



*The challenge of
Reaching unreached
Pastoralist people groups*

Practical analysis





Prepared by:-
Mr. Million Mathewos Salato
President of south Omo For Christ
Ministry





Introduction

Ethiopia, a country located in the horn of Africa consists of 86 ethnic people groups out of which 35 tribes live a nomadic way of life. The focus of this research goes to the southern part of Ethiopia where 56 tribes live together under the umbrella of Southern, Nations, Nationalities and peoples Region.





- More specifically the research is concerned with South omo sub region where 16 ethnic groups live together.
- The area of this sub region is 22,650 km square with an estimated population of more than 600,000.
- With the exception of one fully agrarian tribe and 2 semi agrarian people groups, the rest 13 ethnic groups are all pastoralists living a primitive way of life.





- Recent studies indicate that, more than 56% of the pastoralist communities still belong to traditional beliefs.
- As an inter-denominational ministry, we did a lot with local churches to reach these tribal people groups but the outcome was not as expected.





- So this research tries to identify specific challenges with possible recommendation yet expecting more solutions from the audience.
- Here is a summary of the major challenges to reach pastoralist UPGs





1. Unsettled way of life

- Still in the 21st century the pastoralist communities live an unsettled way of life moving from one place to another in search of grazing land for their cattle.
- The average maximum duration which they stay in one village doesn't exceed 5 weeks and minimum 2 weeks.





- So when we move to their first village to train and visit them we will find empty field or new settlers. The previous village settlers will move to other place and merge with others or occupy new area to establish new camping site.
- So the strategy that we have been using so far was greatly challenged by the life style of the community and we were forced to look the discipleship and church planting work in new dimension.
- This is the biggest challenge to plant churches and make disciples.





2. Chief based leadership

- Almost all pastoralist communities in our sub region share the same thing that they are still under local chief leadership. For them, the word of the local chief is like the word of God.
- if one needs to preach members of the tribal groups, he/she should start from the head down to family members





- Otherwise it will be a futile work to expect the decision from individual members to accept Jesus.
- This submission to higher authority goes down to families where women and children have no power to decide on any issue including decision to accept any religion.
- As a head of the family, it is the husband who decides on everything, but he also relies on the local chief to decide what is good for his family.





- The local chief further relies on hereditary spirits and strong bondage to evil traditional beliefs.
- In the past 10 years we preached lots of tribal men, women and children but when we want to make them disciples we won't find them because of this chain.





3. Traditional beliefs

- Almost all of pastoralist tribal people groups have their own beliefs and thoughts.
- Some believe in witch doctors and sorcerers while others believe in rivers, trees and even in fossils of their ancestors.
- Because of high bondage to these beliefs and thoughts winning souls for Christ has been very challenging in the past years.





- Even after receiving Christ as their savior some tribal people want to take traditional beliefs as another option and some return back to these spirits.
- So the task of untying people from their traditional beliefs is still the biggest challenge for disciple making missionaries.





4. Bad cultural experiences

- Some cultures of tribal people completely contradict to the bible that they can't survive if people receive Jesus.
- For example, in some tribes if the tooth of a new born baby grows in the upper jaw first his/her fate will be death. He/she will be thrown to the river or down from big mountain because they believe such babies will bring Famine and curse to the community.





- The same is true for the fetus that comes by his leg during maternal delivery.
- Actually this culture is now waning because of severe punishment by the government and willingness of local chiefs to give babies to local NGO's rather than throwing them.
- Bull jumping, digging the fossils of died ancestors, taking girls in the form of slavery... etc. are cultures that hinder the enhancement of the gospel. Even after receiving Jesus, they need to continue with such cultures.





5. Linguistic diversity

- As I tried to mention in the introduction part, we have 16 different tribes each having their own language and culture.
- One will find new language in every 50-60 km distance. So you can easily imagine the difficulty of preaching, training and discipling native people.
- As there are no mature and strongly educated people in most tribes, it will be very challenging to find such people and communicate in a language which they understand.





➤ Once we find some trainers who understand Amharic or English language, it will be easy to move the next step because trained native people can teach their community in native language.

➤ But in some tribes we still don't have an active man/woman to use as a channel of communication. This all is the effect of ethnic and language diversity.





Strategies Used so far

Below are the strategies which have been in use to cope up with the above mentioned challenges

1. Equipping native missionaries

- Training indigenous missionaries who will move with pastoralists from place to place is one of the major strategy used to reach unreached pastoralists so far.
- These are homeless evangelists who will make disciples moving together with the tribal people. As they are native, it will be easier for them to adopt the life style of the community and they are free of language and cultural barriers.





2. Translating bible stories to local language

We will translate 70 selected bible stories to tribal languages and load them on solar powered story teller devices. Until now we were able to translate stories in 8 languages which helped our ministry to reach the oral community in a better way.





3. Using Jesus Film

Jesus film has been translated in 5 languages of our Sub-region and we have been using it for the past 3 years. But due to long duration of the movie, pastoralists will not attend it in tolerance.

Even with this drawback still it helped us a lot to win souls for Christ.





4. Massive evangelism campaigns and curse breaking prayers

Mobilization of hundreds of youth to share the gospel for tribal people for 2 or 3 weeks is a very common scenario in our sub-region.

Youth from different regions will gather together 2 or 3 times a year to move to different villages to share the gospel, pray and give training on different topics.

Many souls will come to Christ by such campaigns but the homework of making them disciples still remains unanswered.





5. Charity services

- Charity services like free medical treatment, helping the poor and other people with basic needs paved the way to reach some aggressive tribal communities.
- Specially free medical treatment helped us a lot to get the heart of some tribal people groups who blocked all other ways to reach them





Practical problems

1. Shortage of laborers

- we do have a plenty harvest to be collected but only few indigenous laborers are in the field. until now we were able to send only 23 missionaries to the harvest.
- But the vastness of the field and tribal diversity requires many more laborers to collect the harvest.





- Without sending missionaries, the outcome of the outreach campaign will be an empty figurative report.
- Any strategy Either it be story telling or Jesus film, training or charity service all need native believers who serve as a bridge to reach the community
- So the task of finding, equipping and sending a native field workers is one of the practical problem that we are facing right now.





2. Passiveness of local denominations

- As we are para-church ministries, we can't plant churches by our own.
- We will give new believers to nearby local churches and even pay salary for missionaries to support them. but most churches are not active enough to take the responsibility of making disciples and planting churches in the bushes.





- We do have lots of denominations in the cities but only few are volunteer to go to the bushes to plant churches.
- Due to this problem, We still have villages in our hand waiting for local denominations.
- In some areas we won't find nearby churches at all. So the only thing that that we do(if we have enough fund) is to send a missionary to teach them or invite volunteer church to go there.
- this makes church multiplication process a bit difficult because we believe new churches should be handled by one denomination.





- Even we can't go long distance by supporting missionaries without collaboration with local denominations.
- so making local churches active in mission and church planting movement has become another homework of our ministry.





3. Lack of facilities

- The sparse and irregular settlement of pastoralists in the bushes is another problem which makes the mission work tiresome.
- Most of the villages they choose for settlements are areas where one can't find access roads to reach them or river banks which can only be accessed by foot journey.





- We are travelling to most villages by motorbike and foot journey of more than 5 hours to show Jesus film or distribute story tellers.
- So lack of infrastructure and transport facility is another hurdle of reaching pastoralist UPGs.





- Lack of facilities also extends to shortage of different equipment to reach the pastoralist UPGs
- For example, we only have 2 Jesus film projectors but five versions of Jesus film in different language.
- We were unable to get enough storyteller devices which are very key gospel tools for the oral community.
- Evange cubes and Amharic bibles are also tools that we won't find abundantly to give for missionaries





Recommendation

1. Designing mobile Discipleship and Church planting strategy.

- We believe pastoralists all over the world, in one way or another share similar things in common. Specially moving from place to place is still common to pastoralists in Africa.
- So until they start to live a settled way of life, the solution will be planting a mobile church and making mobile disciple makers who will move with the community together.





➤ The disciple maker will go where ever they go to disciple them and plant a moving church among that community.





2. Chief and tribal leaders based gospel strategy

- as the tribal people are subordinate to their local and master chief , focusing on the leaders to share them the gospel and pray for them is the main thing that should be done to reach the community in short way.
- Even if it takes longer time to get the will of such people to accept Jesus, the result will be powerful that their conversion can transform the whole tribal people groups
- So focusing on tribal chiefs of unreached pastoralist groups is a good strategy to reach them.





3. Intensive teaching of bible stories

- You can't directly tell the pastoralist community that, what they are doing(their culture) is bad. The good way is to teach them the word of God so that they can see their culture in light of the lesson they were thought.
- They do have a good oral culture of sharing stories to one another easily. So using this method, teaching them selected bible stories with good response to bad cultures will help them to challenge bad cultural practices.





4. Curse breaking prayers

- We believe prayer has a great power to transform a nation in holistic way. So deliverance prayers will greatly help to break any chains of evil and open doors to win souls for Christ as well.
- But getting accurate information about the evil practices of the tribal people is the key thing to make a targeted prayer.
- Special prayers should be done on the spot(river, tree, mountain or stone) where tribal people worship evil spirits.





5. Facilitating Discipleship training Centers

- As pastoralists live in many sparsely located small villages, There is no best option other than equipping and sending more native people.
- So Training centers will play pivotal role to equip more missionaries from all tribal people groups in a short period of time





6. Alliance with churches and para-church ministries

- The last but no least thing is making strong bondage with local churches and ministries working on the same vision.
- United actions will always have great impact. The alliance between churches and para church ministries will help to a lot in winning souls and mobilizing resource easily .
- Specially the task of discipleship, church planting and missionary send needs strong alliance with one another.





Thank you!

