

***A Case Study of Research that Guided Kingdom Impact***  
***By RM<sup>1</sup>***

***Research (Information Management) is Key to Kingdom Impact***

In September 2014, the Director of Research of my Mission Organization<sup>2</sup> informed the leader of the area in which I worked that in the previous 12 months, our area of the world had “engaged”<sup>3</sup> more Unengaged Unreached People Groups (UUPGs) than all of the rest of the world combined. Quite a statement. How did this happen?

First of all, I would suggest a more accurate statement might have been “you have ‘marked’ engaged more UUPGs than the rest of the world combined.” Then, I would suggest a major reason for this accomplishment was research or “information management.” Why do I suggest this? Because God had placed me on a team that helped track and report engagement (as we simultaneously did the work of evangelism, disciple making, church planting and leader development) of over 200 UUPGs in a three-year period in the part of the world to which he referred. I believe it was largely due to the diligent information management (research) in our work that enabled the research director to make his statement about this great work of God. In this case study, I would like to share the story (Case Study) of how this happened. How was it that research (information management) was able to guide Kingdom impact to such a great degree?

***The Challenge***

Jesus commanded His people to “...make disciples of all nations/peoples.” (Matthew 28:19). In 2012, I served on a strategy leadership team in a very unreached part of the world. In July of that same year, our leadership team was reminded that there were over 240 remaining UUPGs in our assigned area. We had no evidence that anyone from these people groups even knew Jesus, much less knew how to be His disciples. Our hearts broke. As stewards of this “assignment from God,” we knew we had to do something about it. We all agreed to pray for guidance. As we prayed, we all sensed a strong burden from the Lord that “UUPG Engagement” should

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<sup>1</sup> Due to security reasons, discreet names and locations are used throughout the case study.

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<sup>3</sup> For our work (and this paper), a people group is “engaged” when a church planting plan is being implemented among this people group. Prayer and advocacy are an essential part of every CP plan, but in our work, evidence of Gospel sharing must be present to indicate the CP plan was being implemented among the people group.

be a key initiative that we would give our lives to, over the next 3 years. We set out to find a way towards solving this problem.

### ***The Weight of Responsibility***

As we studied the lists of people groups from Joshua Project (JP), Global Status of Evangelical Christianity (GSEC) and Finishing the Task (FTT), we were overwhelmed. There were many people groups still unengaged. At the same time, we read names of people groups that we knew were engaged (because we were working among them) but still marked “unengaged” on the lists. We prayed through the lists asking for God’s insight and wisdom on how to proceed. The weight of responsibility seemed enormous.

As we continued to study the lists and how they worked (e.g., how they were compiled, how they were updated, etc.), we were faced with the fact that our own organization hosted one of the world’s most used reservoirs of people group information, which included engagement status. In a sobering moment of reality, we then were reminded that we in fact held the authority and responsibility to keep this information updated. It was *our* Kingdom assignment to inform the world what God was doing among each of these people groups to the best of our ability. It was staggering to be reminded that with the click of a mouse, we could change the status of a people group from unengaged to engaged; thereby, informing the world that someone was trying to “make disciples among this people” (Matthew 28:19). To our team, the stakes were high. Eternal implications for the Great Commission and the Great Commission community were at play. We knew that if we could get the “right information to the right places and people,” we could make a large Kingdom impact.

### ***Creating the System***

So, how would we get “the right information to the right places and people” to enable clear, focused strategic decision making that would better enable getting the Gospel to where it was not (Romans 10:14-15)? We knew we had to develop and implement a system of information management that put the “right information into the right hands for the right reasons.” Field leaders and workers needed accurate information to know where to allocate time, energy, attention and resources (TEARs). Many would need to be coached in how to use this information when relating with indigenous leaders on this sensitive subject. Leaders and workers needed to know what further information to ask from their local partners and how to collect this desired information. Then they needed to know what to do with this information once they gathered it. When our team had the information from

the field, the information had to be organized and presented to multiple leaders for further decision making. Once decisions had been made, these decisions had to be captured in the field database, which would then update the public global database, informing the Great Commission community that God and His people were working among these peoples. We also knew that once the system was created, the right people had to “work the system” to get our desired outcomes. There was much work to be done, but we were committed to doing it.

### ***From Frustration to Fruit with the UUPG Targets***

As our team began speaking with field leaders and workers about UUPGs, we learned that there was frustration with the ever-changing list of UUPGs. As soon as our workers would get a good handle on the list of UUPGs, new groups would be added and some modified. Our field workers talked about the complexity, challenge and frustration of trying to hit a moving target. The nature of research demands regular updates in order to reflect the changing realities of the field. However, for field leadership to develop field strategies that can be implemented over a sustained period of time (3 years in our case), we felt a fixed target was helpful, needed and necessary. Our leadership team agreed to “freeze” a priority UUPG list for 3 years. This list became known as our “Top 100.” We found that this “frozen” list...a set UUPG Target...was a major morale booster to our workers, and greatly energized them to tell those who had not heard.

The “Top 100” was actually a list of 108 UUPGs that were prioritized among our leadership after studying JP, GSEC, and FTT. This list became a “banner” of sorts to wave as we advocated for taking the Gospel to those who had not heard (Romans 10:14-15). As we created this list, some field workers felt permission to create their own frozen lists, some of which included UUPGs not on our list. Another organizational division in our part of the world would learn of the effectiveness of having a frozen list and created their own. There was an excitement building because we knew our priority targets now (where we needed to take the Gospel), could confidently work where the Gospel was not, and could measure progress in our work.

### ***Casting Vision for “The Top 100”***

Once the list (“The Top 100”) was set, we rarely missed a chance to cast vision for work among “The Top 100.” We regularly beat the “God wants us to take the Good News to where it is not” drum...and reminded people that the names on this list identified the people groups where the Good News was not. When we were with our organization’s workers, we cast vision for “The Top 100.” When we were with indigenous leaders and

organizations, we encouraged them to work among the Ends of the Earth, which could partly be identified in “The Top 100” (unreached places/villages were also identified). We asked our field workers to have conversations about “The Top 100” with their local partners and other partners. We did all we could to get the word out that these were key targets for Gospel work in our area. These people needed to hear about Jesus.

### ***Obstacles and Opportunities when Talking with Local Leaders about “The Top 100”***

“The Top 100” prioritized and platformed conversations about UUPGs. Our field leaders were excited and started talking with people about these UUPGs. We took great encouragement and hope knowing that God promised there would be people from every “Nation, Tribe, People and Language” worshipping Him together one day (Revelation 7:9). Habakkuk 2:14 (that the knowledge of His glory would cover the earth as the waters covered the sea) was another key verse that filled us with hope. Knowing His promises, we regularly taught these verses, casting vision for God’s heart for “All Peoples Everywhere” knowing Him and worshipping Him.

Some had success, but others quickly ran into trouble. Some learned that discussing people groups, or different communities, was a very sensitive issue in our part of the world due to a history of community identification and segregation. It was difficult in some cases encouraging indigenous leaders of the necessity of identifying and acknowledging specific communities with the intent of ensuring they hear about Jesus. We spent time coaching field leaders and workers how to have conversations with local leaders about people groups in our area of the world. Things improved and conversations about UUPGs gained momentum.

“The Top 100” also served as a “score card” of sorts. In meetings, leaders and workers would ask “how are we doing on ‘The Top 100’?” Our team brought regular updates on the status of “The Top 100.” One might hear in a meeting “We know of activity among 42 of the top 100” or “We now can identify God’s activity in 78 of our top 100.” These reports were life giving, energizing and directing for our leaders and workers. Some UUPGs continued to show up time and again with “no activity.” This compelled some leaders to up the ante on getting the Gospel to these people groups. These “no activity” reports fueled prayer and urgency to do something about this problem.

By July 2015 (our three-year deadline), over 90 of “The Top 100” people groups had verifiable “God activity” among them, enabling our team to mark them engaged. Even more, the effectiveness of our system inspired others to implement some of our practices that led to even more UUPGs being engaged with the Gospel outside our own organizational division in our part of the world.

### ***What Information was Needed?***

When we talked with local leaders and workers about UUPGs, what were we looking for? What did we want to know? We ultimately wanted to know “Was God working among each of the UUPGs or not?” If God was not working, we knew we needed to “start the work” (i.e., prayer, evangelism, training for evangelism, etc.). However, if God was working, where...or among whom...was He working? What was the nature of the work? Were there believers? Were they baptized? Were they being disciplined? Were they meeting regularly in churches? Were there leaders among them? Were believers, churches and/or leaders multiplying? The more detailed information we could find, the better. Trust and credibility in relationships would be key to discovering and trusting information.

### ***Identifying or Initiating God’s Work?***

One thing many workers discovered as we talked about UUPGs with local leaders and workers was that God was way ahead of us. He was already at work. He had promised that people from every Nation, Tribe, People and Language would worship Him...and He was making this happen...before we ever showed up! Therefore, for some of the UUPGs, our “work” was “identifying” the God’s work and further strengthening it. For other UUPGs, there was a clear need to “initiate” the work and equip others to do the same. As our leaders and workers discovered new information, they captured as much as they could based on the information we requested.

### ***Getting the Right Information from the Field to the Right Places***

Getting the collected information from numerous field workers back to a central location was key. Our team knew we had to make it simple, efficient and user friendly if very busy field workers were to do it. Two members on our team agreed to be collectors of information. These two members agreed to receive information in any format and through any medium from anyone wanting to send information. The mantra became “just get us the info.”

Some texted information, some sent emails, some “called it in,” some took pictures of their notes with their phones and forwarded the pictures. One field leader wrote a note on a drink napkin at a meeting and handed it to an information collector. Another asked “would you take the information on toilet paper?”, to which we replied “just get us the info.” Simplifying the process helped it happen.

One information collector was regularly discussing “The Top 100” list with workers at meetings, taking copious notes as he spoke with these workers. Even Facebook posts by personnel were used to capture UUPG engagement information (which would be later followed up on). Thank you Mark Zuckerberg for helping us accomplish God’s Vision!

We know that ease of reporting was a key factor in frontline workers being willing to send in information we requested.

### ***Capturing Information – “The FAR”***

Capturing the reported field information was simple as well. We simply kept an Excel Spreadsheet with reported information. One of the two information collectors agreed to maintain this report. We recorded information by UUPG, including information such as who reported, their organization, date reported, location of God’s activity among the UUPG often down to the village level, and as many details of the activity as possible.

This report became known as the “Field Activity Report” or FAR. It became a part of the culture of our team and our organization in our part of the world. It became a “best practice tool” for information management in our work. In meetings, leaders would ask “do you have any FARs to report?” The FAR became the “holding place” for reports of God’s Activity around our area. The information collectors would collate and organize the information which would then be presented to field leadership for decision making.

One note on this. For years, our personnel had a system of reporting their own work within a specific people group. If they were working among a people group (e.g. sharing the Gospel, making disciples, training others to do so, etc.), systems and tools existed for them to report this work. What they did *not* have was a system (and tools) designed with the intent of collecting and reporting God’s Activity outside of their own work. This system (and tools) of information management is what we created and it did in fact intentionalize and facilitate the task of finding out where God was working among specific UUPGs.

### ***Presenting Recommendations to Strategy Leaders***

Two to three times a year, our team would present the Field Activity Report (FAR) to strategy leadership for review and decision making. The FAR would be organized by UUPG, with all of “God’s Activity” per UUPG. The leaders would then discuss, based on the activity indicated, whether to “mark” this UUPG “engaged” in our field database, which would then update the public database used by global leaders and organizations.

At the time there were 7 leaders on the strategy leadership team. It was decided that at least 4 from this team had to be present to discuss and recommend UUPG engagements. It was further decided that a majority of leaders present had to agree to mark a UUPG engaged before we would move forward with marking a UUPG engaged.

At these meetings, the FAR would be reviewed line by line...UUPG by UUPG. Significant discussion would be given to each "Activity Report." Questions of trust, credibility, accuracy, and authenticity of reporting were considered. Usually, someone in the group knew the organization or person reporting the work, and therefore could validate the veracity of the work, often leading to a decision to mark the UUPG engaged. If, however there was uncertainty in a specific report, or questions of trust and credibility, or a simple need for further clarification or information, strategy leadership would decide to "flag" that particular UUPG for consideration later, pending the issues/concerns being resolved by the next meeting. A leader on the strategy leadership team would agree to follow up with any UUPG needing an issue/concern addressed.

In these meetings, among strategy leadership, there was a sobering ethos of "kingdom stewardship." The weight of responsibility for communicating to the Great Commission community the status of UUPG engagement in our part of the world was felt in the room. There were often times of extended prayer seeking God's wisdom on what decision to make. Every leader took their responsibility seriously while making these eternity impacting decisions.

#### ***Information Recorded into the Global Database and Reported to the World***

Once the strategy leadership team decided which UUPGs should be marked engaged, these decisions were then indicated in our field database, which as stated above, communicated to the world through the public global database that this UUPG was now being engaged on the field (i.e, the Gospel was being shared, disciples were being made, churches were being formed, etc). All of the "Field Activity Reports" were recorded per UUPG to provide vital field intel to anyone wanting to pursue further action among a particular UUPG.

### ***Success: How This Research Guided Kingdom Impact***

How did this research guide Kingdom impact? Here are some successes of the project:

- ***God's Activity was Identified and Joined*** – We discovered many places and among many peoples where God was working. We were able to join Him where He was working and allocate more “TEARs” (Time, Energy, Attention, Resources) for greater impact.
- ***200+ UUPGs were Marked Engaged*** - We were able to “mark engaged” over 200 UUPGs in a three-year span because we identified or initiated work among these UUPGs. By marking these UUPGs engaged, we communicated to the world which people groups are in fact hearing about Jesus (and which ones are not). Knowing who is hearing the Gospel (and who is not) better enables organizations, leaders and workers to make plans and allocate resources to the right places to further the work of global evangelization.
- ***Precise Field Intel was Gathered and Made Available*** – We were able to gather precise field intelligence that enabled field leaders to make strategic decisions and allocate field resources to specific situations. This information was “front line” and “real time.” Leaders were able to know exactly where God was working and through whom He was doing the work. This enabled them to follow up with these peoples and places for further work. At times, believers from a single UUPG were gathered for further vision casting, encouragement, and training to reach their own people. Case studies were done on some of these people group engagements to determine the health of the work. This information is available today to any field leader and worker wishing to pursue work among a specific people group.
- ***God was Glorified and Worshipped for What He Did*** – Our people saw God pull off an “Ephesians 3:20” in our lives and work. UUPG meetings were held where new believers from numerous former UUPGs were invited so God’s work could be celebrated and showcased and challenges given for further work. We were part of a supernatural work. We knew this. And this moved us to worship God in humility because He would do such a great work...and would allow us to be a part of it.
- ***God's People were/are Encouraged by God's Great Work*** – Leaders and workers were thrilled to see God move mightily in our area. Tracking and Reporting the work allowed us to see God at work among many communities. We witnessed and were a part of God making Revelation 7:9 come to life.

- ***Desire to Surrender All to See God Move was Increased*** – Because of God’s faithfulness in this project, field leaders and workers have the courage and confidence to do what it takes to do it again. We are currently undergoing another round of “intentional information management” that we are praying will guide Kingdom impact once again.

### ***Key Ingredients for Success***

As we reflect on this initiative, key ingredients necessary for success can be identified. These are:

- ***Prayer*** – Prayer was key. “The Top 100” provided a clear focus for prayer. “The Top 100” was distributed among key prayer partners for continued diligent prayer. Defining our target, planning, decision making and more were all bathed in prayer. We knew we were about God’s business and needed to get His take on all we did.
- ***God’s Promises*** – Habakkuk 2:14, Matthew 28:18-20, and Revelation 7:9 were “rallying cries.” We knew God wanted to do this even more than we wanted to do it. This put fresh wind in our sails and encouraged us to fight the good fight. We knew He was leading us and we simply wanted to be obedient to His call. This greatly encouraged us and compelled us forward.
- ***Fixed Target*** – Defining our target (“The Top 100”) was key. Without it, our leaders and workers were frustrated and unclear about direction and expectations. Communication, planning, tracking and reporting became much much easier with the target clearly defined.
- ***Vision Casting*** – Waving the banner for “getting the Gospel to where it was not being heard” (i.e., among “The Top 100”) at every opportunity prioritized this focus and kept the challenge in front of people. It reminded leaders and workers that what we were doing was a priority to God and to us.
- ***Ownership of the Vision by Many People*** – This work was accomplished by many of God’s people. The “Body” was clearly seen functioning together...from researchers, to strategy leaders, to “front-liners,” to local leaders, to new believers among the former UUPGs. Many people were a part of God moving mightily and granting great success.
- ***Healthy Trusting Relationships*** – Sharing information, especially sensitive information, is risky business. Respect, honor, empathy, trust, grace and credibility were essential relational traits in all of this. If a partner was uneasy having a people group conversation, we found it helpful to respect their wishes and “wait for the

right time” (if it ever came). Keeping confidences with names and locations was key. Coaching leaders and workers on these very real relational dynamics (and how to cultivate them) was foundational to “information sharing and flow.” We also found that without the healthy relational pieces in place, the information simply did not flow.

- **Intentional Leadership** – Someone has said “As goes the leader, so goes the organization/initiative.” And this was very true in our case. We knew that some key leaders had to run point on this initiative so it would not slip through the cracks among the myriad of tasks begging for attention from very busy field leaders and workers. Our team (and individual leaders on the team) took responsibility for the process, campaigned diligently for doing the work and pushed it to completion. Accountability structures were even put into place to ensure that things got done.
- **Simple Process and Tools** – Field leaders and workers are asked to do many things. We knew that if we could make their lives easier by creating simple processes and tools, our chances were greater that they would want to help us on this initiative. And this happened. A number of workers told us, “This makes doing our work and reporting very easy.”
- **Right Information into the Right Hands for the Right Reasons** – All information is useful; but, not all information is useful all the time. Researchers value information. We want to pass it on for field use. At times, we dump lots of information on field workers with good intentions. However, information overload can hinder a work (or at least not help it) if the information is not edited for the “right information in the right hands for the right reasons.” We only distributed essential information about the people groups to field workers to make their lives and work easier. Likewise, we only requested a small specific amount of information from them when reporting on God’s activity.
- **Diligent and Continual Communication** – Constant communication was necessary. Keeping the vision in front of people at every opportunity was vital. Regularly asking for specific UUPG reports primed the pump for more information from the front lines. Emailing individuals with follow up questions and asking about specific UUPG activity in their areas was key. One of our thoughts was “over communicate to get the information.”

### ***Research Can Guide Kingdom Impact***

God granted us great success as we diligently applied these key ingredients in this UUPG initiative. It was a blessing for many to be a part of something great done by God and His people. Seeing Him work through His people to engage (and report engagement of) over 200 UUPGs in a very hard place in a three-year span was exhilarating. Our team was convinced that “information management” was a non-negotiable and absolutely critical to getting God’s work done comprehensively and sharing His love with all everywhere. Research can and does in fact guide Kingdom impact when managed and used correctly.

Being convinced of this, members of this same team recently initiated another three-year focus to facilitate engagement of another 451 UUPGs in a much larger area in this part of the world. We trust God will once again glorify Himself and bless His people as we work with Him to make Jesus known everywhere and among all.