

Case Studies on Recent LDS Missionary and Church Growth Successes

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Rapid National Outreach Expansion In Ghana

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Overview

The LDS Church in Ghana has experienced some of the most rapid national outreach expansion in the world within the past two years. No other country has appeared to have as many wards, branches, and groups organized in locations that previously had no reported LDS presence. This case study provides background information on outreach expansion and congregational growth in Ghana. Successes, opportunities, and challenges for growth are examined. A comparative growth section compares outreach expansion efforts in Ghana to other Sub-Saharan African countries. The growth of other proselytizing Christian groups in Ghana is compared to LDS growth trends. Lastly, a future prospects section predicts the outlook for future church growth for the foreseeable future.

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LDS Background

Congregational growth rates have provided official statistics that reflect recent rapid national outreach expansion in Ghana. The Church experienced steady congregational growth during the 2000s as the number of units doubled from 62 in 2000 to 120 in 2010. The number of wards and branches increased by less than 10 a year during the 2000s with the exception of 2009 when the number of units increased by 21. At year-end 2010, the Church reported 121 wards and branches in Ghana. The number of wards and branches reached 129 in 2011 and approximately 150 in late 2012. During the two-year period comprising 2011 and 2012, congregational growth increased by 24%.

Increasing numbers of cities, towns, and villages with a LDS congregation has provided insight into national outreach expansion. In 2001, there were approximately 24 populated places in Ghana with at least one ward or branch. At year-end 2010, there were 54 cities, towns, and villages with at least one ward or branch. By year-end 2012, there were 66 populated places with at least one ward or branch functioning; 22% more than two years earlier and nearly three times as many as 11 years earlier. The Church opened its first ward or branch in 14 cities, towns, or villages between early 2011 and early 2013 including Akonfudi, Bibiani, Domeabra, Eshiem, Kenkuase, Kpone, Kwamo, Ntranoa, Paramu, Shama, Sunyani, Tarkwa, Tsito, and Twifu Hemang. One additional location (Tamale) had a dependent unit organized (groups or dependent branches). Of these 15 populated places reached within the past two years, eight were in the Ghana Cape Coast Mission (Akonfudi, Eshiem, Kenkuase, Ntranoa, Paramu, Shama, Tarkwa, and Twifu Hemang), five were in the Ghana Kumasi Mission (Bibiani, Domeabra, Kwamo, Sunyani, and Tamale), and two were in the Ghana Accra Mission (Kpone and Tsito).

In early 2013, 30% of the national population resided in the 38 cities with over 20,000 inhabitants that have an LDS presence. At the time there were 35 cities, towns, and villages with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants and an LDS presence. Approximately one percent of the national population appears to reside in locations with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants and an LDS presence assuming that the average city, town, or village with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants with an LDS presence has, on average, 7,000 inhabitants. The percentage of the national population residing in locations with a ward or branch increased from approximately 28% in early 2011 to approximately 31% in early 2013.

Successes

The Church has taken advantage of optimal conditions for expanding missionary work in Ghana as evidenced by the

organization of two new missions since 2005, the establishment of a missionary training center in 2002,[1] and accelerated outreach expansion since 2011. Few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have achieved the level of economic and political stability enjoyed in Ghana today which reduce safety, health, and medical risks for assigning foreign African and non-African missionaries. Widespread religious freedom and the strong receptivity of many Ghanaians to nontraditional Christian groups has encouraged church growth and promotes tolerance of missionary activity. The relatively large population of Ghana that surpasses all West African countries except Nigeria also provides fertile ground for growth. The Church in Ghana has also historically experienced good self-sustainability in local church leadership and member-missionary activity as evidenced by many local members serving full-time missions, virtually all congregations led by native members, and the Church withstanding past difficulties such as the Freeze and achieving steady growth during this period notwithstanding government restrictions on church activities.

The percentage increase of the number of cities with an LDS unit (22%) was commensurate with the percentage increase in the number of wards and branches in Ghana (24%) between early 2011 and early 2013. This finding indicates that congregational growth almost exclusively occurred in locations that previously had no LDS presence. National outreach expansion has occurred as a result of the placement of full-time missionaries in previously unreached locations and good member-missionary activity.[2] This constitutes a major accomplishment for the Church considering most countries have had sizable numbers of new units organized within the past two or three years had most new units organized in locations that already received LDS outreach. Within the past five years the Church has effectively expanded outreach in major urban areas, cities, towns, and villages as manifest by the number of wards and branches increasing by 50% from approximately 100 to 150. Approximately half of the locations with an LDS presence are cities with over 20,000 inhabitants and the Church has experienced steady growth in less populous towns and villages in rural areas. The Church has not engaged in any rural outreach in most Sub-Saharan African countries with the exception of southern Ghana, extreme southeastern Nigeria, and a few isolated areas in Kenya and Madagascar.

Ghana numbers among the most well-reached countries in Africa by the LDS Church. 83.6% of the population residing in cities with more than 20,000 people have an LDS unit in their city and approximately one-third of the population lives in locations with an LDS unit functioning. Half the locations with wards and branches functioning are small cities, towns, and villages with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants.

The opening of Sunyani to missionary work stands as one of the greatest successes in LDS missionary work in the world within the past decade. In late 2010, the Church assigned six young full-time missionaries and a senior couple to Sunyani and simultaneously organized three dependent units in different areas of the city. Missionaries report that there were no known Latter-day Saints living in the city prior to the assignment of missionaries. Within two years, the Church had organized four branches and formed a district as a couple hundred of converts were baptized and retained. The strength and size of the four branches in Sunyani considerably varies by branch as one branch appears to have close to 100 active members whereas another branch has as few as 20 active members. Senior missionaries have reported that the so-called "Sunyani Method" of opening new cities to proselytism, namely assigning several missionary companionships that each open separate groups, has gained favorability with area leaders and has been or may soon be implemented in additional cities opening to missionary activity.

Since 2011, two ethnic groups have received LDS outreach for the first time. In Tarkwa, the organization of a branch in 2012 provides formal outreach to the Wasa (309,000 speakers). No church materials have been translated into Wasa and the Tarkwa Branch remains the only congregation that operates within areas traditionally inhabited by the Wasa. In Tamale, the organization of a group in 2013 provides outreach among the Dagbani within their homelands for the first time. Approximately 800,000 speak Dagbani but there remain no translations of LDS materials into Dagbani. No other units provide outreach among the Dagbani at present.

Opportunities

The most populous unreached cities provide the Church with the opportunity to reach large numbers of people within small geographical areas. This results in improved efficiency of limited resources. The establishment and gradual strengthening of multiple congregations within the same city provide needed local manpower and resources to effectively expand the Church into nearby towns and villages with little, if any, reliance on mission leadership. A district can be organized once multiple branches function and sufficiently meet their own administrative needs and thereby create a small center of strength. Opportunities for simultaneously opening multiple dependent units within the same city appear most favorable for church growth in at least seven currently unreached cities including the Achiaman area, Aflao, Berekum, Ejura, Hohoe, Tafo, and Techiman. In 2012, 5.9% of the national population resided in the 28 cities with over 20,000 inhabitants without an LDS presence. A map displaying the status of LDS outreach among cities with over 20,000 inhabitants and the timing of locations that have had LDS units established can be found here.

Lesser-reached populated areas on the outskirts of major cities such as Accra and Kumasi provide some of the most feasible opportunities for church planting due to high population densities and close proximity to mission headquarters. In Accra, there is little or no outreach in many locations on the outskirts of the city such as Achiaman, Afienya, Amasaman, Ashiyie, Dawhwenya, Medie, New Ningo, Obeye, Prampram, and Pokoasi. In Kumasi, there is little or no outreach in Adangomasi, Adwumakase-kese, Asabi, Duase, Ebira, Effiduase, Juaben, Kenyasi, Kyirapatere, Mangpontin, Ntensere, Ntonso, Ntri Boahung, Onwe, and many additional towns and villages surrounding the city. Local church leaders and full-time missionaries searching for unaccounted members, visiting isolated active members, finding and teaching investigators, and assessing conditions for holding cottage meetings and organizing a dependent unit are effective methods for expanding outreach while

conserving limited resources. Newly organized units can meet in members' homes or in a rented space if feasible. Official branches may be organized once there is a small nucleus of active members who can hold their own church services and meet basic administrative requirements with little to no outside support.

Challenges

High receptivity in most areas where full-time missionaries serve challenges mission leaders to effectively delegate limited mission resources. Many cities and towns with a ward or branch have good opportunities to assign additional missionaries and organize additional congregations. At the same time, there remain hundreds of unreached towns and villages that would likely experience good receptivity to the Church if outreach is extended. Church leaders therefore must balance the distribution of limited resources between further saturating already reached locations and opening unreached locations.

In recent years, the Church has utilized North American missionary manpower to bolster missionary numbers in an era of plentiful opportunities for growth but limited regional missionary manpower. Dependence on North American missionaries to significantly expand the full-time missionary force in Ghana to support three new missions within the past decade has potential to erode local self-sufficiency and inherent resiliency of West Africans to convert attrition. Reduced self-sufficiency in regional missionary manpower may result in lower convert retention rates and leadership development difficulties if quick-baptism tactics are widely implemented.

Cultural differences with the Muslim north and the Christian south have dissuaded LDS outreach until 2013; 35 years after the Church's initial establishment in Ghana notwithstanding no legal or societal restrictions on proselytizing, nontraditional Christian groups operating in traditionally Muslim areas. The opening of Tamale to missionary activity in February 2013 stands as a major breakthrough in expanding outreach in Ghana but hesitance by mission leaders to expand into traditionally non-Christian locations may result in missed opportunities for growth and extreme slow outreach expansion in these areas if any missionary activity occurs at all.

Comparative Growth

Between 2011 and early 2013, the number of previously unreached cities that have had a ward or branch organized for the first time in Ghana has surpassed all other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. During this two-year period, the number of cities that had a ward or branch organized for the first time was seven in Uganda (Busia, Iganga, Lira, Lugazi, Masaka, Mbale, and Njeru), six in Nigeria (Amakohia, Asarama, Enin-Atai, Mbarakom, Ogwa, and Orlu), four in Madagascar (Ambositra, Andranomanelatra, Anjoma, and Sarodroa), three in Mozambique (Chimoio, Luaha, and Quelimane), two in Botswana (Kanye and Mochudi), two in Cote d'Ivoire (Agbonou and Meagui), two in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kakanda and Uvira), two in Kenya (Mautuma and Naivasha), and one each in Angola (Lubango), Ethiopia (Wendo Genet), Gabon (Libreville), Reunion (Saint Paul), Sierra Leone (Waterloo), South Africa (Phothaditjaba) , Tanzania (Mwanza), Zambia (Kawama), and Zimbabwe (Dombashawa). There were 14 countries (Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Swaziland, and Togo) that have a church presence and had no new wards or branches organized in previously unreached locations during this two-year period.

Other missionary-minded Christian groups report a dramatically more widespread presence in Ghana than the LDS Church. Evangelicals claim approximately one-quarter of the Ghanaian population and have a presence in all areas of the country.[3] Jehovah's Witnesses report eight congregations alone in Techiman where there is not a single LDS ward or branch. Witnesses report a presence in virtually all cities and towns in southern and central Ghana. There are only two LDS branches in Volta Region whereas there are 88 Witness congregations in Volta Region. Witnesses report a more widespread presence even in the most-reached cities of Ghana. For example, Assin Foso is one of the most well-reached cities by the LDS Church as there are five wards in a small city of approximately 20,000 inhabitants whereas Witnesses report 12 congregations in Assin Foso.[4] Seventh Day Adventists report nearly 390,000 members, over 1,200 churches,[5] and over 1,600 companies (small congregations).[6] The Church of the Nazarene reports approximately 100 congregations in Ghana; a large number of which operate in Tamale.[7]

Limitations

The Church does not provide official statistics on the number of total LDS congregations in Ghana. Only wards and branches are included in official figures and no data is provided for the number of dependent units. All data on dependent units was obtained from missionary and member reports. The location of wards and branches was retrieved from the Church's online meetinghouse locator at lds.org/maps. Population figures for city population and national population were retrieved from different sources resulting in some error in calculating the percentage of the population reached by Church. City population data originated from http://bevoelkerungsstatistik.de and are estimated totals as of 2012 whereas national population figures were estimated figures retrieved from http://faostat.fao.org for 2012.

Future Prospects

Steadily increasing numbers of missionaries assigned to Ghana, the acceleration of outreach expansion within the past couple years, and good results opening new cities to missionary work suggest that many more locations will have missionaries

assigned and have branches or wards organized within the foreseeable future. One or two additional missions may be organized within the next five years due to favorable conditions for growth, high receptivity, increasing numbers of missionaries assigned, and steady congregational growth. Prospects appear most favorable for opening additional cities to missionary work in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo due to the recent organization of the Ghana Kumasi Mission, several large and medium-sized cities without a church presence, and recent missionary reports of opening additional locations in these regions to missionary activity. There may be noticeable progress expanding outreach in Volta Region as there remains only two locations with a church presence (Ho and Tsito) but several reports of high receptivity in the area. Little progress will likely occur opening additional cities to missionary work and organizing congregations in northern Ghana due to the predominantly Muslim population, greater opportunities for expanding outreach in the traditionally Christian central and south, and distance from current mission outreach centers.

[1] Stahle, Shaun D. "First 54 missionaries enter first training center in Africa," LDS Church News, 25 May 2002. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/41860/First-54-missionaries-enter-first-training-center-in-Africa.html

[2] "Family finds truth in Book of Mormon," LDS Church News, 5 January 2008. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/51509/Family-finds-truth-in-Book-of-Mormon.html

[3] "Ghana," Operation World, retrieved 13 February 2013. http://www.operationworld.org/ghan

[4] http://www.jw.org/apps/index.html?option=FRNsPnPBrTZGT&txtCMSLang=E

[5] "Ghana Union Conference," www.adventistyearbook.org, retrieved 9 February 2013. http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&AdmFieldID=GHUC

[6] "Ghana Union Conference (2003-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 9 February 2013. http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=U_GHUC

[7] "Nazarene Church Data Search," Church of the Nazarene, retrieved 13 February 2013. http://app.nazarene.org/FindAChurch/results.jsp?n=&c=&y=GH&s=&z=&l=&SearchChoice=