

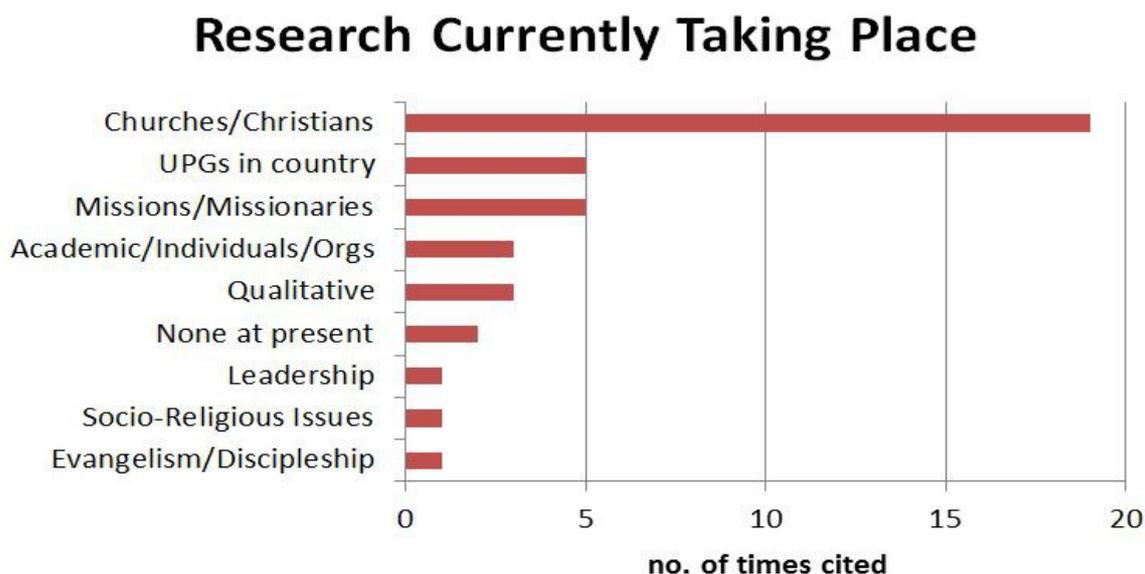


This information was provided from 13 individuals who responded to our questionnaire. In addition, data from a few countries were obtained in response to raising the question of National Research Functions in the April 2015 bulletin of the Community of Mission Information Workers, "Correct Me If I'm Wrong"<sup>ii</sup>. This information was then studied for common themes in the responses. No real attempt was made to get information on the countries we might call traditional or historical sending nations such as the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States which are relatively resource rich and where various parachurch, educational institutions and denominational groups do research. Although these countries were beyond the scope of this study, we recognize they are an important block of data and we hope to include them in future studies.

### Analysis:

The responses were then coded according to the principal themes found in each response. Looking at this data it is important to keep in mind that the respondents were people we knew or at least suspected were involved in research at a national level. These results are presented here as a basis for the discussion which follows:

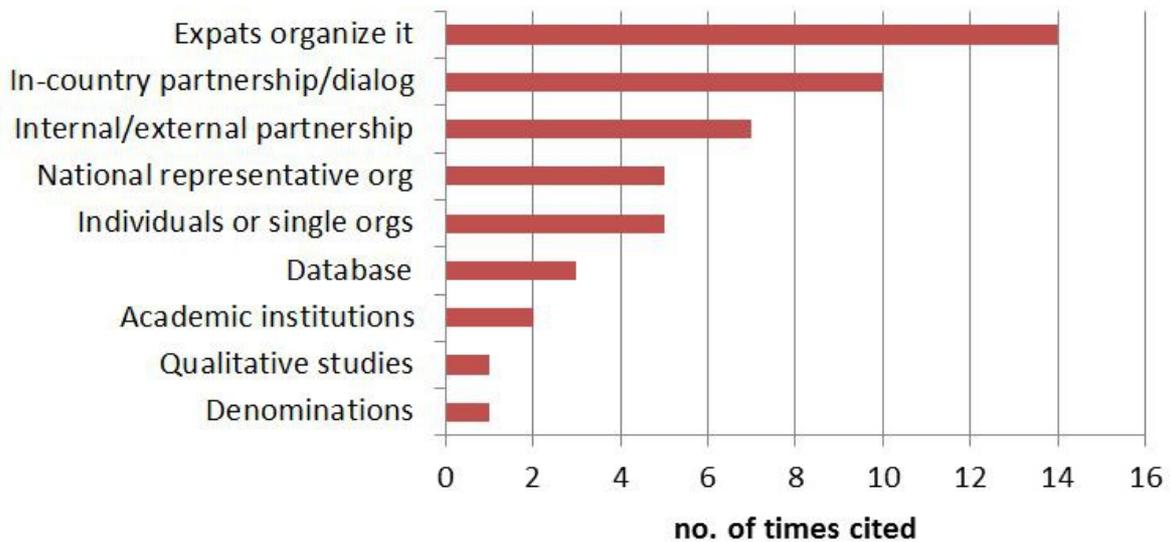
Question 1: What research is currently taking place at a national level?



Here it is apparent that, by far, the most common subject of study is the number and location of existing churches and the believing population in the country. This is followed by the unreached peoples in the country and the church's missionary sending.

Question 2: How is it organized?

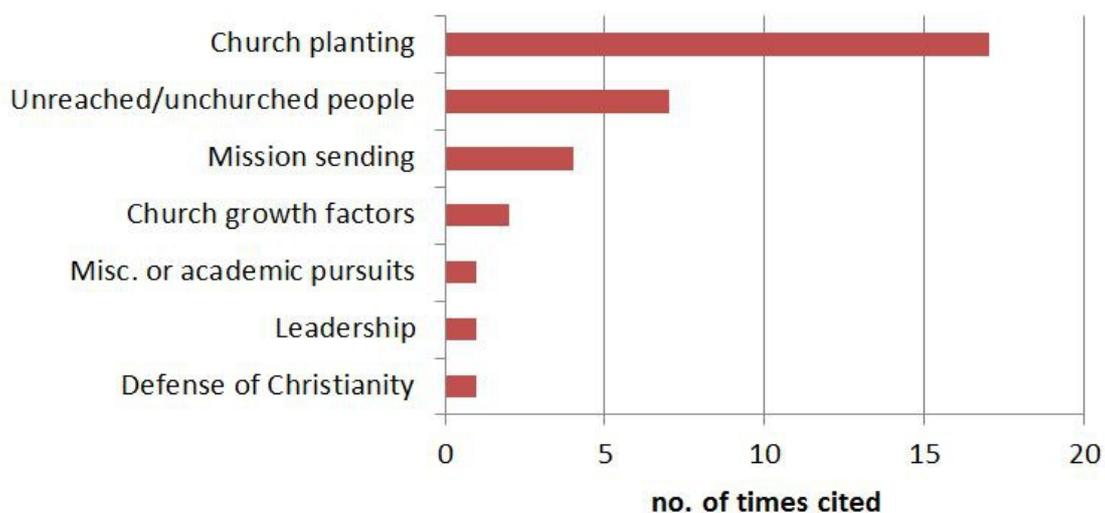
## How the Research is Organized



Of the 13 people responding to the survey, 5 were nationals and 8 were expatriate workers. Answers from both nationals and expatriates showed that the research is most often organized by expats. However, it is encouraging to see that in-country partnerships between national churches, national missions and expat mission agencies working in the country was the second most often cited way of organizing research on a national scale.

Question 3: What are the main research focus areas (internal church growth, foreign mission sending, etc.)?

## Research Focus

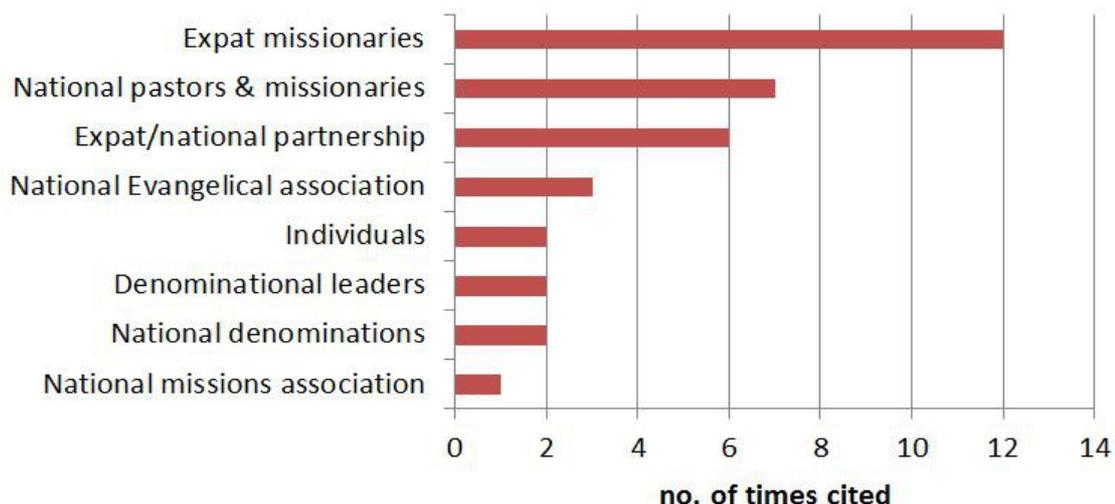


There is some overlap between this question and the first on about what research is currently taking

place and it is clear that some respondents interpreted the questions in the same or in a similar way. However, besides reinforcing the focus of church planting, the unreached and mission sending, we see other areas being mentioned such as church growth factors and defense of Christianity.

Question 4: Who does the organizing of the research?

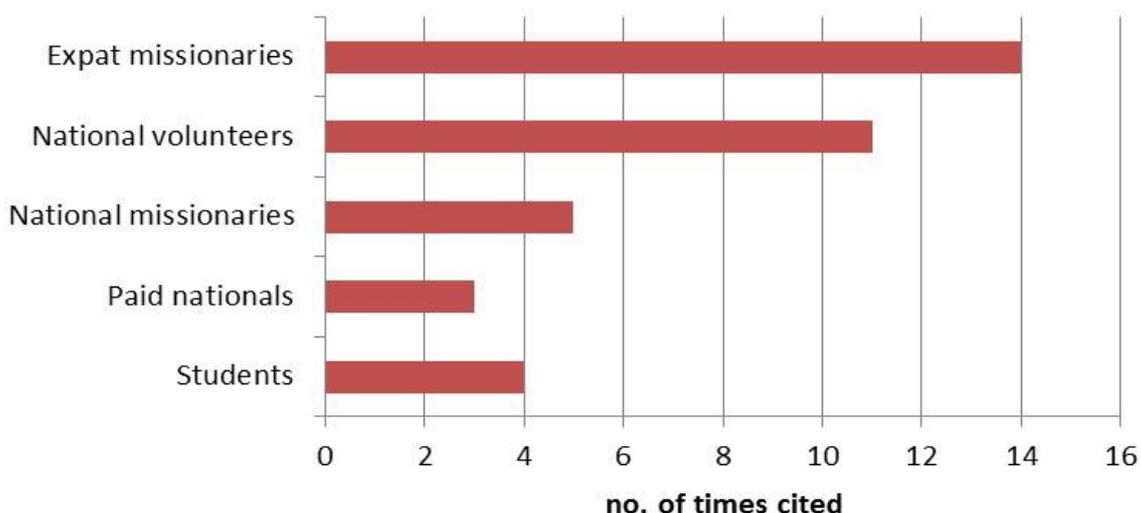
### Who Organizes the Research?



Here it is clear that expat leadership is most common, but that there are other national entities involved. It was mentioned several times that individuals or denominations do their own research or organize it on behalf of the country as well.

Question 5: Who does the actual leg work for the research?

### Who Does the Leg Work?



It is interesting to note that the most cited people to do the actual leg work of the research are

expats. However, if we add together the different categories of nationals doing the work, that makes a majority.

### **Discussion:**

Since this study was limited in scope, the author will add to the above analysis his own comments based upon 28 years of experience in attempting to encourage national research functions in several countries. Further study is needed to verify these observations and several questions for future study are raised at the end.

#### **Western/Missionary Influence:**

In almost every country about which we received data, the research process was begun by expatriate missionary workers and originally funded from sources outside the country. Although this questionnaire didn't ask the "why" question, and this should be studied in the future, we can think of several possible reasons for this: 1) that missionaries are in countries to see results and therefore feel a greater need for good information to track progress against their goals; 2) they feel a need to report back to their sending constituencies about the progress being made; and 3) they may see good information as a tool to help mobilize toward reaching the lost, a national church they have gone to plant, serve or influence for the Kingdom of God.

In some cases reported in this study, it was the national church leaders who felt the need for good information. They had heard of the effectiveness of expat workers in other countries in gathering this information, and then invited the expat workers to begin this process in their own countries. Some examples of this would be Romania, Mongolia, Cambodia and Ethiopia.

In many cases, years after the national research process was begun and where it has been fully integrated into the strategies and planning of the national church, it is still organized by expat workers and often funded with outside money. Notable examples mentioned were the Philippines and Ghana. In most cases, however, once the process was well under way, the actual field data gathering was done by nationals, either paid or volunteer. There were several exceptions where the national church took up the challenge and moved forward with their own research efforts when expat researchers either moved out of the country or on to other job responsibilities (for example, Brazil). A good summary statement came from one African respondent to the survey: "If money is paid to workers, the chances to gather information is better. The challenge though is to get local buy-in and local people/organizations/churches believing in the value of the gathering of the information and providing the resources."

#### **The Place of Academic Research:**

In several countries, it was mentioned that key research had been carried out by nationals and expats alike who were seeking a meaningful project for a degree program (bachelors, masters or doctoral level). Frequently, these students approach expat or nationals involved in national research to ask for orientation regarding what needs to be studied, and they often ask these researchers to become their academic mentors on these projects. When this happens, the studies tend to be more practical and useful for the church in its current situation.

Although this type of research results in some very well-done studies, those doing these studies rarely continue to do church/mission research on a national level once they obtain their degree, and instead move on to their chosen career. This was clear in specific responses from South Africa and

Brazil. It is important to note that as a church matures, the body of accumulated academic research provides a solid basis of understanding which is used and built upon by students and churchmen in training in the future.

### **Regional Mission Movements:**

It is especially the case when the research subject has to do with Unreached People Groups (UPGs) in countries and missionary sending, that regional mission movements have an impact. Leaders in the research area of both MANI (Movement for African National Initiatives) and COMIBAM (Ibero-American Mission Conference) responded to our survey indicating that they were working on research on these two subjects on a regional scale. In order to accomplish this, they have been encouraging and even requiring their member countries on a national level to research the remaining UPGs within their countries and/or their countries' progress as a missionary sending nation.

### **Individual Organizations and Denominations:**

In several countries, especially where the evangelical church is more developed, much of the research is driven by large denominations or parachurch organizations. Examples of countries participating in this survey would be South Africa and Canada. This is most likely the situation in countries like the UK, US, Australia and many other "Western" nations as well.

### **Lack of Long-Term National Adoption/Ownership:**

It appears that the development of national research functions in countries follows a general pattern. It begins with expatriates being the driving force and also doing most of the work and providing the funding for research. The next stage seems to be that expats continue to organize the work, raise a lot of the funding and do the technical work of analysis and reporting. This is followed by an attempt by the expat leaders to transition to national leadership. Depending on the country this sometimes is to national parachurch ministries or denominations, to a national missions association, or to a national church planting partnership. In most developing countries, this is where the process of a national research function hits a road block. Often, this is related to a lack of adequate funding for research ministry. Sometimes, the banner is taken up by an educational institution such as a seminary or Bible college which decides to set up a research department. But, to date, very few countries have been able to surmount this hurdle.

### **Information Needs and Interests Change as the Church in a Nation Moves on:**

The church in each country goes through a developmental process in many areas. Two simultaneous streams that we have observed which directly impact national research functions are:

growth → consolidation → institutionalization

and

receiving outside missionaries or evangelists → reaching one's own people →  
sending to reach beyond one's borders

The felt needs for information change as this developmental process continues and there is often little willingness to invest time and money into maintaining what was often fundamental for a past

phase. This frequently changes once a country has a strong and organized church and has more resource to put to the task.

Perhaps the tendency for research ministry not to be a permanent function in many nations is related to the fact, that as a church develops, information needs change. At first, there is a great need for studies which help understand the culture and how to best communicate the Gospel in that context. These anthropological and ethnographic studies are often undertaken by pioneering missionaries. Once a church is established and begins to grow, the need tends to shift more to geographic or demographic information, that is, where local churches exist and where they don't. This information is essential for continued church growth within a country. It is often accompanied by studies that reveal the factors which lead to church growth, leadership development, etc. within a context. As the church develops further in a nation, both the national church and expatriate workers who are assisting it increasingly need to understand the factors that influence growth, stagnation and decline. Finally, the church develops a greater felt need to track and optimize its growing missionary sending efforts as it matures and begins to understand its responsibility to not only reach the least reached parts of its own country, but also to reach out to the ends of the earth.

In theory, it would be optimal if, as these new information needs developed, we would see the prior needs continuing to be met and kept up to date. This is important for a church to remain healthy and continue to grow and develop. However, as resources, both people and finances, are limited, the natural tendency is to focus those resources where the need is greatest at the time.

In addition, we recognize that the strength, size and composition of the churches are different in every country, and perhaps even among regions within the same country.

### **Conclusions:**

It is hoped that this brief study into the development of national research functions will help us all as we attempt to assist the church in the world with its needs for good information for strategic planning and development. Several observations can be made in conclusion and some indications of areas for further study can be considered.

First of all, although national research functions may be seen as a Western desire and not be the natural direction many cultures tend to go, we have observed over the years that good research is considered extremely valuable and is appreciated all over the world. The national leadership may not think to do the research, or if challenged to do so they may complain it is a Western concept or too expensive. Once the information is available and in their hands, however, they praise the effort and give thanks to God for the valuable and practical help it brings to them and their churches as they grow and develop.

On the other hand, it seems to be hard to effect a natural transition from research being done by outsiders to national ownership of the process. Even in the current context of great respect for national leadership, it seems the driving force behind the majority of church and mission research comes from the West. This is certainly an area that merits additional study. Is there something in the way research starts in countries that develops a pattern that expects outside funding and expertise in order for this to happen? It might be helpful to study secular business and educational research in non-Western countries to get a comparison of how the concept takes hold in those sectors.

This has been only an exploratory study. We intend to continue to study this subject with an eye to

seeing good mission and church information ministries grow in every nation on earth. Future topics of study which are planned include developing a database of the existing National Research Functions and case studies of those which are functioning well to better understand the factors that have led to their success. Any comments, proposed answers to the questions raised here or suggestions are welcome.

*The author wishes to thank all who took the time to share their thoughts in responding to this study.*

Larry Kraft, [research@worksmail.net](mailto:research@worksmail.net), [www.ocresearch.info](http://www.ocresearch.info)

Global Community of Mission Information Workers  
[cmiw@worksmail.net](mailto:cmiw@worksmail.net), [www.globalcmiw.org](http://www.globalcmiw.org)

### **Endnotes:**

- i Waymire, Bob, National Research Mobilization Handbook, January 1994, Light International, page iii
- ii Kraft, Larry, "Research Country by Country?" Correct Me If I'm Wrong, Volume 5, Number 2, April 2015, <http://www.globalcmiw.org/resources/cmiw-bulletin-v5n2-2015-04.pdf>