



THE SCHLEHLEINS

Missionaries to the Tsongas of South Africa



SURVEYING THE YAO IN MALAWI

A Visit to the Most Unreached People Group in Sub-Saharan Africa

Back in 2009 I traveled with my friend Tim Smith (a missionary in central Asia at the time) to visit the Comoros Islands, a tiny atoll off the coast of Tanzania, 99% Sunni Muslim and considered to be among the most unreached people groups on earth.

Tomorrow I'll be traveling to another people group that is also considered unreached. I'd like to tell you about them so that you'll be able to pray for them, for me, and for our trip.

What's an Unreached People Group?

According to [Joshua Project](#), the people group in sub-Saharan Africa that is least reached with the gospel is the Yao people in the eastern region of Malawi.

Joshua Project breaks down the world's population of eight billion people into over 17,00 people groups. Each of these people groups are then placed into one of [five Progress Levels](#) based on their number of evangelicals, defined as someone who believes the Bible and trusts in Jesus Christ as their sole source for salvation.

People groups in Category 5 are called "significantly reached" and have a population of at least 10% evangelical (e.g. the US, Australia). People groups in Categories 2-4 are called "minimally reached" and have populations between 2-10% that claim to be evangelical (e.g. Russia).

The final category is the most alarming. These people groups are called "unreached" because less than 2% of their populations are evangelical and less than 5% even profess to be Christian. These groups represent nearly half of the world's population. Most of these people reside in the 10/40 Window, a rectangular area in the world from 10 degrees north to 40 degrees north latitude, stretching from Portugal

and northern Africa eastward to Japan and Indonesia. The population here is over five billion and it comprises most of the world's Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus. If you want to be a missionary, this is the first place you should consider.

The Yao in Mangochi, Malawi

But what about sub-Saharan Africa? Are there unreached people groups there as well? Yes there are and Joshua Project believes the [Yao](#) people of Malawi are the most sizable unreached [people](#) group in that massive region.

2,000 years after Christ's death, whole people groups sit in spiritual darkness like the Yao that are .5% evangelical and 1% Christian. On JP's website, the Yao are a bright red dot. They are frontier. They are unreached. The only other people in sub-Saharan Africa with this need level are the Forok Fur of Sudan, with a much smaller population of 1.3 million.

Why Are the Yao So Unreached?

There are several reasons the Yao are so unreached. First, they are strongly Muslim in a sea of Christianity. Muslims are notoriously resistant to the Gospel, often violently so. It is no surprise that mosques dot their territory.

Second, according to 2023 [stats](#), Malawi is the 8th poorest country in the world. Poverty often deters missionaries.

Pray for Us

We'll be leaving on January 8 from South Africa and will be surveying the Yao on the eastern banks of Lake Malawi in the Mangochi District. We return January 13.

I'll be traveling with my son Nathan and Karni Katunga. My good friend, Pastor Gideon Mpeni from Zambia, will be waiting for us in Blantyre. Pray for wisdom and open doors.

Warmly, Paul & Melinda

Audrey, Nathan, Lawson, Owen,
Julianna, Clara, Luke, Katie