



# Finishing the Task in East Africa

## Q&A with Sam Kebreab

### Tell us about your journey into frontier missions?

As the mission director of my church in Ethiopia it was my job to coordinate efforts to reach the Borana people group of Southern Ethiopia. As I began to do research on the Borana (an Ethiopian tribe of 700,000), I discovered many other nearby unreached peoples and I began to urge our church to begin work among them. Around this time I was also doing my graduate studies with William Carey International University and so I decided to integrate these two, which resulted in a national ethnographic research project.

### Sounds providential! How did your graduate work contribute to this effort?

WCIU really came right on time, both for my assignment with the Borana people as well as my new role as regional facilitator for the country assessment process of the Horn of Africa with MANI (Movement for African

National Initiatives). The WCIU program gives you a passion for reaching unreached peoples, and greatly helped me to coach our church planters in researching the cultural background of the Borana and then contextualizing the message. The readings and assignments were exactly what we needed and very practical for what we were trying to do.

### Tell us a little about your partnership to reach the Borana.

This is a joint endeavor between local churches in Ethiopia and partner churches in the United States affiliated with the Baptist General Conference, which have also adopted the Borana. We began in a practical way by starting hostels for school children, who needed a place to stay while studying away from home. Our partner churches assisted us with funds and short-term personnel. As a direct result, today there is a church planting movement among the Borana, and about 50 house-fellowships have been established.

### After you researched all the people groups of Ethiopia, what did you do from there?

I began my assessment by starting with the Joshua Project data of the U.S. Center for World Mission. I was surprised to learn how many unreached peoples are listed by Joshua Project in Ethiopia and my research



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confirmed this data. I approached one of our Ethiopian church leaders about this and urged him to make this front and center as a national priority. We agreed that what was needed was to make detailed profiles of each of these groups, then present this information to every leader as opportunity allows, and then urge them to take the action step of adopting one of these groups.

### How is the Ethiopian church responding to the needs of the least-reached peoples?

Of the 18 major church-networks in Ethiopia which we are tracking, only three have no current evangelistic outreach or ongoing church planting activities among the UPGs. The fact that more than 80% from among those evangelical institutions included in the study are involved in some degree in reaching the Ethiopian UPGs is a very encouraging finding. It tells us the evangelical institutions are, to a large extent, aware of the existence of these UPGs and are exerting some efforts to reach them.

### What are the priorities revealed by the survey?

In our first survey of 2008 we found that there were at least six people groups that were not yet engaged. They were the Biralala, the Kwegu, the Saho (Irob), the Seze, the Shabo, and the Shebelle. Through a more recent assessment we learned that work has started among the Saho and the Shabo. Among the people groups that can be listed as under-engaged, there are about 15 groups. (These include the Anfillo, Koma, Mao of Bambasi, Benshangul, Hamer-Banna, Karo, Tsemai, Arbore, Suri—including Tirma, Chaj, Baale—Nao, Chara, Shabo, Hararge Oromo, Karrayu Oromo and Yajju Oromo.) Among those that are said to be engaged, there are 9 groups where the gospel seems to exert little influence. (These include the Afar, Harari, Somalis, Jimma Oromo, Agua, Qebena, Allaaba, and Siliti.) Among these people groups, it would be good to carefully consider and perhaps reevaluate the methods of approach when presenting the gospel in order to bring a breakthrough among them.

### What you have done in Ethiopia has now become a model for other countries in Africa. Tell us a little about how this is developing.

As a regional coordinator for MANI, one of my duties is to oversee the country assessment process in the Horn of

## Largest Unreached People Groups in Ethiopia

People Group	Population	% Evang	Religion
Somali	5,197,000	0.03	Islam
Afar	1,425,000	0.08	Islam
Silti	1,013,000	0.5	Islam
Argobba	151,000	0	Islam
Wolane	86,600	0.1	Islam
Oromo, Jimma	84,700	1.2	Islam
Oromo, Yejju	84,700	0	Islam
Hamer-Banna	73,300	0.6	Traditional
Kebena	56,800	1	Islam
Reshiat, Daasanach	51,800	0.5	Traditional
Oromo, Kereyu	34,900	0.05	Islam
Harari, Adere	34,300	0.01	Islam
Turkana	33,100	0.7	Traditional
Suri	30,000	0.4	Traditional
Arab, Yemeni	22,800	0	Islam

Source: Joshua Project

Africa, including Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti. The vision is to equip nationals to do their own research, and then to use the information to mobilize the churches for action. We start by gathering leaders and experts in each country and forming an assessment group. This group examines the Joshua Project data and updates it with known information. Then we begin to pursue the gaps in our knowledge through field survey. In some cases the data is about ten years old, and much has happened since then.

### How can the global Church help with what you are doing?

Partnership is very much welcome and helpful. Outside funding and personnel can have a catalytic impact, though there should be a clear plan involved with this, and a time limit placed on outside assistance. I am personally involved in advocacy and coordination for the Somali, Afar, Beja and Tigre people groups. The church in Africa is becoming more aware, and we need mission-minded leaders to come alongside and help Africans reach their people. This is the focus of MANI: to help Africans reach Africans. That is my call also.<sup>f</sup>