.

## ***UNENGAGED AND UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUP***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

A people group is ***unreached*** when the number of Evangelical Christians is less than 2% of its population. A people group is called ***unengaged*** when there is no church planting methodology consistent with Evangelical faith and practice under way. A people group is not engaged when it

has been merely adopted, is the object of focused prayer, or is part of an advocacy strategy.

### ***Joshua Project***

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### ***World Christian Database***

An ethnic, linguistic and other group without previous contact with Christianity, who have not or not yet had the gospel brought to them. The term "unengaged" is not listed in field definitions, dictionary, or glossary.

## ***LEAST REACHED PEOPLE (LRP)***

### ***Global Research, IMB***

This term is not used by Global Research but closely parallels the Last Frontier category in the Global Status of Evangelical Christianity

### ***Joshua Project***

Joshua Project uses the terms "unreached" and "least-reached" to mean the same thing. The terms are used interchangeably on this website.

An unreached or least-reached people is a people group among which there is no indigenous

community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group.

The original Joshua Project editorial committee selected the criteria less than 2% Evangelical Christian and less than 5% Christian Adherents. While these percentage figures are somewhat arbitrary, "we should not underestimate the significance of the small group of people who have a vision of a just and gentle world. The quality of a whole culture may be changed when two percent of its people have a new vision." - Robert Belair, Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, quoted in Christianity Today Oct 2011: 42.

#### ***World Christian Database***

This term is captured by World A peoples which are ethnolinguistic peoples each with over 50% of population is unevangelized.

## HARVEST FORCE TERMS

### **BAPTISM**

#### ***Global Research, IMB***

Baptisms are individuals who have come to faith in Christ and were baptized by immersion as an act of obedience and testimony to the Lord. Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead.

#### ***Joshua Project***

This term is not defined or used by the Joshua Project.

#### ***World Christian Database***

Baptism is for "followers of Christianity who have undergone the formality or ceremony of baptism."

### **CHRISTIAN ADHERENT**

#### ***Global Research, IMB***

This term is not used by Global Research, IMB.

#### ***Joshua Project***

Christian Adherent or Professing Christian is one who professes to be a follower of the Christian religion in any form. This definition is based on the individual's self-confession, not his or her ecclesiology, theology or religious commitment and experience.

This includes professing and affiliated adults and also their children (practicing and non-practicing) who reside in a given area or country, or who are of a particular ethno-linguistic or ethno-cultural people.

This is the broadest possible classification of Christian and includes the six ecclesiological types of Christians: Protestant, Roman Catholic, Other Catholic, Orthodox, and Foreign marginal, Indigenous marginal as defined in Operation World. Christian Adherent numbers include the Evangelicals subset.

#### ***World Christian Database***

Adherents are followers, supporters, members, believers, devotees of a religion.

Communion Adherents – Adherents (AD2005) as published for the communion or council. This is sometimes more than the sum of affiliated church members when membership is wider than the listed denominations, e.g. individual memberships may be included in the total membership

## **CHURCH**

#### ***Global Research, IMB***

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

#### ***Joshua Project***

Church is "Usually written as "church" with lower case "c." and is a gathering of followers of Christ. Does not imply a building or specific location. A fellowship of believers committed to spiritual growth and mutual encouragement. Starting these fellowships is often called church planting. This definition is based on Operation World's definition: A local fellowship of believers. The word is commonly used to mean a church building or church service, but here this usage has largely been avoided.

#### ***World Christian Database***

Congregations – The number of worship centers (churches, congregations) in this country. A church has a building or congregation's premises or other place for a regular weekly service of Christian worship. An indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize their own people group without needing outside cross-cultural assistance is a viable indigenous church.

## **EVANGELICAL**

### ***Global Research, IMB***

An Evangelical Christian is a person who believes that Jesus Christ is the sole source of salvation through faith in Him, has personal faith and conversion with regeneration by the Holy Spirit, recognizes the inspired Word of God as the only basis for faith and Christian living, and is committed to biblical preaching and evangelism that brings others to faith in Jesus Christ.

### ***Joshua Project***

Followers of Christ who generally emphasize:

- The Lord Jesus Christ as the sole source of salvation through faith in Him.
- Personal faith and conversion with regeneration by the Holy Spirit.
- A recognition of the inspired Word of God as the only basis for faith and living.
- Commitment to Biblical preaching and evangelism that brings others to faith in Christ.

The noun "Evangelical" is capitalized since it represents a body of Christians with a fairly clearly defined theology (as also Orthodox and Catholic bodies, etc.). Evangelicals are here defined as:

- All affiliated Christians (church members, their children, etc.) of denominations that are evangelical in theology as defined above.
- The proportion of the affiliated Christians in other denominations (that are not wholly evangelical in theology) who would hold evangelical views.
- The proportion of affiliated Christians in denominations in non-Western nations (where doctrinal positions are less well defined) that would be regarded as Evangelicals by those in the above categories.
- This is a theological and not an experiential definition. It does not mean that all Evangelicals as defined above are actually born-again. In many nations only 10-40% of Evangelicals so defined may have had a valid conversion and also regularly attend church services. However, it does show how many people align themselves with churches where the gospel is being proclaimed. Source: Operation World by Patrick Johnstone

### ***World Christian Database***

Evangelicals – The number of evangelicals residing in this country. These are individuals linked to Evangelical church councils. Evangelicals are a subdivision mainly of Protestants consisting of all affiliated church members calling themselves Evangelicals, or all persons belonging to Evangelical congregations, churches, or denominations; characterized by commitment to personal religion. Additionally, evangelicals are defined as: Church members of evangelical conviction, involved in Christ's mission on Earth; synonymous with Great Commission Christians.

## **CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT**

### ***Global Research, IMB***

What is a Church Planting Movement? A simple, concise definition of a Church Planting Movement (CPM) is a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment. A Church Planting Movement is a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment.

### ***Joshua Project***

A Church Planting Movement is a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment. Characteristics of a CPM:

#### ***Rapid***

As a movement, a Church Planting Movement occurs with rapid increases in new church starts. Saturation church planting over decades and even centuries is good, but doesn't qualify as a Church Planting Movement.

#### ***Multiplicative***

This means that the increase in churches is not simply incremental growth—adding a few churches every year or so. Instead, it compounds with two churches becoming four, four churches becoming eight to 10 and so forth. Multiplicative increase is only possible when new churches are being started by the churches themselves—rather than by professional church planters or missionaries.

#### ***Indigenous***

This means they are generated from within rather than from without. This is not to say that the gospel is able to spring up intuitively within a people group. The gospel always enters a people group from the outside; this is the task of the missionary. However, in a Church Planting Movement the momentum quickly becomes indigenous so that the initiative and drive of the movement comes from within the people group rather than from outsiders.

### ***World Christian Database***

This term is not used nor defined by the World Christian Database.

## **REFERENCE LIST**

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A People Group is “a significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc. or combinations of these.” For evangelistic purposes, it is “the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.”

An Unreached People Group is “a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize this people group.”