

Case Studies on Analyzing Growth Trends by City or Administrative Division

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Analysis of LDS Growth in Lagos, Nigeria

Author: Matt Martinich

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Overview

Lagos is the most populous metropolitan area in Sub-Saharan Africa. Population estimates for the entire urban conurbation range from as low as 13.4 million[1] to as high as 18.4 million.[2] Most of the Lagos metropolitan area is located in Lagos State; one of the 36 administrative states of Nigeria that is divided into 20 local government areas (LGAs).[3] Metro Lagos consists of 16 of these 20 LGAs.[4] Some LGAs outside of Metro Lagos pertain to the greater urban Lagos conurbation such as LGAs in Lagos State (Badagry and Ikorodu) and Ogun State (Ifo and Ado-Odo/Ota). Maintaining a presence since as early as 1980, the LDS Church in Lagos numbers among the first locations in West Africa reached by formal LDS outreach. The Church experienced slow growth during the first 30 years of its operations and only recently has begun to experience rapid growth.

This case study reviews the history of the Church in Lagos. The status of LDS outreach by LGA is reported. Recent church growth and missionary successes are noted and opportunities and challenges for future growth are discussed. The growth of the Church in other major West African cities is compared to the Church in Lagos. The size and growth trends of other missionary-focused Christian groups is reviewed. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

NOTE: Unless specifically indicated, the use of "Lagos" in this case study refers to Metro Lagos and adjacent urban LGAs in Lagos and Ogun States. All population figures included in this case study are as of 2006 unless otherwise specified.[5]

LDS Background

In 1978, the Church appeared to send missionaries to Lagos and baptize the first converts. By early 1980, there were two branches in the city.[6] That same year the Church organized the West Africa Mission with headquarters in Lagos. In 1985, the mission was renamed the Nigeria Lagos Mission. In 2007, the Church relocated the Nigeria Ibadan Mission to Lagos and renamed the mission to the Nigeria Lagos East Mission. However, the mission was consolidated with the original Nigeria Lagos Mission in 2009.

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The Church in Lagos appeared to organize its first district sometime in the 1980s. In early 1997, the Church organized its first stake in Lagos from the Lagos Nigeria District. The new stake included five wards (Agege, Festac, Ikeja, Ogba, and Surulere) and four branches (Apapa, Egbeda, Victoria Island, and Yaba).[7] In late 1999, the Lagos Nigeria Stake had nine wards (Agege, Egbeda, Festac, Ikeja, Ogba, Ojodu, Oshodi, Surulere, and Victoria Island) three branches (Apapa, Okokomaiko, and Yaba). In 2005, the Church organized a second stake (Lagos West). In 2011, the Church created its third stake in Lagos (Lagos South). In April 2014, the Lagos Nigeria Stake had seven wards (Ikeja, Ikorodu, Ketu, Ogba, Ojodu, Surulere, and Yaba) and four branches (Akute, Ibafo, Igbogbo, and Itamaga), the Lagos Nigeria South Stake had seven wards (Ajah, Apapa, Festac, Ikoyi, Lekki, Okokomaiko, and Satellite) and three branches (Ajangbadi, Badagry, and Mosafejor), and Lagos Nigeria West Stake had nine wards (Abule Egba, Orile-Agege, Akowonjo, Egbeda, Ejigbo, Ifako, Igando, Ikotun, and Oshodi) and three branches (Ayobo, Iju, and Sango).

Rapid congregational growth began in the early 2000s as 13 new congregations were created between year-end 2011 and April 2014 including the Ayobo Branch (2012), Akute Branch (2012), Ajah Ward (2012), Iju Branch (2013), Abule Egba Ward (2013),

Sango Branch (2013), Igbogbo Branch (2014), Itamaga Branch (2014), Igando Ward (2014), Ibafo Branch (2014), Badagry Branch (2014), Mosafejor Branch (2014), and the Ketu Ward (2014). One branch also became a ward during this period (Ikoyi in 2012). The number of congregations increased from nine (five wards, four branches) in 1997 to 12 (nine wards, three branches) in late 1999, 20 (18 wards, two branches) in late 2011, and 33 (23 wards, 10 branches) in April 2014. A map displaying congregational growth trends in Lagos can be found here.

In spring 2014, 24 of the 30 congregations serviced LGAs within Metro Lagos whereas six congregations (Ibafo, Akute, Igbogbo, Ikorodu, Itamaga, and Sango) operated in LGAs outside of Metro Lagos but were part of the greater Lagos urban conurbation. The average congregation within Metro Lagos currently includes at least 617,700 people within its geographical boundaries.[8] A map displaying the status of LDS outreach by Lagos LGA can be found here.

Successes

The Church in Lagos has recently experienced rapid active membership growth and outreach expansion as evidenced by accelerating congregational growth rates and the establishment of congregations in previously unreached LGAs. The number of congregations increased from 20 to 33 between year-end 2011 and April 2014; an astounding 65% increase within less than two-and-a-half years. Congregational growth rates have also accelerated as the Church organized three new congregations in each year for 2012 and 2013, whereas the Church organized seven new congregations during the first four months of 2014 alone. The Church established its first congregations in five LGAs that previously had no ward or branch, including Ado-Odo/Ota (the Sango Branch), Badagry (the Badagry Branch), Ifo (the Akute Branch), Kosofe (the Ketu Ward), and Obafemi-Owode (the Ibafo Branch). The opening of official congregations in these five LGAs has resulted in the Church reaching an additional 2.6 million people who previously had no congregation operating within their home LGA.

The Church has aggressively opened congregations in urban areas on the outskirts of the Lagos metropolitan area within the past five years. These efforts have resulted in rapid membership growth and accelerated congregational growth. In 2009, the Church organized its first branch in Ikorodu and by early 2014 there were three congregations in the Ikorodu area (one ward, two branches). This stands as a significant achievement considering the Church postponed the opening of congregations in these locations for several decades.

The Church established a presence in Lagos prior to almost all other major cities in West Africa. Initial LDS operations in West Africa were headquartered in Lagos for the first several years of formal missionary activity in the region following the revelation extending priesthood and temple blessings to all members of the Church regardless of ethnicity. The decision to organize Nigeria's first mission in Lagos has helped allocate mission resources to the city during the long run, although slow growth occurred during the first two decades of proselytism.

Opportunities

LGAs in the greater Lagos metropolitan area with the highest population densities remain among the least reached by current missionary efforts as evidenced by the ratio of LDS congregations to LGA population. These locations present some of the greatest opportunities for starting branches due to massive populations, long distance to the nearest meetinghouse, little to no LDS outreach previously extended, and populations exhibiting strong receptivity to LDS outreach throughout the metropolitan area.

LGAs without a congregation present some of the greatest opportunities for church planting efforts. Four LGAs (Apapa, Lagos Island, Shomolu, and Mushin) have no ward or branch although each currently falls within the geographic boundaries of a ward or branch headquartered in an adjacent LGA. Mushin has a population of 1.3 million and entirely falls within the geographic boundaries of the Surulere Ward. The combined population administered by the Surulere Ward totals nearly 2.6 million people. Shomolu has a population of 1.03 million and entirely falls within the geographic boundaries of the Lagos Mainland-based Yaba Ward. The Yaba Ward services approximately 1.6 million people. Apapa has a population of 522,000 and is serviced by two congregations headquartered in neighboring Ajeromi-Ifelodun, namely the Apapa Ward and Mosafejor Branch. Each of these congregations appear to service approximately one million people. Lagos Island has a population of nearly 860,000 and is serviced by the Ikoyi Ward based in Eti-Osa. The Ikoyi Ward has more than one million people within its geographical boundaries. Holding cottage meetings, organizing member groups, and renting meetinghouse facilities in these LGAs present good opportunities for growth.

Six LGAs (Agege, Ajeromi-Ifelodun, Kosofe, Lagos Mainland, Oshodi-Isolo, and Surulere) have LDS congregations but experience minimal outreach as the average congregation services half a million people or more. Surulere has a population of 1.27 million and has only one ward (Surulere) that also services neighboring Mushin. Agege has a population of 1.03 million and has only one ward (Orile-Agege). Kosofe has a population of 935,000 and has only one ward (Ketu). Ajeromi-Ifelodun has a population of 1.44 million and two congregations (the Apapa Ward and the Mosafejor Branch) that also service neighboring Apapa. Lagos Mainland has a population of nearly 630,000 and only one ward (Yaba) that also services neighboring Shomolu. Oshodi-Isolo has a population of 1.13 million and two wards (Ejigbo and Oshodi). Conducting church planting tactics in these LGAs presents good opportunities for improving the accessibility of the Church to the city population, and spurring greater active membership growth and leadership development.

The organization of specialized congregations that provide church services and classes in indigenous Nigerian languages such

as Yoruba presents good opportunities for growth. Currently all congregations appear to hold church services in English, but it is likely that many have sizable numbers of Yoruba-speaking members who converse and teach in Yoruba due to limited proficiency in English. Stake and mission leaders identifying what areas of Lagos have a sufficient number of active members and priesthood manpower to segregate speakers of English, Yoruba, and other Nigerian languages into separate congregations appears the most likely scenario for the Church to establish language-specific congregations. The establishment of language-specific Sunday School classes and translation capabilities for sacrament meeting services may be an effective alternative that exacts fewer resources to operate but also can meet local language needs.

Challenges

Although the Church in Lagos has maintained a presence for several decades and has recently experienced rapid growth, the size of the Church remains miniscule even in the best-reached areas of Lagos. Ikeja LGA has the lowest congregation-to-population ratio of one LDS unit per 216,000 people, suggesting that this location experiences the most penetrating outreach and has the most established LDS presence. However, the congregation-to-population ratio in Ikeja is substantially higher than many other major metropolitan areas in West Africa. A limited LDS presence in Lagos has been the product of modest membership and congregational growth trends since the establishment of the first congregations approximately 35 years ago. Reasons for slower growth during this period appear primarily due to a lack of mission resources allocated to the Lagos metropolitan area and the Nigeria Lagos Mission, historically lower receptivity to LDS outreach compared to most other major cities in the region, and perhaps less developed member-missionary skills and interest compared to other locations. The operation of a mission in Lagos would seem to imply adequate mission resource allocation to service Lagos, but relatively few missionaries have been assigned to this mission since its organization. The mission also servicing areas outside of Lagos such as Yorubaland where only districts operated prior to 2014 have also likely limited mission resource allocation within the greater Lagos metropolitan area.

Limited numbers of trained priesthood leaders has posed and continues to pose challenges for meeting the ecclesiastical needs of members and the administrative needs for congregations and stakes. The Church has likely delayed opening congregations in additional areas of the city due to a lack of active priesthood holders with a sufficient knowledge base and church experience to properly lead congregations.

Safety concerns and poor living conditions exist in many areas of the city. Safety concerns have prevented the assignment of foreign missionaries from some countries. The handful of non-African senior missionaries who serve in Lagos report that they receive specialized training for some safety concerns such as becoming kidnapped or witnessing violence. Living conditions are poor in many areas of the city and poverty is widespread.

Comparative Growth

Lagos numbers among the least-reached, major metropolitan areas in Sub-Saharan Africa where the Church has maintained a presence for more than two decades as evidenced by the average congregation including more than half a million people within its geographical boundaries. All metropolitan areas in Nigeria with one million or more inhabitants and an LDS presence are better reached by missionary efforts and congregations with the exception of Kaduna. Benin City is the best-reached metropolitan area in the country as the average congregation includes only 35,700 people - a mere six percent the population serviced by the average congregation in Lagos. The average congregation has less than 100,000 people within its boundaries in most notable metropolitan areas in West Africa, including Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire; Accra, Ghana; Freetown, Sierra Leone; and Monrovia, Liberia. The Church in these other metropolitan areas has been more proactive in opening additional congregations since its initial establishment and has appeared to have had greater availability of mission resources from national and regional sources.

Other missionary-focused Christian groups exhibit significant variability regarding the penetration of outreach and the number of active members in the Lagos area. Evangelicals appear to maintain a widespread presence and number among the largest religious groups. Jehovah's Witnesses number among the largest nontraditional proselytizing Christian groups. Witnesses maintain a pervasive presence in Lagos and have appeared to experience steady growth over the past several decades. Witnesses have established a strong presence in essentially all LGAs within the greater Lagos conurbation. The size of Witnesses' presence in Lagos is evident in that there are approximately 30 congregations in Mushin area, whereas there is not a single LDS ward or branch headquartered in this LGA. Some areas of the city have as many as 100 Witness congregations per one LDS congregation, such as in northern areas of the city. The Seventh Day Adventist Church has experienced moderate growth and is comparable in size to the LDS Church. In 2013, Adventists reported 10,889 members and 48 congregations in Lagos State.[9] The Church of the Nazarene reports a limited presence in Lagos. Currently Nazarenes report approximately 15 congregations in the Lagos area.[10]

Limitations

Some wards and branches overlap multiple LGAs or do not have boundaries that neatly follow LGA boundaries, creating challenges for accurately assessing the penetration of LDS outreach by LGA. The Church does not publish annual, country-by-country data on the number of convert baptisms, the number of members serving full-time missions, the number of full-time missionaries assigned, or the increase of children of record. No data is available to the public regarding official LDS statistics on member activity and convert retention rates. Reports from current missionaries have been scarce within the past

couple years, creating challenges to accurately assess the number of active members within Lagos or in most congregations. The Church does not report an official list of its member groups by country or for the entire world. Consequently member groups may operate in Lagos that are not reported in this case study. The Church in Nigeria does not publish a breakdown of its membership by administrative division.

Future Prospects

The unprecedented acceleration of congregational growth during the early 2010s signals a new era of LDS outreach expansion and rapid active membership growth in the Lagos area. Prospects appear favorable for the Church to regularly organize additional wards and branches within the three Lagos stakes. The outlook appears favorable for remaining LGAs that currently do not have a congregation to have congregations established within the near future. Depending on the availability of mission resources in the region, the Church may reestablish a mission headquartered in Ibadan or organize a second mission in Lagos within the next decade in order to improve focus on missionary activity in Lagos while conditions are highly favorable for growth and to better serve the massive population currently administered by the Nigeria Lagos Mission. Several additional stakes will likely be organized in Lagos within the next decade as branches become wards and there are a sufficient number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders to staff both ward and stake leadership positions. The Church may announce a temple for Lagos within the long term due to distance from the Aba Nigeria Temple and Lagos quickly becoming one of the primary centers of strength in West Africa.

[1] "MAJOR AGGLOMERATIONS OF THE WORLD," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 15 April 2014. http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html

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[3] "Population," Lagos State Government, retrieved 2 April 2014. www.lagosstate.gov.ng/pagelinks.php%3Fp%3D6+&cd=5&hl=en

[4] "NIGERIA: Metro Lagos," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 2 April 2014. http://www.citypopulation.de/php/nigeria-metrolagos.php

[5] "NIGERIA: Metro Lagos," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 2 April 2014. http://www.citypopulation.de/php/nigeria-metrolagos.php

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[7] "New stake presidencies," LDS Church News, 19 April 1997. http://www.ldschurchnewsarchive.com/articles/29667/New-stake-presidencies.html

[8] "NIGERIA: Metro Lagos," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 2 April 2014. http://www.citypopulation.de/php/nigeria-metrolagos.php

[9] "Western Nigeria Union Conference," www.adventistyearbook.org, retrieved 15 April 2014. http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&Year=9999&AdmFieldID=NGUM

[10] "Nazarene Church Data Search," nazarene.org, retrieved 15 April 2014. http://app.nazarene.org/FindAChurch/results.jsp?n=&c=lagos&y=NI&s=&z=&l=&SearchChoice=