



# God's Gift of Surprising Proximate Strategies



FEATURE ARTICLE

Photo by Jerry Atnip

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**JESUS SAID, ‘GO INTO ALL THE WORLD’** (Mk. 16:15) but that task remains undone for over 1,300 people groups who have never in the history of Christianity had any form of gospel witness. They are referred to as Unengaged Unreached People Groups (UUPGs).

Unreached People Groups (UPGs) are those peoples who have no indigenous movement to Christ that is able to reach their own people. Unengaged Unreached People Groups are those who not only have no Christ Followers, but they are often the ones that no one is looking for.



Jesus revealed His heart and His priorities in the story of leaving the 99 sheep who were safe to find the one who was missing (Lk. 15:4). If this parable is the guiding beacon for the missionary enterprise, how is it possible that after more than 2,000 years of Christian missions there is any such thing as an UUPG? The answer is that they are Unreached and Unengaged for a reason. If there were a 10-point scale that combined both entrenched resistance and extreme difficulty, most UUPGs would be 11.

So where do we go from here? The answer lies in what gives motion to movements. Readers of *Mission Frontiers* are regularly exposed to a range of insights about the ability of Disciple Making Movements/Church Planting Movements to take root and multiply in a given community or people group in a relatively short time frame compared to traditional ministry models.

One of the key ingredients that makes this possible is natural networking. Everyone connects to others in one way or another. It could be language, culture, occupation, marriage or whatever. Relationships that intersect more than one network are what gives the gospel a chance to leap from one network to another. Therein lies the secret of engaging the unengaged.

If the main reason the UUPG door remains locked and bolted are resistant attitudes and difficult circumstances, then the key that unlocks the door may well be near neighbors who share the circumstances and can defuse the attitudes. This is referred to as a proximate strategy.

Movements are based in a chain-reaction of one life impacting another in the context of some common denominator that they share. When the Kingdom takes root in a people group that is a cultural and geographic ‘near neighbor’ to an UUPG, the barriers to entry may not be totally gone but they are the lowest they will ever be. And that equals a strategic opportunity to do what has never been done – engage the unengaged.

### Examples from Cote d’Ivoire

Cote d’Ivoire yields examples of something that is happening across many parts of Africa today.

# 1

## Case Study #1: West of Côte d’Ivoire – a partner

Several years ago, Cityteam (now New Generations) catalyzed a replicating disciple making process among the Mau people in Cote d’Ivoire. Over time a few Mau people visited their extended families living among the Klaa people and introduced them to the Discovery Bible Study Method. Soon Klaa churches began springing up.

When Younoussa Djao, New Generations’ Africa Director, became aware of what happened, his first thought was: “If this can happen when new Christian families start Discovery Groups in new places, then what if we could be more intentional about the process?” So Younoussa started looking for ways to normalize this kind of progression in movements. He did not have to wait long for a second opportunity.

It turns out that New Generations had given DMM training to a few leaders of a Christian denomination and

they had experienced encouraging outcomes. Some time later the denomination chose a new president who started his term by going throughout the country learning what was happening among the churches.

After he visited the leaders trained in Kingdom Movements he went to visit Younoussa to say thank you, and ask for a closer mentoring relationship. Younoussa responded: “If you will engage this process with intentionality, we will train as many missionaries as you are willing to send. They will all be your missionaries but we will be glad to train, coach, and mentor them as long as you feel it is of value.”

Eventually, the Klaa and Mau peoples engaged the Toura people, and eventually the Klaa also engaged the Yacouba people.

## 2

### Case Study #2: From the Ouan to the Malinke

In the Kounahiri region, DMM initiatives were launched among the Ouan people who live among the Malinke. The Ouan are more Animistic than Islamic, but in this case, the movements jumped naturally to the Muslim Malinke because they share many proximate spaces, customs, social events, and family connections through marriage.

## 3

### Case Study #3: In Burkina Faso-Multiple Proximate Engagements

In Burkina Faso, Disciple Making Movements were launched simultaneously among the Tussian, (123 churches) the Bouaba, (194 churches) and the Muslim Unreached People Group (MUPG) the Bobo Mandare (44 churches). The resulting DMM churches among these people groups all spoke Jula, had Muslim backgrounds and were geographically proximate. So, with a little bit of critical mass, the Tussian people (123 churches) engaged the Tiefo and the MUPG Senoufo (25 churches). The Bouaba engaged the Dagari (20 churches) and the Bobo also engaged another Senoufo group.

### Another Region in West Africa

Another New Generations region in Africa began to observe the emergence of grass roots, proximate strategies about eight years ago, just four years into the DMM process. It did not take much for the leader to realize that with some strategic planning and tactical support, this phenomenon could be leveraged for sending missionaries to local people groups, as well as for in-country missionaries to distant populations of their own people, and even in sending missionaries to their people group’s diaspora populations in other countries.

The leader of that region notes that proximate strategies are responsible for about 57-58% of the 7,000 churches that have been planted in the region, because proximate strategies:

- Fulfill and nurture the early apostolic spark in the hearts of recently disciplined people!
- Create natural channels to lost people who in turn discover Christian transformations that make them jealous for the Kingdom of God.
- Insure that apostolic teams understand that engaging an unengaged people is more than checking a box as “done.” It is just the first phase of a natural stream of Kingdom of God advance—the subject about which Jesus gave many parables.

Currently New Generations is realizing that for many of the unengaged peoples whom they have engaged with Kingdom Movements there are often one or two more people groups that live nearby, and one or two that have cultural and linguistic connections in a different part of the same country, or have those same connections within another country. In all those cases there are growing examples of successful engagements.

We are sure that this is a strategy that many other CPM/ DMM ministries have experienced, and perhaps we can all find ways to improve our effectiveness and encourage each other in advancing God’s Kingdom coming from heaven, via “proximate disciple making strategies.”

Finally, the journey into Kingdom DNA not only includes obedience and replication, but also risk (living sacrifice) and ownership (an empowered disciple—not just a recipient). With 1300 challenging people groups still unengaged, may God give us eyes to find God’s proximate strategies that may be hidden in plain sight—His provision for our journey together towards “no place left.” Rom. 15:23 