



Brazilian Indigenous Ethnic Groups

2010 Report

Organized by Ronaldo Lidório

The Brazilian indigenous universe, so diverse and multicultural, has been the constant focus of statistical and socio-cultural studies and measurements. In this document I will present the report of the Research Coordination Section of the Office of Indigenous Affairs (DAI) of the Association of Brazilian Trans-cultural Missions (AMTB), which consists of 41 missionary agencies representing more than 120 different denominations.

The present report results from the analysis and conclusions of the databank of the DAI regarding indigenous people groups; it reflects demographic tendencies, ethnic composition and evangelical initiatives in diverse areas. We will consider the 37 indigenous people groups currently on the brink of extinction, the 41 emergent groups and the processes of urbanization among 111 different groups. We will see the 121 unevangelized or nearly unevangelized people groups, the 95 groups without a missionary presence and the 38 languages which still lack Bible translation or equivalent oral projects. We will also present information regarding the 257 programs and social projects coordinated by the evangelical missionary force among indigenous peoples and their expressive relevance.

The Research Coordination Section concluded in 2010 a broad program of research and data review in conjunction with its partners: the National Council of Indigenous Pastors and Evangelical Leaders (CONPLEI), the ETHNOLOGUE/SIL, PNA100, SEPAL, Antropos Institute, various field researchers, and collaborative analysts. Ethnic research has been fruitful for the Brazilian evangelical missionary movement. Carl Harrison, Rinaldo de Mattos, Isaac Souza, Shirley Bacon, Osvaldo Álvares, Ted Limpic, Enoque Faria and Paulo Bottrel, among others, have carried out this ambitious project of research, organization and data analysis over many years, and the result of this research has been the databank of the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DAI) of the AMTB.

As part of this current review (DAI/AMTB 2010), we carried out 27 field research projects, 76 interviews, consultations in the databanks of the IBGE and FUNAI, among others, for a total of 4,200 data evaluated. A working group consisting of the following persons was formed for review of the resulting databank: Edson Bakairi, Stan Anonby, Wilsamara Filgueiras, Andreas Fuchs, Richard Eger, and Ronaldo Lidório. Other brothers and sisters collaborated faithfully throughout the entire review process, and to them we are immensely grateful. We give special thanks to Elisabete Wiens, Cassiano Luz, Adriano Hedler, David Philips, and Gedeon Lidório, who invested time and effort in this task. The directors of DAI/AMTB, Rocindes Correia and Edward Luz, coordinated the course of the work and the concluding process of analysis.

The results show an eclectic picture, involving growing urban migration, the explosion during the last 15 years of individuals who opt to declare themselves as indigenous, the accelerating pace of mother-tongue language loss among peripheral ethnic populations in urban centers, and the intensification of problems of health, education and survival in rural villages.

The statistical presentation regarding an evangelical and missionary presence also shows us data that simultaneously inform us and make us think deeply. The indigenous church is in a period of obvious growth, and this is happening as a result of intertribal relations at the local level, missionary activity with emphasis on discipleship and training, and three strong national indigenous movements. The missionary presence coordinates more than 200 social programs and projects of importance in the reduction of suffering in critical areas, especially in terms of health and education. The linguistic register, combined with the production of literacy materials, is another vigorous fruit of missionary initiatives, involved especially with groups that remain on the margin of the larger society's care and interest.

We present below the statistical data gathered, with some associated implications. The second part of this report consists of statistical graphs and a summary of the data presented.

DEMOGRAPHIC TENDENCIES

The growth of the overall population of indigenous people groups in Brazil is quite significant. In 1991 the official indigenous population of Brazil consisted of 294,000 individuals. At the beginning of the year 2000, however, the IBGE registered growth rates of up to 150% among numbers of people self-declaring themselves as indigenous, especially in urban areas or sectors in the process of urbanization. In the IBGE's 2000 research, approximately 734,000 persons declared themselves to be indigenous, and that number rose to almost 900,000 in the IBGE's 2010 survey. There are various reasons for this statistical increase. We observe that the phenomenon of self-identification on a broad scale occurred especially in urban areas and sectors of increasing urbanization in the northeastern and southeastern regions of Brazil. The underlying reasons are quite diverse, but we calculate that three of the main reasons are: cultural renewal, political activism, and the search for governmental incentives.

The National Foundation of Health (FUNASA), an entity related to the Brazilian Ministry of Health, presented recent reports in which 520,000 indigenous people are currently being cared for in 34 Special Indigenous Health Districts (DSEIs) linked to the National Health Insurance Program (SUS). 54.2% of these persons reside in the broad Amazonian area and 26% in states of the northeastern region of the country.

DAI/AMTB, in its analysis of ethnic groups already known or presumed to exist, recognizes an overall indigenous population of 616,000 in the year 2010. Among these people groups, 52% live in rural villages and 48% in urbanized or urbanizing areas. Nearly 60% of the Brazilian indigenous population resides in the general Amazonian region (called “Amazônia Legal”), which is composed of the states of Amazonas, Acre, Amapá, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima, Tocantins, Mato Grosso and the western sector of Maranhão. On the basis of a reading of demographic movements, however, we calculate that within 5 years there will be relative equality between the size of purely rural populations and those that live in cities of various sizes. Beginning around 2015, the number of indigenous persons living in urban centers will certainly be greater and following a pattern of increasing growth.

There is a marked presence of ethnic minorities in general. Forty-six of these ethnic groups are composed of up to 100 persons; 97 groups of between 101-500 persons; 24 from 501-1,000 persons; 49 groups of between 1,001-5,000 people; 11 from 5,001-10,000; and 9 groups show populations greater than 10,000 persons. Sixty-nine of Brazil’s ethnic groups do not show a specific population number.

According to the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), there are 611 indigenous reservations (TIs) already recognized or in the process of recognition, accounting for 13% of total land in Brazil, of which 21% lies within the greater Amazonian region.

ETHNIC COMPOSITION

The perception of ethnic survey analysis passes through various filters that cloud an absolutely clear set of statistics. One of these filters is the existence of groups that are still isolated, that is, ethnic communities who live in remote areas with little or no contact with other indigenous or non-indigenous groups. There are 27 such groups listed, but there may be as many as 52 in all.

There are also various ethnic groups treated as a block, which are in fact diverse communities with distinct socio-cultural and linguistic identities. One example of such groups is that of the Yanomamis, frequently listed as a single indigenous group but which compose diverse ethnicities. The same thing occurs with the so-called “Maku,” a pejorative generic term used to refer to at least 5 different ethnic groups.

Finally, there are also resurgent (or emergent) groups which, through miscegenation with non-indigenous persons (and other dispersive factors), had lost for a period of time their ethnic self-identification. For various reasons these groups have once again requested recognition as indigenous communities. These are the most acculturated groups, so to speak, and there are 41 of them within the national territory.

Therefore, among known ethnic groups (228), isolated communities (27), partially isolated groups (10), possibly extinct communities (9), resurgent groups (41) and as yet unstudied communities (25), we recognize a total of 340 indigenous groups in Brazil.

A relevant statistic refers to the growing process of urbanization. Currently 111 ethnic groups are represented in cities of various sizes, and they list the following as factors which attracted them to these population centers: (1) the search for formal education in Portuguese; (2) proximity to better health care; (3) access to assimilated products (especially clothing, foodstuffs, entertainment and alcoholic beverages); and (4) the expectation of a better life in general. The data relating to the urbanization process and its socio-cultural, socio-linguistic and domestic implications are inconclusive, however, but they point in the general direction of a worrisome scenario made up of serious deficiencies in the areas of social inclusion, poor nutrition and difficulty of access to public help initiatives.

EVANGELICAL INITIATIVES

The indigenous church is present, at various levels of activity, in 150 ethnic groups, with local church leadership active in 51 of these but without such ethnic leadership in 99 others.

There is an evangelical missionary presence in 182 indigenous communities. This presence represents more than 30 evangelical mission agencies and nearly 100 different denominations.

In 165 ethnic groups there are social programs and projects coordinated by evangelical missionaries. Of these, 92 have an active social program, with 54 showing two such programs and 19 with three or more, for a total of 257 programs and projects with an emphasis on various areas of education (linguistic analysis, cataloging, literacy, local publications, and translation), health (basic care, first aid, and medical clinics), and survival and socio-cultural facets (cultural appreciation, citizenship promotion, fair market, and social inclusion). Only 17 ethnic groups with an evangelical missionary presence lack active social programs. More than 90% of these programs and projects are subsidized by Brazilian churches, businesses and evangelical representatives. These numbers show that the evangelical missionary presence is and has been, historically and traditionally, associated regularly with social and cultural initiatives, especially those of great value for local communities.

Among the 182 ethnic groups with an evangelical missionary presence, 132 include evangelical indigenous members and 50 do not. There are 16 seminaries and Bible courses in Brazil with an emphasis on indigenous preparation and three national movements in the area of evangelical indigenous initiatives and coordination: the National Council of Indigenous Pastors and Evangelical Leaders (CONPLEI); the Association of Evangelical Indigenous Women (AMEI), and the Indigenous Association of Evangelical Translators (AITE).

Another national movement with emphasis on human rights and an anti-infanticide campaign was begun by ATINI – Voice for Life; during the past few years it has attracted support and participation from all evangelical segments, setting off debates, exposing incriminating facts, and resulting in actions in support of life and of children in danger of infanticide.

There are 121 ethnic groups which are still unevangelized or with little evangelical contact; these are communities lacking any evangelical missionary presence or even evangelical indigenous members. Other factors such as access to other evangelized groups and demographic dispersion are also considered in this category. Of these 121 relative unevangelized ethnic groups, 74 live in accessible areas. The remainder are divided between partially restricted (13) or fully restricted (34) areas.

There is no missionary presence in 95 known ethnic communities. We estimate a total of 147 such communities, of which 95 are already known, 27 are isolated and 25 remain to be surveyed and researched.

Among the 150 ethnic communities with an evangelical indigenous presence, 99 lack their own indigenous leadership and 54 lack access to any program of Biblical teaching, which factors show that the indigenous church is growing rapidly but lacks a equivalent growth in the areas of education and training, which may eventually create serious problems due to syncretism and nominalism.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS AND BIBLE TRANSLATION

We here consider the existence of 181 indigenous languages in Brazil, in spite of the various discussions and studies which are still inconclusive with regard to several of them.

In 54 of these languages there are currently programs of linguistic analysis and literacy through evangelical initiative. In 31 of these languages there are also programs of Bible translation. At the moment we find 58 languages which possess a complete Bible, New Testament and/or Biblical portions in the mother tongue, serving a total of 66 ethnic groups.

In 3 languages there is a complete Bible (serving 7 ethnic groups); in 32 there is a complete New Testament (serving 36 ethnic communities), and in 23 there are Biblical portions, serving the same number of ethnic groups.

In 10 languages there is a clear need for Bible translation and in 28 the need for a special translation project based on orality, while 31 show an undefined situation which needs to be evaluated. These 31 languages to be evaluated are spoken by 59 ethnic communities. The languages needing translation projects and those needing a special project based on orality show very little potential for the understanding of the Gospel in any other language, through any other means of communication, or via any neighboring groups.

There are nearly 102 indigenous groups that speak Portuguese. Fifty-seven of these groups speak only Portuguese, while 45 are bilingual or trilingual with Portuguese. Forty-eight of these 102 ethnicities evidence the need of a new version of the Bible in Portuguese to facilitate their understanding. This matter will be the subject of further research.

According to Moore, 13% of living Brazilian indigenous languages have been completely described, while 38% show an advanced description, 29% an incipient description, and 19% little or no descriptive material.

The German researcher Michael Kraus says that 27% of South American languages are no longer learned by children. This means that an increasing number of indigenous children are losing daily the power of communication in their mother tongue. The reasons for this vary from the socio-economic pressure of other ethnic communities near the indigenous villages and towns to a lack of socio-cultural esteem sensed by indigenous groups, which strengthens the elements of attraction drawing them in the direction of the surrounding society.

It is estimated that, during the period of conquest by the Portuguese, some 1,273 indigenous languages were spoken in what is now known as Brazil. That means that we have lost 85% of our linguistic diversity over the last 500 years. Scholars affirm that there is a socio-linguistic crisis in the State of Rondônia, where 65% of indigenous languages are in serious danger of extinction because they are no longer used by the children and have a small number of native speakers.

This linguistic loss is associated with irreparable cultural losses, such as the transmission of knowledge, artistic forms, oral traditions and world view.

The presence of missionary linguists, educators, and translators, through initiatives linked to AITE (Indigenous Association of Evangelical Translators), ALEM (Evangelical Linguistic Missionary Association), AMEM (Mission of World Evangelization), Amanajé, APMT (Presbyterian Agency of Trans-cultural Missions), ATE (Evangelical Trans-cultural Association), JAMI (Administrative Mission Council of the National Baptist Convention), JOCUM (YWAM) – Youth with a Mission, JMN (Council of National Missions), MEIB (Evangelical Mission of Indians of Brazil), Missão Evangélica Caiuá, UNIEDAS Indigenous

Mission, MEVA (Evangelical Mission of Amazonia), MNTB (New Tribes Mission of Brazil), SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics), and various others in the area of cataloguing, analyzing and producing literacy materials in indigenous languages, has contributed to the heightening of linguistic, social and cultural evaluation of Brazil's indigenous population as a whole.

Thus, it is understood that the gospel doesn't only answer the deep questioning of the human soul, but also contributes to individual, social, cultural and linguistic survival of the indigenous peoples of Brazil.

CHALLENGES TO FACE

In the face of this overall picture, various challenges appear, and I will point out those linked directly to (1) research and evaluation, (2) evangelization and discipleship, (3) translation and use of Biblical Scriptures, (4) indigenous training, (5) necessity of new missionaries, (6) necessity of support for projects already underway, and (7) specialized support.

Research and Evaluation

The goal is to present a full overview of ethnic, linguistic, and socio-cultural reality and collaborate in the working out of new initiatives of relevance alongside the indigenous peoples of Brazil.

The 42 remote ethnic groups and the 37 groups in danger or in process of extinction demand attention.

The 121 ethnic communities which are unevangelized or nearly so demand research to evaluate adequate strategies of cooperation and interaction with these groups.

There should also be wider research among the 111 ethnic groups in process of urbanization, regarding factors of attraction and their implications for these groups.

The 59 ethnic groups which speak languages as yet unevaluated demand socio-linguistic research.

It is also necessary to evaluate the demand of 48 ethnic groups which are monolingual, bilingual or trilingual in Portuguese and have requested a more understandable version of the Bible in Portuguese.

Evangelization and Discipleship

Of the 121 ethnic groups which are evangelized or nearly so, 79 reside in areas considered viable, that is, in which there is possible unimpeded interaction with indigenous people groups. Another 47 communities reside in restricted or partially restricted areas. Our attention is drawn to the high number

of ethnicities without knowledge of the gospel in relatively open areas that still lack evangelical initiatives and a missionary presence.

There are also 95 known indigenous groups with no missionary presence, which shows that the great need of missionary movements still has to do with human resources. Considering that more than 40% of current missionary activity urgently demands more personnel to assure its continuation, we may estimate a need of at least 357 new missionary units (single persons or couples) to reinforce the existent work and begin new projects. Taking into consideration specialized activities as well as the administrative, logistic, and pastoral work that precedes and accompanies such initiatives, there will certainly be a need of at least 500 new missionary units to take on the present challenge. This will not be possible without (1) mobilization of the Brazilian Church in recruitment and sending, (2) the support of institutions of missionary, theological, missiological, anthropological, and linguistic instruction and preparation, and (3) much prayer.

The 37 ethnic communities which are nearly extinct or facing the possible risk of extinction, as well as the 111 in the process of urbanization, form two groups with very distinct demographic movements but with an equal need of evangelization and discipleship, for which strategies are more complex.

Translation and Use of Scriptures

The challenge in this area appears in the 10 languages lacking Bible translation, the 28 needing a special project based on orality, and the 54 which have current linguistic and translation projects underway. It is imperative for us to support those who are already on course, and not invest only in new initiatives.

We also note a challenge in many ethnic groups which already have the Bible, or portions of it, in their mother tongue; this challenge is related to Scripture use. There are 17 ethnic groups with access to portions of the Bible in the mother tongue but lacking evangelical indigenous believers in their midst, and at least 25 others with the same access to Scripture as well as a local church, but without their own indigenous leadership.

Therefore, we note that in this area we must look toward those individuals and groups whose projects are already in progress, so that they don't lose heart along the way; toward those who are about to begin new challenges, and toward those whose translation work is already finished, but where interest in the use of the Scriptures needs to be reawakened. We need as many educators and teachers as linguists and translators!

Indigenous Training

The 99 ethnic groups which possess an evangelical church, but lack local leadership, represent at the present time an extension of the challenge of training. Added to that is the fact that 67 of these groups have little access to Biblical courses, and 54 of them have no such access at all.

The indigenous church is living a moment of increasing interest in Biblical training and various other areas of study, but suffers from an absence of training in areas of demand and need. Between 2006-2009 we have registered 4,004 indigenous participants in the meetings and congresses of CONPLEI, or sponsored by CONPLEI, which demonstrates a great interest in training and specialized preparation. It is necessary for us to observe this tendency and begin now with infrastructures on a scale appropriate for future needs.

However, there is a need to strengthen the seminaries and courses which already exist for indigenous training, investing in new initiatives and also encouraging training movements such as CONPLEI launched by the indigenous community itself.

One of the strategic conclusions most obvious and urgent in recent years is this: It is necessary to invest in an intentional and abundant manner in the training of evangelical indigenous leaders.

New Missionaries and Initiatives

As was previously mentioned, there is a great need for at least 500 new missionary units in coming years to deal with demands and opportunities. It's simply common sense that they (1) are committed to Christ and to mission work among indigenous peoples; (2) are desirous of being involved with medium- and long-range challenges and programs; (3) are able to learn a new language and culture; and (4) have a strong desire to become fully involved with the indigenous world.

There is a need for new missionaries to carry on already existing projects as well as to initiate new ones. In both situations, the principal activities are: (1) Evangelization and church planting; (2) Discipleship and training of indigenous leaders; (3) Development of relevant social action; (4) Bible translation and special projects based on orality; (5) Specialized support: logistics, transportation and communication; missiology, linguistics and anthropology; (6) Research and strategy development.

Support for Projects Already Underway

It is essential to pay attention to missionary activities already underway, especially those that are in the phase of consolidation or conclusion (with over 10 years of existence). Given the nature of the Brazilian

Evangelical Church and its strong desire for new initiatives, we sometimes overlook precious seeds that were planted one or more decades ago and need greater attention and support. We are referring to the missionary presence in 182 people groups, to the 257 social programs currently in existence, to linguistic and translation projects in 54 languages, to the three great evangelical indigenous movements, and to the 16 seminaries and courses emphasizing indigenous training.

Specialized Support

In diverse missionary activities there is a need for specialized technical support, essential for the quality of production. We may cite the areas of linguistics, anthropology, missiology, research, community development, social action, transportation, communication, and logistics. Without an adequate strengthening through specialized support, missionary activities among indigenous people could lose force, quality and opportunity.

We may observe what institutions and initiatives such as Missionary Aviation Fellowship (Asas) represent in relation to support in the areas of logistics, transportation, communication, and the empowering of social action. Such specialized initiatives multiply missionary activities, and form a fundamental part of a goodly portion of the work carried out.

CONCLUSION

The sincere desire to be related in a relevant manner with indigenous peoples is not sufficient to guarantee correct attitudes, approaches and initiatives. It is also necessary to have a two-way relationship, constant self-evaluation and discernment.

AMTB, in its code of values (expressed in the 'Introduction' to the book *A Questão Indígena*, Ultimato Publishers) affirms that the evangelical missionary movement possesses goals of strong collaboration in the cultural, social, and linguistic preservation of indigenous societies of our country, such as the following:

- Contribute to the indigenous group's esteem for, and desire to remain in, its own home area, thus avoiding the negative social consequences of tempestuous migrations toward river towns and urban or urbanizing centers.
- Collaborate in the formation of good education programs in the mother tongue, esteeming it and the culture it represents and making possible the registration, preservation, and transmission of its historical and social facts in the face of increasing external social influences that frequently invalidate the value of a group's mother tongue.
- Collaborate toward programs in vital areas such as health, satisfying the essential needs of indigenous groups.

- Contribute so that processes of integration already underway with the non-indigenous society may collaborate with the mechanisms of ethnic, cultural and linguistic esteem, so that the indigenous group may not become dissolved or weakened in the face of a strong surrounding society. Likewise, collaborate with the group in its search for a worthy coexistence with others, when outside its home area.

AMTB further declares its belief that the gospel liberates all who believe and, therefore, its desire to share it with all peoples. It distinguishes *evangelism* from *catechism* in the following words: *This evangelization differs from catechizing with respect to its content, approach, and communication. The content of the catechism is the church, with its symbols, structure and practice, its ecclesiology. The content of evangelism is the gospel itself, its Christian values centered on Jesus Christ. Catechism is characterized by imposition and coercion. Evangelism is characterized by dialog and explanation. Catechism communicates through the transmitter's codes, language, and customs, importing and rooting values. Evangelization is carried out through the utilization of the receptor's codes, language, culture, and environment, respecting local values and contextualizing the message.*

We therefore believe that the transforming experience of the Apostle John is the plan of God for the whole world: *The next day John saw Jesus, who was coming toward him, and said: Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29)

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