

Three Insights that Facilitate Nationwide Disciple Making Movements

By Russell D. Mitchell*



Not all saturation church planting or disciple making processes produce equal fruit. What makes the difference? If we have limited resources, which emphases are most fruitful? These are some of the questions posed at the beginning of the 2017 National Church Planting Processes Survey. This study aimed at assessing the effectiveness of whole-nation disciple making process, sometimes referred to as Saturation Church Planting or DAWN Initiatives. This article focuses on the three statistically significant insights that followed from the analysis of participant responses; insights, which when acted upon, can guide the development of nationwide disciple making movements.

The Background of this Study

DAWN is an acronym for “Disciple A Whole Nation.” Most readers will associate this phrase with Matthew 28:19–20, the Great Commission. In a nutshell, “DAWN aims at mobilizing the whole body of Christ in whole countries in a determined effort to complete the Great Commission in that country by working toward the goal of providing an evangelical congregation for every village and neighborhood of every class, kind and condition of people in the whole country.”¹ The DAWN vision is also referred to as Saturation Church Planting (SCP).

DAWN grew out of Jim Montgomery’s missionary work in the Philippines with Overseas Crusades, the same organization this author serves with today—though now known as OC International or One Challenge. In the 1970s Montgomery played a key role in motivating and mobilizing Philippine church leaders to set a goal to establish an evangelizing congregation in every small community of that country by the year 2000. It “dawned” on Montgomery that the best way to disciple the whole nation of the Philippines would be to establish a “witnessing cell of believers” in every population center in the country.² Projections estimated that this would require 50,000 churches, quite an audacious goal when there were roughly 5,000 evangelical churches in the country! But by 2000, the Philippines had more than 50,000 evangelical churches—although not every small community had a witnessing church.

The DAWN vision, birthed in the Philippines, developed into a strategy for world evangelization. In 1985 Montgomery founded Dawn Ministries to help church leaders in other countries to disciple their nations. Montgomery’s book, *DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go*, published in 1989, was key in spreading the vision globally. DAWN became perhaps the most significant world evangelism strategy during the final decade of the twentieth century as DAWN country initiatives were a significant part of the AD2000 and Beyond Movement championed by the Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Association.

Although DAWN initiatives were launched in over 150 countries,³ a scholarly review of the effectiveness of these initiatives on a global scale has yet to surface. So, beginning in June 2017, at the invitation of Dr. Murray Moerman, who

is writing a book to commemorate the 30th anniversary of *DAWN 2000's* publication, this author began this first-of-its-kind multinational study on the effectiveness of whole nation church planting initiatives.

The 2017 National Church Planting Process Survey

A 21-question online survey was created to gather data for this study. A goal was set to have input from 100 persons with significant experience in advancing national church planting projects—a goal which was exceeded as 117 people participated in the survey, reporting on approximately sixty countries from all continents.

The key question for this study asks, “What would you consider to be one or two of the most significant lessons (positive or negative) that you have discovered about facilitating a national church planting process?” Responses to this question provided rich insights.

The rest of the survey focuses on the country where the respondent has *the most significant experience*. Participants were first asked to rate the effectiveness of the national church planting process for the country of their *most significant experience*. Thirteen additional questions evaluate how well the DAWN strategy was implemented in the same country. Twelve of the questions are based on the eight-point DAWN strategy elaborated in Montgomery’s subsequent book, *Then the End Will Come*⁴ as he considers this “the ideal DAWN strategy.”⁵ An additional question solicits information about para-church organizations that may have made significant contributions to national church planting processes.

The following three insights, based upon statistical analysis, are further augmented by the lessons practitioners shared in response to the key question.

Three Key Insights from the 2017 National Church Planting Process Survey

The “ideal” DAWN strategy is effective

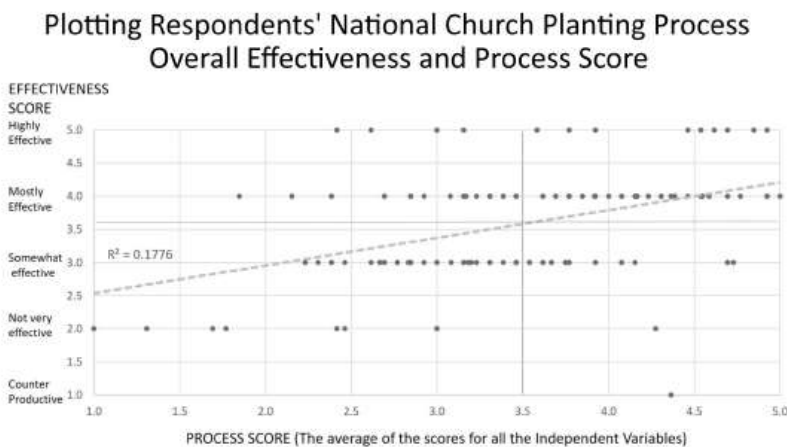
This study’s findings support the generalization that the better a country implements the “ideal” DAWN Strategy (Table 11.1), the greater the effectiveness of the national church planting process. The following graph correlates each respondent’s overall effectiveness score for the country of his or her most significant involvement with the average score for the thirteen DAWN process variables studied. 110 cases are plotted.⁶ The dots represent the intersection of each respondent’s evaluation of effectiveness of the national church planting process on the Y Axis and average score of the DAWN process variables on the X Axis. *The trend line indicates that the better a country implements the “ideal” DAWN Strategy, the greater the effectiveness of the national church planting process.*⁷

Several survey participants mentioned that developing an effective nationwide church planting process requires workers to first understand the ministry context and then contextualize the disciple making process. Montgomery himself expected that field workers would contextualize the disciple making process.

Table 11.1 The “Ideal” DAWN Strategy

1	National leaders work together to mobilize the whole Body of Christ to disciple the whole nation.
2	A Saturation Church Planting vision drives the movement.
3	Research guides the process.
4	Key stakeholders gather for a national congress.
5	A national SCP goal is set.
6	Denominations and mission groups implement their own action plans.
7	The movement grows through on-going research, publications, seminars, and follow up gatherings.
8	Effective prayer movements undergird the process

Figure 11.1 National Church planting Process Overall Effectiveness Score



“A careful study of the context of the Church—whether it be on a local, regional, people group or national basis—will suggest what methodologies will be most productive in the disciple-making process.⁸

Lessons are being learned and revisions constantly being made. DAWN, as it turns out, is not cast in iron. It has, instead, an inherent flexibility which accommodates contextual differences in the nations... without compromising the vision.⁹

Thus, it would be improper to uncritically implement DAWN as a “standard solution strategy.”¹⁰ Contextualizing and refining a whole nation disciple making process is essential for effectiveness.

Referring again to the graph, while the overall trend shows that the better the DAWN strategy is implemented, the greater the effectiveness of the nationwide church planting process, the graph also shows that there are outliers or exceptions to this generalization, which may raise questions for some: Is it necessary to implement all elements of the DAWN strategy? Are there shortcuts? Or why did the strategy not seem to work in some cases?

Clearly there are no shortcuts. Further analysis shows that *every element of the DAWN strategy studied benefited the national process at some point*. No factor was shown to be extraneous.

However, analysis also indicated that the elements of the “ideal” DAWN strategy do not make an equal contribution to effectiveness. The Pareto or 80:20 Principle, which postulates that for many events, generally 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes, implies that only two or three of the thirteen elements studied may be responsible for 80% of the results. Indeed, this was found to be so, as only two elements of the “Ideal” DAWN strategy have a statistically significant relationship to an effective National Church Planting Process: “National Leaders” and “Seminars and Consultations.” These two elements largely account for the difference between higher and lower performing countries. The following points focus on these two significant factors.

National Leadership is the most important part of the DAWN strategy

“National Leaders” is the *most statistically significant* factor contributing to the effectiveness of a National Church Planting Process. When comparing more effective national processes to those less effective, “national leaders” was the highest rated factor in the more effective group.¹¹

Upon analyzing practitioners’ responses to the key question, it was surprising to find that the predominate theme pertained to leadership. *This was the most frequently mentioned positive factor that promotes church planting. On the other hand, poor leadership, at national, denominational or local levels, was the most frequently mentioned hindrance to effective disciple making.* It appears that developing visionary, competent, courageous leadership—with Christ-like character—is the most significant factor contributing to an effective national process.

Multiple field workers mentioned “buy in” by church leadership as a key factor for advancing a national church planting process. Here are several quotes.

You need the buy-in and participation by national leaders.

A major lesson learned is to engage with the local church early on so that they are a part of the process and take ownership, or at least “buy-in” to the process.

It is easier to get people to buy into a vision to plant churches than to buy into the hard work of planting them where there are none present (ethnically, culturally and geographically speaking).

The timing is God’s but the effort to accomplish the process comes mostly from the National level leaders and their interest in seeing this succeed.

So, it seems that “buy in” by church leadership is a key factor for advancing a national church planting process and may partially explain why some national processes come up short.

These observations give greater meaning to what evangelical leaders have pointed out. For example, Bill Hybels, asserts, “The local church is the hope of the world, and its future rests primarily in the hands of its leaders.” And John Maxwell declares, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” When it comes to advancing a national church planting process, national leadership is so key. *To advance a whole nation disciple making process, focus on developing Church leaders.*

Seminars and Consultations are key to discipling whole nations

The second statistically significant element of the “Ideal” DAWN strategy is “Seminars and Consultations.” This finding was unexpected, since these are but a subpoint of the “ideal” DAWN strategy under item seven. Seminars and Consultations provide more than just instruction. In Montgomery’s thought, seminars and consultations help motivate, train and mobilize denominational leaders, organizational leaders, pastors and Christian workers to develop and implement their own church planting action plans.

Several survey participants shared that seminars and consultations should not be just national events, but ought to be held in different regions of a country, and preferably at the local level. Countries with an effective national process did a better job at holding seminars and consultations throughout the country over an extended period.

To summarize, countries with highly effective national processes received superior ratings for “National Leaders” and did an exceptional job at holding “Seminars and Consultations.” *Focusing attention upon these two critical factors, without omitting the other elements of the “ideal” DAWN strategy, leads to a more effective nationwide disciple making process.*

Facilitating National Movements

In *Innovation in Mission*, Derek Seipp cites one writer who suggests that we are now transitioning into new era of missions, characterized by “facilitation of national movements.”¹² Certainly, what we have learned about the DAWN strategy speaks to facilitating whole nation church planting movements. After more than forty years of field experience, we can affirm the value of the DAWN strategy, and we certainly know more now about advancing whole-nation disciple making processes than before.

What might this mean for the future?

In our present context, whole nation or saturation church planting initiatives seem to have taken a back seat to Church Planting or Disciple Making Movements. Few will deny that the breakthroughs CPMs or DMMs are having among some of the more resistant ethnic groups are wonderful, accompanied with stories of how God is giving the growth. However, CPMs or DMMs are not replacements for saturation church planting or whole nation processes. While CPMs and DMMs are movements, they are not normally nationwide movements—the very thing that the DAWN strategy aims at facilitating.

Disciple Making Movements and whole-nation processes are complementary. In the judgment of this author, whole-nation processes augment Disciple Making Movements in at least three ways. First, DAWN provides a biblically based, whole nation vision for saturation that involves the whole Body of Christ. Second, the “ideal” DAWN strategy offers an effective, contextualizable framework to mobilize the entire Body of Christ to work together toward discipling a whole nation. Third, national processes capitalize upon the power of good information gained through mission research. Recall Montgomery’s description of a whole national initiative: “It is a DAWN project if it is built on the premise that the most direct way to work at the discipling of a whole nation is to fill it with evangelical congregations so that there is one within easy access both practically and culturally of every person of every class, kind and condition of mankind in that nation.”¹³ To accomplish this goal, good information is needed to motivate leaders, mobilize prayer, establish relevant goals, shape strategy, solve problems and provide insightful evaluation. Typically DAWN research focuses on the Harvest Force and the Harvest Field. On the other hand, CPM/DMMs closely monitor Harvest Fruit and provide effective tactics for establishing witnessing cells. Since the “ideal” DAWN strategy leaves the tactical questions of how to plant churches and make disciples up to local leadership, CPM/DMMs are free to flourish within the whole-nation process. Thus, the two approaches to disciple making are complementary and mutually beneficial.

Twenty-first century Church leaders can only benefit by familiarizing themselves with the strengths of the “ideal” DAWN strategy and enriching themselves with insights of field practitioners as they continue refine the process to best suit the realities of their ministry contexts.¹⁴

Combining what we have learned about facilitating whole nation disciple making processes and Disciple Making Movements is the surest way to make the greatest strides toward fulfilling the Great Commission in the next generation.

Russ Mitchell enjoyed fifteen years of fruitful ministry in Romania with OC International where he helped develop the national church planting process and a cross-cultural missions movement that continues today. His key contributions in research led to consultations with workers in the Ukraine, Moldova and Mongolia. Currently he serves on OC International's Global Research Team as Assistant Director.

Notes

1. Jim Montgomery, *DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1989), 12.
2. Montgomery, *DAWN 2000*, 50–52.
3. Steve Steele, "A Case Study in Cooperative Evangelism. "The Dawn Model," a paper presented at the Billy Graham Round Table of Evangelism at Wheaton College (2002), 1.
4. Jim Montgomery, *Then the End Shall Come* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1996), 63-73.
5. Montgomery, *Then the End Shall Come*, 63.
6. Although 117 persons participated in the survey, three did not complete the country evaluation section of the survey. It was determined that four other participants did not provide reliable data, either because directions were not followed, or outlier scores were not justified by the explanation provided or tests for internal consistency.
7. A statistician, looking at this data, would be careful to not overstate the confidence level of this conclusion. The Coefficient of Determination (The R² value) for the trend line is 0.1776, while the Correlation Coefficient (or the R value) for this trend line is 0.42. Statisticians generally hold that R values greater than 0.5 merit the "significant" classification. So, this analysis, weighing all factors equally, falls a bit short of the standard for statistical significance, although basis for the general trend stands.
8. Montgomery, *DAWN 2000*, 128.
9. Montgomery, *Then the End Shall Come*, 91.
10. See Edward Dayton and David Fraser's chapter on "Strategy" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1981), 569-572, edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne.
11. Linear Regression Analysis identified only two statistically significant factors. The Beta Score for "National Leaders" is 0.48—twice that compared to "Seminars and Consultations," which is 0.24. The Coefficient of Determination (Adjusted R² value) for this regression is 0.37. My paper, "The Vital Role of Church Leadership in Advancing a National Church Planting Process," provides further detail on the role of church leadership and the statistical analysis performed. See the final note for details.
12. Derek T. Seipp, *Innovation in World Mission: A Framework for Transformational Thinking about the Future of World Mission*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016), 33.
13. Montgomery, *Then the End Shall Come*, 65.
14. In three previous papers, I further develop how insights from this research can help advance national church planting processes. The first, entitled *DAWN 2.0*, was shared at a gathering of international church planting catalysts in Berlin, Germany (February 2018). "The Vital Role of Church Leadership in Advancing a National Church Planting Process," was presented at the 8th Lausanne International Researchers' Conference in Nairobi, Kenya (May 2018). "7 Key Insights that Advance Nationwide Disciple Making Processes" (July 2018) summarizes the NCPP research findings. All reports can be accessed at <http://OCresearch.info/?q=content/NCPP> or search this site for NCPP

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