



# Prospective LDS Outreach Case Studies

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## Prospective LDS Outreach in Burkina Faso

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### Overview

With 17.8 million people, Burkina Faso is a landlocked country located in West Africa that is 61% Muslim, 23% Christian, 15% animist, and 1% followers of other religions. Ouagadougou is the capital of Burkina Faso and had an estimated population of 1.93 million people as of April 2013.<sup>[1]</sup> French is the official language and there are two indigenous African languages spoken by more than one million people (Moore and Jula). As of late 2013, the LDS Church had not established a presence in Burkina Faso notwithstanding widespread religious freedom, a large target population, abundant French-speaking African missionary manpower, and small numbers of Burkinabe joining the Church in other nations.

This case study reviews the Church's history of administrating Burkina Faso and identifies translations of basic proselytism materials 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 Burkina Faso is summarized. Limitations to this case study are described and the prospects for an LDS establishment in Burkina Faso is predicted.

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### LDS History and Language Resources

In 1998, the newly organized Africa West Area included Burkina Faso within its jurisdiction. In 2011, the Church organized the Africa West Area Branch to service Burkina Faso and nine additional countries within the Africa West Area that were unassigned to missions. No more than 20 Latter-day Saints appear to reside in Burkina Faso at present. Burkina Faso 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 Burkina Faso. There were three materials translated into Moore (Gospel Principles, The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the 13 Articles of Faith) and two materials translated into Bambara and Hausa (Gospel Principles and The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith).<sup>[2]</sup>

### Opportunities

There are current opportunities to reach Burkinabe who reside in countries with an LDS presence. Cote d'Ivoire has one of the largest Burkinabe populations outside of Burkina Faso. There approximately two million Burkinabe residing in Abidjan and other areas of the country for employment purposes. Returned missionaries who have served in the Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan Mission reported frequent contact with Burkinabe and small numbers of Burkinabe investigators and members. Notwithstanding small numbers of Burkinabe converts and limited outreach extended in Abidjan, there has thus far been an insufficient number of members who have joined the Church, remained active long enough to experience meaningful church activity, and have permanently returned back to Burkina Faso in order for an official LDS congregation to be organized in Ouagadougou or another city. Greater focus on Burkinabe-specific outreach in Abidjan may help produce a sufficient number of active members who return to Burkina Faso and lay the groundwork for an official congregation to begin operating.

Ouagadougou is the fourth most populous metropolitan area in Sub-Saharan Africa without an LDS ward or branch operating.

Prospects for establishing an LDS presence in Ouagadougou 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 Ouagadougou includes hundreds of thousands of Christians that can be targeted for initial missionary efforts and who may exhibit higher receptivity compared to their Muslim counterparts.

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 Burkina Faso. The allotment of even two or three missionary companionships to Ouagadougou 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. Religious groups have not experienced difficulties registering with the government in order to formally operate in the country, suggesting that the Church could easily obtain government registration when desired.

The argument made by some that delays in establishing an LDS presence in Burkina Faso is attributed to no Christian majority and low levels of economic development are unsubstantiated. Other West African nations with an LDS presence report similar societal conditions as in Burkina Faso (no Christian majority and low levels of economic development) and report some of the most rapid LDS growth in the world. In Benin, the population is 43% Christian, 24% Muslim, 17% Vodoun (Voodoo), and 16% followers of other religions yet the LDS Church has experienced significant growth within the past five years as demonstrated by the number of members and branches quintupling. The level of economic development is comparable in both Benin and Burkina Faso (\$1,700 GDP per capita in Benin versus \$1,400 GDP per capita in Burkina Faso). In Cote d'Ivoire, the population is 39% Muslim, 33% Christian, 12% followers of indigenous religious, and 16% unaffiliated with a religious group. The GDP per capita in Cote d'Ivoire is \$1,800. The Church in Cote d'Ivoire has experienced rapid membership and congregational growth since its initial establishment in the late 1980s. In Sierra Leone, the population is 60% Muslim, 10% Christian, and 30% followers of other religions. The GDP per capita in Sierra Leone is \$1,400. Currently Sierra Leone has one of the highest percentages of nominal Latter-day Saints of any Sub-Saharan African nation. In Togo, the population is 29% Christian, 20% Muslim, and 51% followers of indigenous religions. The GDP per capita in Togo is \$1,100. The Church in Togo has experienced dynamic growth trends similar to the Church in Benin as within the past five years the number of members has tripled and the number of branches increased from two to 11. According to the most recent available estimates, the percentage of the population living below the poverty line is comparable for Burkina Faso, Benin, and Cote d'Ivoire (40-50%) and significantly higher in Sierra Leone (70%). There does appear to be a more visible Muslim presence in Ouagadougou than compared to the largest cities in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Togo but widespread religious freedom occurs in all five countries.

## Recommendations

The establishment of the Church in Burkina Faso will begin with visits from mission and area leaders to assess conditions and meet with any members and investigators who reside in Ouagadougou. 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 and church growth. 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 Ouagadougou 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 Burkina Faso. 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 Ouagadougou area, facilitate efforts to register the Church with the government, and to help conduct church services for a member group. The Church may assign Burkina Faso to a mission at this time. French-speaking missions appear most likely to have Burkina Faso added to their jurisdiction such as the Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan Mission or the Benin Cotonou Mission. Senior missionaries can also search for missionary housing, investigate opportunities for humanitarian and development projects, and begin baptizing the first converts within the country if approved by area leaders.

Full-time missionaries may be assigned to Ouagadougou once government registration is obtained and when this action is approved by area and international church leadership. The greatest successes in baptizing large numbers of converts and achieving high convert retention will require full-time missionaries regularly opening additional member groups in locations distant from where the initial member group begins functioning. The Church in West Africa has experienced impressive results from following a church-planting approach to outreach expansion in newly opened cities to missionary work such as in Sunyani, Ghana and Techiman, Ghana. Involvement from local members in missionary efforts will be vital towards instilling self-sufficiency in the Church in Burkina Faso and to achieve higher convert retention and member activity rates.

Prospects for opening additional areas of the country to missionary work will become more likely once church units in

Ouagadougou develop greater self sufficiency and experience regularly increases in the number of members and investigators attending church services. The central geographic location of Ouagadougou in the country provides good opportunities for national outreach expansion. Bobo-Dioulasso is the second most populous city and will likely be the first city outside the capital to receive investigatory visits from mission leaders and senior couples and have a member group organized.

## Challenges

Reluctance from mission and area leadership to expand missionary activity into countries that have previously had no LDS presence presents the greatest barrier to the establishment of the Church in Burkina Faso. The centers of strength policy has guided mission and area leaders 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 the government, 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.

The Church in Burkina Faso may experience self-sufficiency problems as the small numbers of Burkinabe members have thus far appeared unable to self-organize and establish a presence in Ouagadougou. To contrast, converts who joined the Church abroad and returned back to their home country played a central role in the initial establishment of the Church in many other Sub-Saharan African countries, even with very limited to no involvement from young, proselytizing missionaries and senior missionary couples. Coordination between the Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan Mission and the Africa West Area Presidency will be vital towards implementing a Burkinabe-specific outreach program in Abidjan and identifying members and leaders who can help prepare for the organization of an official branch in Ouagadougou.

## Comparative Growth

Virtually all proselytism-focused Christian groups that extend outreach on a worldwide scale report a widespread presence in Burkina Faso. Evangelicals claim 8.9% of the population.<sup>[3]</sup> In 2012, the Seventh Day Adventist Church reported approximately 3,900 members, 11 churches, and 63 companies. Adventists have experienced rapid membership growth within the past decade but slow congregational growth.<sup>[4]</sup> Adventists translate basic publications into at least 11 indigenous languages including Bambara, Bissa, Bobo Fing, Bwamu, Dogon, Gourmanchema, Fulfulde (Fulani), Hausa, Jula, Lyele, and Southern Samo.<sup>[5]</sup> In 2013, Jehovah's Witnesses reported 48 congregations in Burkina Faso; 23 of which operated in Ouagadougou. Provided with the number of congregations or groups in parentheses, languages into which Witnesses conduct services included French (26), Moore (18), Jula (4), American Sign Language (3), English (1), and Ewe (1).<sup>[6]</sup> There were nearly 1,600 active Witnesses at year-end 2012.<sup>[7]</sup> Witnesses report slow but steady membership growth in the country. Witnesses have translated basic proselytism materials into five indigenous languages including Bambara, Dagaare, Hausa, Moore, and Jula.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Limitations

The Church does not publish membership figures for Burkina Faso. It is unclear how many members 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 Ouagadougou. There are no official membership statistics on country of origin or language usage for languages not within the top most commonly spoken languages in the Church. There are no reliable estimates on the number of Burkinabe Latter-day Saints worldwide. There are no details available on whether mission or area leaders have petitioned or planned to open Burkina Faso 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 establishing a presence in Burkina Faso appears mixed for the short and medium terms. Widespread religious freedom, societal and cultural conditions comparable to other West African countries with an LDS presence, the presence of a major metropolitan area (Ouagadougou), recent successes in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire expanding missionary work into cities located in areas with sizable numbers of Muslims, and unprecedented increases in the worldwide full-time missionary force suggests good prospects for establishing an LDS presence in Burkina Faso as soon as church leaders decide to seriously consider visiting the country and taking an active stance to opening it to missionary activity. However, the Church's centers of strength policy, denied petitions from isolated members and investigators for the Church to establish a presence in currently unreached countries in West Africa, and the Church not establishing a presence in additional countries in West Africa for over a decade indicate that an LDS presence in Burkina Faso may be many years or even decades away from realization. Within the foreseeable future, it appears most likely for the Church to organize a member group in Ouagadougou and assign the country to a mission but to not take any proactive measures to assign missionaries for many more years to come.

[1] "MAJOR AGGLOMERATIONS OF THE WORLD," [www.citypopulation.de](http://www.citypopulation.de), retrieved 5 September 2013. <http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html>

[2] [store.lds.org](http://store.lds.org), accessed 5 September 2013

[3] "Burkina Faso," Operation World, retrieved 4 September 2013. <http://www.operationworld.org/burk>

[4] "Burkina Faso Mission," [www.adventiststatistics.org](http://www.adventiststatistics.org), retrieved 4 September 2013. [http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view\\_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10038](http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10038)

[5] "Statistical Report for 2010," [sda.org](http://sda.org)

[6] "Congregation Meeting Search," [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), retrieved 4 September 2013. [http://www.jw.org/apps/E\\_FRNsPnPBrTZGT](http://www.jw.org/apps/E_FRNsPnPBrTZGT)

[7] "2012 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide," [jw.org](http://www.jw.org)

[8] "Featured Items," [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), retrieved 4 September 2013. <http://www.jw.org/en/publications/>