

Prospective LDS Outreach Case Studies

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Prospective LDS Outreach in Senegal

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Overview

Inhabited by 13.3 million people, Senegal is a country located in West Africa that is 94% Muslim, 5% Christian, and 1% followers of indigenous religions. Dakar is the capital city and had an estimated population of 2.9 million people as of October 2013.[1] French is the official language and there are three indigenous African languages spoken by more than one million people (Fulani [Pulaar], Serer-Sine, and Wolof). As of late 2013, the LDS Church had not established a presence in Senegal notwithstanding sufficient religious freedom permitting the operation of other proselytism-focused Christian groups, a large target population, and abundant French-speaking African missionary manpower.

This case study reviews the Church's history of administrating Senegal and identifies translations of basic proselytism materials available in indigenous languages spoken in the country. Opportunities for establishing an official LDS presence and achieving growth are explored. Recommendations for how to most effectively establish an initial church presence are provided. Challenges for establishing a church presence and achieving growth are discussed. The growth of other proselytizing Christian groups that operate in Senegal is summarized. Limitations to this case study are described and prospects for an LDS establishment in Senegal is predicted.

LDS Background

In 1998, the newly organized Africa West Area included Senegal within its jurisdiction. In 2009, the Church reported 13 members in Senegal.[2] In 2011, the Church organized the Africa West Area Branch to service Senegal and nine additional countries within the Africa West Area that were unassigned to missions. No more than 30 Latter-day Saints appear to reside in Senegal at present. Senegal has never appeared to be assigned to a mission.

In 2013, the Church listed a handful of basic proselytism materials into indigenous languages spoken in Senegal. Gospel Principles and The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith are available in three indigenous languages, namely Fula and Futa (two Fulani languages spoken in West Africa), Mandinka, and Wolof.

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Opportunities

With the number of members serving full-time missions worldwide increasing by the tens of thousands in 2013 alone, the Church has an unprecedented opportunity to capitalize on surplus missionary manpower to orchestrate the opening of additional countries to missionary work such as Senegal. The allotment of even two or three missionary companionships to Dakar would make virtually no noticeable impact on taking away resources from other areas of the world but could generate a long-term pay off for the Church in terms of establishing a permanent LDS presence through finding, teaching, baptizing, and retaining native converts. The government and society uphold religious freedom and the Christian minority does not experience any major persecution or restrictions on religious expression and practice, implying that full-time missionaries could not only serve in the country but may openly proselyte. The Senegalese government upholds religious freedom and maintains a secular state notwithstanding Muslims accounting for 94% of the national population. All religious groups must register with the government and obtain legal status as an association in order to operate in the country. The government has generally approved new applications from religious groups for obtaining legal status,[3] suggesting that the LDS Church would likely obtain registration with no major challenges.

Delays in the Church obtaining government registration and assigning foreign missionaries may result in the Church missing the opportunity to enter Senegal at a time when the government and society respect religious freedom and permit Christian groups to openly proselyte and assemble. Many other homogenously Muslim countries do not provide minority religious groups groups with the right to conduct their operations, specifically pertaining to Muslims changing their religious affiliation and proselytism efforts. The influence of Islam on society would likely prompt future LDS mission leaders to avoid openly proselytizing Muslims to respect cultural norms but these conditions nonetheless present rare opportunities for the Church to establish a foothold in a secular state that is predominantly Muslim.

Sizable numbers of Senegalese live abroad for employment or educational purposes, including many in countries where official LDS missionary activity occurs. Full-time missionaries serving in Western Europe have reported frequently teaching Senegalese although very few have appeared to join the Church and remain active. Coordination between Western European mission leaders and the Africa West Area Presidency to identify Senegalese converts baptized in Western Europe and ensuring that their membership records become successfully transferred to the Africa West Area Branch could help identify indigenous members in Senegal to help establish a membership and leadership base from which to organize a member group and later a branch. Past reports of at least 13 known members in Senegal indicate that there appear opportunities to organize a member group from isolated foreign members and native converts baptized abroad.

Dakar is the second most populous metropolitan area in Sub-Saharan Africa without an LDS ward or branch operating. Prospects for establishing an LDS presence in Dakar appear favorable for many reasons including a high population density requiring fewer congregations to service the city in comparison to rural areas, the large number of inhabitants, relatively easy access by airplane from other major cities in West Africa, and the recent expansion of LDS missionary activity into other major cities in predominantly Muslim areas of West Africa such as in Tamale, Ghana. The large population of Dakar may include as many as 100,000 Christians that can be targeted for initial missionary efforts. Senegalese Christians will likely exhibit higher receptivity to LDS outreach than their Muslim counterparts.

There are a few ethnolinguistic groups native to Senegal with sizable numbers of Christians that exhibit weaker ethnoreligious ties to Islam. These groups present some of the greatest opportunities for the Church to experience good receptivity and achieve growth if outreach is properly extended. Located in central coastal areas, the Serer-Sine people number over one million in Senegal and are 22% Christian.[4] Numbering over 300,000, the Jola-Fonyi people reside in Ziguinchor Region (Casamance) and are 22% Christian.[5] The approximately 120,000 Guinea-Bissau natives who reside in Senegal are estimated to be 75% Christian.[6] Many Guinea-Bissau natives reside in Dakar and Ziguinchor Region.

Recommendations

The establishment of the Church in Senegal will begin with visits from mission and area leaders to assess conditions and meet with any members and investigators who reside in Dakar. Isolated members and investigators petitioning church leaders to hold church services and to assign missionaries will be key for mission and area leaders to determine the need and urgency of registering the Church with the government and assigning missionaries. Mission and area leaders may also begin investigatory efforts on their own without appeals from members or investigators due to the good opportunities for missionary work afforded by the government upholding religious freedom and the large target population. Church leaders can organize a member group if there are several members who indicate that they will attend church weekly and if one of these members holds the priesthood and meets worthiness standards. Based on past experience, the Church generally permits the organization of a member group and even branches in countries where official government registration or recognition has not been obtained.

The assignment of one or two senior missionary couples to Dakar to prepare the groundwork for the arrival of full-time, proselytizing young missionaries appears the most practical course of action to establish an LDS presence in Dakar. This has been the pattern for the Church to establish a presence in countless other nations and has generally yielded good results. Senior missionaries can begin meeting with members and investigators in the Dakar area, facilitate efforts to register the Church with the government, and to help conduct church services for a member group. The Church may assign Senegal to a mission at this time. The Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan Mission, the Sierra Leone Freetown, and the Cape Verde Praia Missions appear most likely to administer Senegal due to relatively close proximity or French language proselytism resources. The Cape Verde Praia Mission may be the most effective mission to administer Senegal due to close proximity and Portuguese-speaking manpower that can be utilized to reach Portuguese Creole-speaking Guinea-Bissau natives. However, this would result in a reconfiguration of area boundaries as Cape Verde currently pertains to the Europe Area whereas Senegal pertains to the Africa West Area. Senior missionaries may engage in tasks such as searching for missionary housing, investigating opportunities for humanitarian and development projects, and baptizing the first converts within the country if approved by area or mission leaders.

Full-time missionaries may be assigned to Dakar once government registration is obtained and approval by area and international church leadership is granted. Involvement from local members in missionary efforts will be vital towards instilling self-sufficiency in the Church in Senegal and to achieve higher convert retention and member activity rates. Church planting efforts within Dakar appear mediocre due to likely low levels of receptivity that the predominantly Muslim population will exhibit toward future LDS outreach. However, the organization of several member groups may be effective due to the large geographic size of Dakar and transportation costs and difficulties preventing some investigators and members from attending church at one central location. Due to likely low levels of receptivity exhibited by the population and the need for effective finding techniques, missionaries may achieve greater success through utilizing social media methods such as Facebook in locating interested individuals.

Prospective LDS outreach in Senegal will likely experience the greatest growth when additional areas of the country open to missionary work, namely cities and towns in southern Senegal where there is a sizable Christian minority and weaker ethnoreligious ties to Islam. Among these peoples, the Serer-Sine appear the most feasible to reach due to close proximity to Dakar as this people traditionally resides in scattered communities along coastal areas between Dakar and The Gambia. LDS outreach in Ziguinchor Region presents some of the greatest potential for growth due to sizable numbers of Christians among the Jola-Fonyi and Guinea-Bissau ethnolinguistic groups. Organizing a member group and assigning missionaries to the city of Ziguinchor will be crucial towards establishing any enduring presence in southern Senegal.

Challenges

Two major barriers will likely deter mission and area leaders in West Africa from seriously considering the opening of Senegal to missionary activity. These barriers include reluctance from mission and area leadership to expand missionary activity into countries that have previously had no LDS presence and the perception that low receptivity and slow LDS growth will occur in Senegal if missionaries are assigned as Muslims constitute 94% of the population and many of the most populous ethnolinguistic groups exhibit strong ties to Islam.

Reluctance by mission and area leaders to open additional West African countries to missionary work is rooted in the centers of strength policy. This policy has guided mission and area leaders throughout the world to not only delay or avoid the opening of unreached cities and provinces in nations with an LDS presence but has often discouraged the opening of countries that have had no previous LDS presence. Members in some areas of Sub-Saharan Africa have reported that their requests to mission and area leaders to establish an official church presence in their country have been denied due to concerns regarding the proper administration of the Church in remote locations, apostasy worries, church leaders' unfamiliarity with local culture and customs, a lack of awareness on the procedure to officially register the Church with respective governments, and threats of safety or political instability. One of the greatest challenges the Church has faced in Sub-Saharan Africa has been comparatively few mission resources dedicated to countries with large populations that are strongly receptive to LDS outreach. Until the worldwide surge in the full-time missionary force in the early 2010s, many missions struggled to sufficiently staff their ranks in order to assign missionaries to currently operating wards and branches.

Mission and area leaders may perceive that prospective LDS outreach in Senegal would yield few results and experience significantly less productivity compared to assigning surplus missionary manpower to other West African nations with a current LDS presence. Future LDS outreach in Senegal would likely experience slow growth due to the prominence of Islam in the country and the slow growth rates reported by other missionary-focused Christian groups. The two most populous ethnolinguistic groups in Senegal, the Wolof[7] and Fulani (Pulaar) are staunchly Muslim as estimates indicated that 99% of either population is Muslim.[8] There may not be a single Latter-day Saint convert from these ethnic groups who currently resides in Senegal, let alone in the entire world. A lack of Senegalese LDS converts who have joined the Church abroad and have returned to Senegal also appears deeply rooted in the lack of an LDS presence in Senegal today. There remains a significant need for the Church to develop teaching and gospel study resources for investigators with a Muslim religious background in order to facilitate proper understanding of the LDS gospel message and obtain a personal testimony.

Comparative Growth

Most missionary-focused Christian groups have established a presence in Senegal but achieve very slow or stagnant growth. Evangelicals claim 0.2% of the Senegalese population.[9] In 2012, Jehovah's Witnesses reported 1,155 active members, 25 congregations, and 36 baptisms.[10] In late 2013, Witnesses operated congregations in French (21), English (2), and Wolof (1) and congregations operated in most large cities.[11] Witnesses have experienced virtually stagnant membership and congregational growth within the past five years. The Seventh Day Adventist Church experiences slow growth but has doubled its membership within the past 15 years from 257 to 567. In 2012, Adventists reported six churches and two companies. Adventists generally baptize between 10 and 30 converts per year.[12] In 2012, the Church of the Nazarene reported 155 members, six churches, and an average of 227 attending weekly worship services.[13]

Limitations

The Church does not publish membership figures for Senegal on a yearly basis. It is unclear how many members currently reside in the country. The Church does not publish the locations of member groups on its online meetinghouse locator. It is unclear whether a member group once functioned or currently functions in Dakar. There are no official membership statistics on country of origin or language usage for languages not within the 10 most commonly spoken languages in the Church. There are no reliable estimates on the number of Senegalese Latter-day Saints worldwide. There are no details available on whether mission or area leaders have petitioned or planned to open Senegal to missionary work. The Church does not publish information on its plans to open additional countries to missionary work until after these plans are finalized and carried out.

Future Prospects

The outlook for the Church to establish an official missionary presence in Senegal appears slim within the foreseeable future due to more aggressive efforts by mission and area leaders in the Africa West Area to expand outreach within countries that have already had an LDS presence established. The likelihood of the Church organizing an official branch in Senegal will hinge on greater numbers of foreigners and Senegalese converts relocating to Dakar, the area presidency organizing a group, and the

group experiencing increasing church attendance and leadership develop in order for a branch to begin functioning. The Church will likely submit an application for government registration once area leaders determine that the assignment of full-time missionaries is more feasible. The ongoing emphasis on the centers of strength policy in regards to opening additional countries to missionary work, the perception that little to no LDS growth will occur in predominately Muslim countries, and the lack of Senegalese converts may delay outreach for many years or decades to come.

[1] "MAJOR AGGLOMERATIONS OF THE WORLD," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 20 December 2013. http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html

[2] Deseret News 2011 Church Almanac, p. 183

[3] "Senegal," International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, retrieved 21 December 2013. http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dlid=208188

[4] "Serer-Sine in Senegal," Joshua Project, retrieved 21 December 2013. http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php

[5] "Jola-Fonyi in Senegal," Joshua Project, retrieved 21 December 2013. http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=11568&rog3=SG

[6] "Crioulo, Upper Guinea in Senegal," Joshua Project, retrieved 21 December 2013. http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=11436&rog3=SG

[7] "Wolof in Senegal," Joshua Project, retrieved 21 December 2013. http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?rop3=110856&rog3=SG

[8] "Fulakunda in Senegal," Joshua Project, retrieved 21 December 2013. http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=11772&rog3=SG

[9] "Guinea," Operation World, retrieved 20 December 2013. http://www.operationworld.org/guia

[10] "2012 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide," jw.org

[11] "Congregation Meeting Search," jw.org, retrieved 21 December 2013. http://www.jw.org/apps/index.html?option=FRNsPnPBrTZGT&txtCMSLang=E

[12] "Senegal/Mauritania Mission (1997-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 21 December 2013. http://adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldInstID=2270538

[13] "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