MISSIOLOGICAL RESEARCH: TOKYO 2010 REFLECTIONS

Compiled by Mark Harris

INTRODUCTION

Several Task Forces were organized for the Tokyo 2010 Global Missions Consultation, among which was the Research Task Force. We were given two one-hour sessions to discuss issues related to missiological research. In preparation for those sessions, led by Dr. Todd Johnson and myself, we narrowed down our basic purposes, for Tokyo and beyond, to these three:

1. Forming a global network of missiological researchers
2. Defining the roles of missiological research in finishing the task
3. Developing research tools or projects that will support goals coming out of Tokyo

I gathered a list of missiological researchers and then sent to them the following preliminary outline of questions, issues and ideas for each topic that came out of some initial brainstorming between several others and me. What follows is a summary outline of issues that were presented or addressed with regards to the role of missiological research in the days ahead:

I. Global Network of Missiological Researchers
    A. Reasons for Being
        1. Is this a Unique Organization?
        2. How would it relate to other research initiatives?
        3. What would be its overall purposes?
    B. Organizational Elements
        1. Leadership
        2. Structure
        2. Operation
            - Coordinating of commissioned research projects
        3. Vision and Mission Statements
        4. Focus
            - Assisting Mission Agencies (those attached to the GNMS?)
            - Aiming at the Frontiers of mission
    B. Tools to Develop
        1. Directory of Mission Researchers
            - Includes skills, experience, interests, current involvements, availability, etc.
        2. Database of Research Project Reports
        3. Researcher Training
        4. Toolbox of Adaptable Research Instruments

II. Role and Potential of Research toward Finishing the Task
    A. Present Status of Frontier Missions Research

      1. What data is already available, and where is it?
      2. How is research being utilized
    3. How are research findings being applied?
  B. Types of Research Needed
    1. Quantitative (demographic, investigative, experimental, evaluative)
    2. Qualitative (ethnographic, archival, phenomological)
    3. Meta (thematic, coorelatonal, trends)
  C. Priority Needs for Mission Research
      1. Best practices in church multiplication and ecclesial leadership
      2. Problems of stalled CP movements
      3. Effectiveness of Westerners in "catalyst" role for CPM's
      4. Measuring of missions deployment (and over-deployment)
      5. Solutions to Chronic Problems
       a. Dependency
       b. Inaccurate Reporting
       c. Feasible monitoring and analysis
  D. Challenges to Doing and Promoting Research
      1. Lack of funding directed toward research
      2. Low value of research among mission leaders
      3. Lack of trained researchers among field workers
      4. Loss of potential national workers to "bidding wars"
    5. Unpublicized cases of applied research findings

III. Research Project Development and Selection
  A. Selection of Topic
    1. Effectiveness of discipleship programs (problem statement to come out of Tokyo)
    2. Selected CPMs in Asia, Africa and Latin America– what are reasons for growth?
    3. Engaging populations undergoing religious invasion
    4. Others?
  B. Design of Research
      1. Quantitative measures
      2. Qualitative analysis of cultural realities
      3. Meta (data mining of completed research)
  C. Assignment of Duties
     -Research teachers business and education
     - Research designers
     - Research managers
     - Field researchers
     - Research funders

These outlines were only preliminary, and were meant to be expanded, edited, fleshed-out, etc. by those who were interested in this initiative. In addition, the three overall topics themselves were open to discussion leading up to Tokyo. I served as the hub for gathering responses through a series of three e-mails which resulted in the responses noted below.

<center>**Issue #1: The Valuing of Missiological Research**</center>

<u>Proposition</u> - Missiological research is a critical component of the task of engaging and discipling the remaining unreached people groups.

<u>Question</u> - Is missiological research valued as it should be among mission leaders? Why or why not?

General Factors

 1. Value varies enormously from totally valued to completely not valued.

 2. The variance is among mission leaders, among organizations, and even within organizations.

 3. Valuing relates to the cost of obtaining the information, not just on the perceived value of the information.

 4. Valuing relates to the type of research done (qualitative vs. quantitative, etc.)

Factors Affecting How Mission Leaders Value Research

 1. Do they understand it? If they "get it" they will value it. But if the data is not understood, or not relevant to the decisions a leader is making, the resources used to undertake the project are wasted. This reinforces the idea in a leader's mind that research is not of practical benefit.

 2. Are enough people doing research that can be applied? When missiological research is not highly valued, it can be because the findings are not readily applied to a field context, or else the reports are not sufficiently practical. On the other hand, when research clearly outlines new models that can be reproduced and multiplied, and offers compelling information and data, mission leaders are able and willing to embrace the information and make changes.

 3. What information do they view as appropriate to use in guiding their strategy development?

 4. What effect has their formal or informal training had on them?

   a. Have they been exposed to missiological research?
   b. Have they been encouraged to use research?

 5. What is their organizational decision-making tradition? This determines the protocol for valuing of research.

   a. Are decisions a purely spiritual practice in which "God's will" is discerned through spiritual disciplines?

b. Are decisions a strategic component of completing a known objective, with the spiritual component assumed?

c. Are decisions made by a hybrid of these two approaches?

6. Are mission leaders open to changing their strategies based on research? Research may only be valued among mission leaders when it supports their presuppositions. When it might require them to change or adapt based on the reality that the research presents, they often times refute or trivialize it.

7. Are the mission leaders visionaries and strategists who are looking to accelerate the completion of the Great Commission? Or are they simply looking to hang on in their organization as long as they can?

8. Will mission leaders only "own" research that comes from their organization or constituents?

Other Issues with Mission Leaders and Research

1. They are not proactive in getting research done, even if they do appreciate it.

2. Decision makers so often don't pay attention to the research results that are already available and usable. They seem to make decisions based on other factors.

3. Even if mission leaders value research, there is a gap at the grassroots practitioner level. Most mission leaders are aware that the greatest effectiveness can only come when we know the current status of progress (where work is and isn't, and how "healthy" it is). In contrast, most grassroots practitioners are rightfully more focused on what their calling and task is rather than the larger task, meaning the research is not as relevant to them. Those with "big picture" responsibility recognize the value of the research far more readily.

4. In many cases, mission leaders seem to still be using data numbers that are outdated.

5. Mission leaders can base their assumptions on what happens in their church or mission, and assume that this must be what other groups are doing as well.

6. Research could have been performed, but the results reported in a format inaccessible to the leaders.

7. Mission researchers and mission leaders are not communicating well. We are expecting mission leaders to take up the research based on a passive relationship. Intentional partnerships will yield better results. Without communication of available vs. desirable research, the researcher doesn't always gather what the mission leader wants or needs and the mission leader doesn't always know or desire what the researcher offers.

Other Issues Related to Researchers

1. Have researchers demonstrated how existing demographic research can be applied before undertaking customized projects?

2. Some of the research done is very poor and does not really correspond with field realities.

Issue #2: The Need for a Central Research Database

Proposition - Missiological researchers and mission organizations are often unaware of what research has already been done for a people group they are trying to reach.

Question - Is there a need for a central searchable (and secure) database of research projects? Is anybody attempting this? How would you recommend the need be met?

Comments Favorable to the Database

1. In concept a centralized "master" ministry activity / research project database is desirable.

2. A central, searchable database would be helpful

3. A regularly updated list of links would be easy and might work.

4. How do we know where the lost people are, what other evangelical organizations are implementing church planting strategies among a people group, or how many evangelicals might be among a people group, if we aren't sharing information with one another? The result is that we're all out there doing research, where it may have already been done.

5. A good start might be to develop a database of MA and higher theses on missiological issues. This should include institutions from around the world.

Factors/Comments Unfavorable to the Database

1. Adequacy of Current Situation for Finding Data

a. It would be surprising if missiological researchers or mission organizations were not doing fairly thorough digging to find info about what research has been done regarding a particular people group.
b. Anything publically available is relatively easy to find on the internet. And with a little perserverence and connections one can find out the general networks focused on a particular people group.
c. With the right references / recommendations from trusted people, one can find out what on-site partnerships and outreach might be going on.
d. Lack of awareness is not that big of a deal. Local churches can do pretty amazing jobs of global networking and finding out what's out there in connection to a people group they may have adopted. Mission agencies do it better yet.

e. Some work is published, and as such readily available by normal book and publications searches. If someone wanted to find out about research being done they should be able to find it via what has been published and/or by getting involved in the somewhat-known networks and field ministry partnerships. One should work through personal relationships and the various ministry networks to look for information that is otherwise not freely available.

2. Great difficulties in management/control/collaboration:

a. Human resource requirements
- The vetting of requesters, etc. is a very human intensive process. There has to be confirmation from trusted sources regarding: a) the identity of the requestor, b) the need to know, c) the protocols for how the requester will handle the data, etc. etc. There may be better ways to automate some of this, but there still needs to be a very significant human resource commitment for the long term.
- A listing of who is doing what, who has what, etc. is potentially workable, but someone has to act as collector and distributor of this list.
- To establish and maintain a central database that points people toward networks, individuals, bibliographies, related to my research interests would be a monumental task, not just to establish but to maintain.

b. Security
- It is a bigger issue than often imagined. Simply having a password-protected site does not really ensure security. Passwords get shared, laptops lost, systems compromised, etc. Serious, determined hackers can probably break into nearly anything if they are really motivated.
- There is extreme resistance to making research public if it is among a restricted access people group or a Muslim people group.
- For some people group research the people groups are so large and spread out we could share general information about the work without risking compromising the local work. But in many cases we would not want to share any details of the work except face-to-face with people on a need to know basis.
- Will the information be shared where local grassroots workers (nationals or expats) may be hurt or even killed (or the work hinder/slowed)?
- Some work is on sensitive topics, so could be circulated to known people but not made freely available.

c. Dynamic nature of the data - Ministry activity information is constantly changing, missionaries and agencies moving on and off the field, etc. A major commitment to continual updating and surveying is required.

d. Theological Differences - Some organizations may feel quite reluctant to share data with others of very different denominational or theological persuasions. A conservative church planting ministry may be rather hesitant to contribute their sensitive data, knowing that a

liberal humanitarian aid "Christian" organization might have access to it. It is a challenge to determine what data is allowed into the system and what data is excluded from the system, as well as who has access to what data.

3. Lack of Trust Between Users of Information
   a. Trust relationships are the core of the whole idea. If these are not well established, many agencies and missionaries simply will not share ministry activity information regardless of how secure the system seems to be.
   b. The key issue: can we trust a person or organization to keep the information confidential. Research is as much about trust and relationships as it is about information.

4. Unwillingness to Share Data - Individuals and organizations are sometimes using the data/information to solicit funds for their work. It is kind of like the children's story where the hen requests all the farm animals to help her prepare and cook bread. All of them are unavailable until the bread is finished - but then they all want to join in eating the bread. There are reasons folks are not willing to share. Could there be a sort of code of ethics for how information that was shared would be used? Or should there be strict regulations on how and what information can be shared?

5. Unwillingness to Use Data
   a. The complicating issue is that most often they don't believe or trust the reliability of the research they are aware of. This makes it less likely that the central searchable database would really be used effectively.
   b. If a database is too secure, it is not going to be used – it is too much trouble to get access to it.
   c. Mission organizations also *choose* not to know what research has been done.

Miscellaneous Comments

   1. A distinction needs be made between "secure" and "public." Information can be housed in a secure way (limited and controlled access) on the internet, but the greater the need for security, the less accessible it becomes.

   2. One of the reasons people are unaware research has already been done is the lack of sufficient citations among current missiological sources of information. If organizations like Operation World, Joshua Project, and others would list where all information was obtained, it would help other researchers and leaders become aware of other research and sources of information.

3. A Helpful index: Doctoral Dissertations on Mission Since 1900
http://resources.library.yale.edu/dissertations/

4. A database would only be as good as the contributions made. Informal networking, is an alternative to a database.

5. I propose to have a database open for as many countries as possible, even open basic information for creative access nations, and further information for logged-in users, or maybe even send it out by e-mail.

6. It might be a good idea to let this be a project linked to a seminary or Christian university.

7. Create a dedicated website, with clickable countries that lead to pop-up menus of people groups.

8. Will information shared be presented as if the presenter has done all the research, and the original researcher who did all the work receives none of the credit?

9. Never expect one central, grand database somewhere to handle the big picture for everybody, on any topic. Decades of real experience by many people and organizations in mission research have borne this out.

10. More significant to the issue are the research or networking skills of the person seeking to learn about a people group, and the presence, around the world, of helpful, knowledgeable, networker kinds of people.

Issue #3: Qualitative Research Needed for Assisting CPM's

Proposition - Qualitative research is greatly needed in order to gain a better understanding of the needs, successes, failures, problems, etc. of CP movements.

 Question - What would you list as the highest priority KINDS of QUALITATIVE research that are needed in order to assist those who are working in CP movements?

Qualitative Research Questions to Ask:

- How biblical is the theology in the various CPMs?
- Can we confirm the 'universal elements' Garrison claims from CPMs he does not describe?
- Do CPM's have a 'flash-in-the-pan' nature? If so, is that because of internal limitations? Of changing context? Of outsider involvement?
- In how many cases did people pray and plan for a CPM, and how often did it happen spontaneously?
- What are differences and similarities of CPMs with missionary involvement from the start, starting at a later date, and not at all?

- More research into religious change and conversion. What are the sociologists and "sociology of religion" folks saying that would inform our understanding of conversion and movements?
 - Missiologists need to do a lot more to update the anthropology base that informs our missiology. Too much of our thinking (such as understanding of people groups) is based on very old schools of anthropological thought.
- How quickly and how regularly are typical disciples held accountable for obedience to the Lord and for passing on what they are learning?
- How quickly and thoroughly they are typical disciples being equipped to feed themselves spiritually via Scripture (interpretation and application), prayer, Body life ("one anothers") and persecution and suffering?
- What models are reproducing (growing #'s of churches, #'s of new believers, generations deep of reproduction)
- What models are based on a process rather than a personality and are infinitely reproducible based on the culture and context they are working in.
- Are CPMs utilizing internal resources to maintain growth?
- Are CPMs measuring retention and reproduction?
- How and why do people respond; changing their philosophy of life/spiritual allegiance/religious affiliation? We do not know the answer to maybe the most basic of all questions. We have some idea of methods that seem to be effective, yet so much of what is done comes with a near written guarantee of minimal success, if not failure. Yet this does not seem to affect the work that continues to be done.

General Comments on Qualitative Method

   1. It seems that the qualitative method of interviewing (over the case study and participant observation method) has the highest likelihood of yielding a complete picture of CP movements. If one aims to gain a picture of an entire CP movement, not simply one CP, an interview instrument that can be applied to a stratified sample of CPs would be best.

   2. Qualitative research is particularly helpful in describing the values, needs, interests and reality as perceived by a particular population. In ministry we make the assumption that we know how people think and why they respond and we are often only partially correct. Qualitative research allows the researcher to capture perceptions that will help to correct and clarify our assumptions.

   3. Qualitative research is most necessary when an organization or its leadership are beginning a new project or redesigning an existing program. Then there is a need to confirm the underlying assumptions that comprise the design and intent of the program or, in an existing program, verify whether or not the operative assumptions are correct - particularly if there is demonstrated declining effectiveness.

4. Qualitative research is especially helpful when done in conjunction with quantitative research. This allows the agent to both understand the underlying perceptions of the subjects and extrapolate the scope and degree to which their opinions and perspectives can be applied to a larger population.

5. It would be good if the interviewers had experience in both research and church planting.

6. To assess CPMs, one should guard against asking direct numeric questions--its far better to listen to people tell their stories and ask follow up questions for the main things. Several methodological possibilities are appropriate, with a CPM team making the final decision.

CONCLUSION

The discussions in Tokyo were divided between a Dr. Johnson and myself between quantitative and qualitative research issues. Given the limited time, and the need to duplicate our presentation in the two sessions, we were only able to touch the surface of the issues and ideas I had gathered in the period leading up to the consultation.

The main potential outcomes from our work are yet to be realized, and depend a great deal on the launching of the Global Network of Mission Structures, which will have a division devoted to research. Assuming that leadership of the research department can be found, all of the topics listed above will be on the table for both discussion and action.

We believe that quantitative and qualitative research are essential components of any overall strategy for finishing the task of world evangelization and church planting among all people groups. We invite all who are interested in promoting, designing, and doing field research to become a part of this global network of missiological researchers.