

Case Studies on Recent LDS Missionary and Church Growth Successes

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Recent Missionary and Church Growth Developments in Angola

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Posted: January 17th, 2014

Overview

The Church has maintained an official presence in Angola since 1996 although slow or stagnant membership and congregational growth occurred until the late 2000s. Significant church growth and missionary developments occurred in the late 2000s and early 2010s including the assignment of proselytizing missionaries, the organization of a district in Luanda, the opening of branches in additional cities, the assignment of missionaries to additional cities, and the establishment of the Angola Luanda Mission.

This case study reviews the history of the Church in Angola and discusses recent missionary and church growth successes. Opportunities and challenges for future growth are examined. The growth of the Church in Angola is compared to other Portuguese-speaking Sub-Saharan African countries. The size and growth of other missionary-focused Christian groups is summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

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LDS Background

During the 1980s and 1990s, hundreds of Angolans joined the Church in Europe and returned to Angola but an official LDS branch did not operate for many years. A member group functioned prior to the organization of the Luanda Branch in 1996. Slow membership growth occurred during the first decade that the Luanda Branch operated as membership increased from 500 in 1997 to 700 in 2006. In 2005, the Luanda Branch had 200 members attending church services.[1]

Significant church growth and missionary developments began in the mid-2000s. In 2005, the Church assigned Angola to the newly organized Mozambique Maputo Mission. Seminary and institute began in 2006 and the first full-time missionaries arrived in late 2008. Annual membership growth rates increased from less than 10% a year prior to 2008 to over 10% a year after 2008. The Church organized a second branch in Luanda (Cassequel) in late 2008. In late 2009, a native Angolan member who resided in Luanda became a counselor in the Mozambique Maputo Mission presidency. The mission granted the new mission presidency member authority to organize member groups in additional cities for the first time. In 2010, the Church organized a third branch in Luanda (Luanda 2nd). In the early 2010s, a senior missionary couple began serving in Luanda to prepare for the formal organization of a separate mission in Angola. In 2011, the Church organized a branch in Lubango, marking the first time that the Church opened a branch outside of Luanda. The Church organized its first district in Luanda that same year and organized a fourth branch (Viana) in Luanda. In 2012, the Church organized a separate mission branch for Angola to service members who lived in areas outside the boundaries of the Luanda Angola District and Lubango Branch. In early 2013, the Church organized a fifth branch in Luanda (Benfica). The number of members on church records increased to 800 in 2009, 1,046 in 2011, and 1,257 in 2012.

In July 2013, the Church organized its first mission in Angola with headquarters in Luanda. Mission leaders reported that the mission baptized an average of one convert per day in the mission for the remainder of 2013. Missionaries reported that the first mission president emphasized the importance of achieving good convert retention and prebaptismal preparation. In July 2013, the Luanda 2nd Branch had up to 170 attending sacrament meeting. That same month the Church organized an official branch in Huambo and ordained seven male members to the Melchizedek Priesthood. In September 2013, nearly 700 attended the Luanda Angola District conference. The mission organized a separate zone to administer missionaries serving in Huambo and Lubango. Missionaries reported that the Huambo Branch had approximately 30 active members and five known inactive members. In late

2013, mission leadership reported several native members began full-time missionary service in other Sub-Saharan African countries.

In late 2013, Kikongo was the only indigenous African language with translations of LDS materials. At the time translations of Gospel Principles and the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith were available.

Successes

The Church in Angola has achieved accelerating membership and congregational growth rates within the past five years after many years of stagnant growth. Increasing amounts of mission resources channeled into the country, the opening of additional cities to missionary work, and the formal organization of member groups in previously unreached cities has played a significant role in accelerating growth. Recently opened member groups have quickly reached the minimum qualifications to become official branches such as the Huambo, Lubango, and Viana Branches. Mission leaders have expanded missionary activity within Luanda through assigning increasing numbers of full-time missionaries and regularly organizing new member groups or branches. The Church has successfully increased church attendance through both a church planting approach and congregation splitting approach as combined church attendance has more than tripled within less than a decade.

The organization of the Angola Luanda Mission is a major milestone that will provide the needed mission leadership and resource allocation for ensuring continued growth in the coming years and decades. A lack of mission resources has constituted one of the primary barriers for the Church in Sub-Saharan Africa to achieve greater growth. The Church in Angola faced persistent challenges obtaining foreign missionary visas when the Mozambique Maputo Mission administered the country. This problem appeared rooted in the complexities of obtaining foreign missionary visas for foreign missionaries residing in Mozambique who were not Mozambican citizens. In the early 2010s, the Church appeared to sufficiently overcome this hurdle by preparing legal paperwork for some of the missionaries called to serve in the Mozambique Maputo Mission to serve in Angola as opposed to Mozambique. With a separate mission headquartered in Angola, the Church has greater infrastructure to call more missionaries to serve in Angola, thus providing the needed missionary manpower to open additional areas to proselytism.

Increasing numbers of local members serving full-time missions constitutes another important milestone in the Church achieving greater growth in Angola and fostering self-sufficiency. In 2009, there were only three Angolans serving full-time missions whereas in 2013 there appeared to be as many as a couple dozen Angolans serving missions. Larger numbers of native members serving missions has potential to accelerate growth and strengthen the Church in many ways. Larger numbers of local members serving full-time missions helps offset the number of foreign missionaries assigned to Angola and improves the self-sufficiency of the full-time missionary force. Members who complete their missions provide valuable experience and expertise in church leadership. Increasing numbers of returned missionaries among church membership provides manpower for staffing branch and district presidency positions and improves prospects for the creation of additional church units, the establishment of a stake in Luanda one day, and the organization of districts in other cities.

Opportunities

Angola presents some of the most favorable conditions for the Church in Sub-Saharan Africa to expand missionary activity into additional locations. Isolated members and investigators reside in many of the country's most populous cities and present valuable opportunities for growth if mission leaders and missionaries build congregations in locations where these individuals are clustered . In 2011, senior missionaries reported that there were seven official members in the remote city of Luena who held a Sunday gospel study meeting that attracted nearly 60 people. As of late 2013, it is unclear whether mission leadership had formally organized a member group or had intentions on assigning missionaries to Luena within the foreseeable future. Senior missionaries have visited additional cities that have isolated members or investigators such as Benguela and Lobito. Mission leaders visiting these cities and meeting with members and investigators, holding cottage meetings, organizing member groups, and securing adequate facilities to accommodate an official LDS unit and the assignment of full-time missionaries will be necessary steps for the Church to successfully and efficiently open additional locations to missionary activity.

Luanda presents excellent opportunities for opening additional member groups and branches due to its massive population, steadily growing LDS congregations, and easy accessibility. With 6.2 million inhabitants, Luanda is one of Sub-Saharan Africa's most populous metropolitan areas yet the average branch currently services 1.24 million people. The Church operates four meetinghouses in Luanda resulting in vast areas of the city without a nearby meetinghouse. The Luanda 1st Branch encompasses the largest geographical area of the five branches as its boundaries stretch from communities in the southernmost areas of the city such as Sapo to communities in the northernmost areas of the city such as Cacuaco. Communities in Luanda that appear favorable for the organization of a member group or branch include Cabolombo, Cacuaco, Camana, Golfe, Ingombota, Mbondo Chapé, Mulenvos, Sambizanga, Sapu, Villa Verde, and Zango.

Lubango also presents opportunities for opening additional congregations as it numbers among the most populous cities in the country and missionaries have served in the city for several years. Mission leaders organizing one or two member groups that assemble in locations distant from the current meetinghouse location can help spur growth and extend greater saturation of LDS outreach.

The widespread use of Portuguese as a second language and language for interethnic communication provides many opportunities for the Church to expand outreach among many different ethnolinguistic groups but without consuming large numbers of mission

resources. These conditions greatly facilitate the use of Portuguese-speaking missionary manpower from other countries where there is a larger LDS presence such as Brazil, Portugal, Cape Verde, and Mozambique and reduces the need for the Church to organize language-specific congregations for speakers of indigenous African languages such as Umbundu, Kimbundu, and Nyaneka.

Challenges

The Church has not appeared to experience any significant increase in the number of full-time missionaries assigned to Angola since the organization of the Angola Luanda mission in mid-2013. Most newly organized or divided missions experienced a significant surge in the number of missionaries assigned as a result of the worldwide surge in the number of members serving full-time missions. The mission continues to operate well below its capacity compared to other Sub-Saharan African missions as most missions have 100-200 missionaries whereas the Angola Luanda Mission may have had as few as 50-60 missionaries in late 2013. The lack of missionaries assigned to the new mission may be attributed to limited numbers of foreign missionary visas available, constraints on mission finances to rent additional missionary housing, limited missionary resources allocated to the Africa Southeast Area, or a combination of these issues. No significant increase thus far in the number of missionaries serving in Angola is a disappointment especially considering the unprecedented number of members serving full-time missions worldwide. The Church in Angola remains almost totally reliant on foreign missionaries to staff the Angola Luanda Mission although increasing numbers of local members have been serving full-time missions in recent years. A lack of local self-sufficiency in meeting full-time missionary needs makes the Church vulnerable to changes in the number and availability of foreign missionary visas. A significant disruption to acquiring and maintaining foreign missionary visas may severely disrupt the pace and progress of missionary activity and church growth nationwide.

The Church has not translated LDS scriptures or any gospel study or missionary materials into indigenous languages spoke in Angola with the exception of Kikongo. This has likely been due to many speakers of indigenous languages demonstrating fluency and literacy in Portuguese and the recent establishment of an official missionary presence. Widespread use of some indigenous languages such as Umbundu, Kimbundu, and Nyaneka may warrant the translation of basic gospel study and missionary materials in order to make proselytism and testimony development more effective for those with limited proficiency in Portuguese.

Costly living expenses and inadequate meetinghouse space constitute major challenges for missionary activity and church growth in Luanda. Luanda ranks among the world's most expensive cities and the Church has experienced challenges securing sufficient meetinghouse space due to limited facilities available and high costs. These conditions may require the Church to utilize more thrifty approaches to meeting worship and meetinghouse needs such as organizing smaller branches that require smaller square footage and initially holding church services in members' homes instead of rented facilities.

Comparative Growth

Angola numbers among the last continental, predominantly Christian African countries to have had full-time missionaries assigned and has thus far experienced significantly slower growth than other Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa with an LDS presence. In Mozambique, the Church organized its first official branch in 1996 - the same year that the Church organized its first branch in Angola. In 1999, the Church assigned its first missionaries to Mozambique and initially experienced rapid growth as membership increased from 311 in 1999 to 2,951 in 2004 and the number of branches increased from three to 14. The Church organized its first mission in Mozambique in early 2005 and opened several additional cities to missionary work between the mid-2000s and the early 2010s. Significant member activity and convert retention problems have occurred within the past decade resulting in diminished membership and congregational growth rates. In 2012, there were 6,029 members and 21 branches in Mozambique. In Cape Verde, the Church organized its first official branch and assigned missionaries in the late 1980s. In the early 1990s, rapid growth occurred resulting in membership increasing from 200 to 2,000 and the number of branches increasing from one to 13 within a two-year period. Membership and congregational growth rates decelerated during the remainder of the 1990s and during the 2000s notwithstanding the organization of the Cape Verde Praia Mission in 2002. The number of branches in the country was unchanged between 1997 and 2011 notwithstanding membership increasing from 3,500 to 8,029 during this period. In the early 2010s, rapid membership and congregational occurred resulting in membership reaching 9,326 at year-end 2012, the advancement of two of the three districts into stakes, and the total number of wards and branches increasing from 18 in 2011 to 31 in late 2013. In 2012 and 2013, several additional locations and islands also opened to missionaries for the first time. The Church reports no presence in other Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa, namely Guinea-Bissau and Sao Tome and Principe.

Virtually all missionary-focused Christian denominations report steady to rapid growth in Angola, operate in most or all areas of the country, and have significantly more members and congregations than the LDS Church in Angola. Evangelicals claim 22.5% of the national population.[2] In 2011, the Seventh Day Adventist Church claimed approximately two percent of the national population and reported 409,137 members, 1,069 churches (large congregations), and 1,549 companies (small congregations). Adventists currently report annual membership growth rates of five percent and membership has nearly doubled within the past decade. Adventists only translate church materials into one indigenous language (Kikongo).[3] Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a pervasive presence in Angola and active Witnesses constitute nearly 0.5% of the national population. In 2012, Witnesses reported over 90,000 active members, 1,228 congregations, over 6,000 baptisms, and a Memorial Attendance of 441,600.[4] Provided with the number of congregations as of late 2013 in parentheses, all 18 administrative provinces of Angola have a Witness congregation including Luanda (500+), Huila (77), Huambo (51), Benguela (36), Malange (28), Namibe (28), Cabinda (24), Lunda Norte (24), Bie (21), Kuanza Norte (17), Bengo (14), Uige (14), Cunene (11), Zaire (11), Kuanza Sul (8), Moxico (6), Lunda Sul (4), and Kuando Kubango (3). Provided with the number of language-specific congregations and groups in parentheses, Jehovah's Witnesses conduct congregations in 14 languages including Portuguese (1000+ congregations), Umbundu (75 congregations, 12 groups), Lingala (32 congregations, 3 groups), Nyaneka (29 congregations, 2 groups), Kimbundu (20 congregations, 13 groups), Kikongo

(18 congregations, 8 groups), Angolan Sign Language (10 congregations, 8 groups), Chokwe (3 congregations, 4 groups), Luvale (1 congregation, 1 group), English (1 congregation), Ibinda (1 congregation), Tshiluba (2 groups), Ngangela (1 group), and Mandarin Chinese (1 group). The Church of the Nazarene reports 7,900 members, an average of 5,500 attending church services, and 178 congregations (127 organized [established congregations], 51 not yet organized [recently planted congregations]).[5]

Limitations

The Church does not publish official statistics on the number of converts baptized per country or mission. Consequently it is unclear how many converts join the Church a year in Angola and how these trends have changed over the years. The Church in Angola does not publish membership figures by administrative province or city. There are no official statistics that provide the number of members who reside in locations without a branch. The Church does not publish information regarding the location, name, and number of member groups. It is unclear whether any member groups currently operate in Angola at present. The Church does not annually publish data on the number of missionaries serving from each country or the number of missionaries assigned to each country or mission. No official statistics on member activity and convert retention rates are available to the public.

Future Prospects

The establishment of a separate mission in Angola will have a tremendous impact of accelerating membership and congregational growth rates and expanding national outreach due to increasing amounts of mission resources allocated to the country and moderate to high receptivity to LDS outreach in most locations. Larger numbers of full-time missionaries will likely be assigned to the mission in the coming years as long as the Church obtains commensurate increases in the number of foreign missionary visas available. Additional branches and member groups will likely begin operating in Luanda within the foreseeable future due to steady active membership growth and long distances for many to travel to reach the nearest meetinghouse. The Luanda Angola District may become a stake within the medium term once it reaches the minimum qualifications for a stake to operate - namely 1,900 nominal members, five ward-sized congregations, and at least 120 active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders. Based on the experience of the Church in other Sub-Saharan African countries where a mission has been recently organized, the Church will likely open a few additional cities to missionary work within the next five years and establish member groups. Favorable locations include Luena, Benguela, Lobito, and Namibe.

[1] "Church Continues to Grow in Africa," lds.org, 20 October 2005. http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=7cecc8fe9c88d010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD&locale=0&sourceId=237e9150

[2] "Angola," Operation World, retrieved 23 November 2013. http://www.operationworld.org/country/ango/owtext.html

[3] "2013 Annual Statistical Report," sda.org, retrieved 19 November 2013. http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CCwQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.adve

[4] "2012 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide," jw.org

[5] "Church of the Nazarene Growth, 2002-2012," nazarene.org, retrieved 19 November 2013. http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDwQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fnazarene.org%2Ff