Prospective LDS Outreach Case Studies

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Prospective LDS Outreach in Chad

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Overview

Inhabited by 11.4 million people, Chad is a country in Central Africa. Prominent ethnic groups include the Sara (27.7%), Arabs (12.3%), Mayo-Kebbi (11.5%), Kanem-Bornou (9.0%), Ouaddi (8.7%), Hadjarai (6.7%), Tandjile (6.5%), Gorane (6.3%), and Fitri-Batha (4.7%). Slightly more than half the population is Muslim whereas one-third of the population is Christian. Followers of indigenous religions and nonreligious individuals constitute the remainder of the population. French and Arabic are the official languages. Nearly 130 indigenous languages are spoken in Chad although none of these languages have more than one million speakers. As of early 2014, the LDS Church had no known presence in Chad notwithstanding the government upholding religious freedom, sizable numbers of Christians in the largest cities and southern areas of the country, and abundant French-speaking African missionary manpower within Sub-Saharan Africa.

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

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LDS Background

In 1998, Chad was assigned to the Africa West Area. One of the first Chadian members, Toupta Boguena was baptized in Arizona in 1997 and returned to Chad in 2003. At the time she was the only member in N'djamena and the closest member was an American working in southern Chad in Doba.[1] In 2011, the Church organized the Africa West Area Branch to service Chad and nine additional countries within the Africa West Area that were unassigned to missions. As of year-end 2013, the Church appeared to have less than 20 members in Chad. Chad has never been assigned to an LDS mission.

The Church has translated all LDS scriptures and a sizable number of missionary and gospel study materials into French and Standard Arabic. No translations of LDS materials are available in commonly spoken indigenous languages.

Opportunities

There appear no legal challenges for the Church to establish a presence in Chad. The government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of Public Safety and Immigration. Recent reports indicate that no religious groups have experienced challenges in obtaining registration.[2] These conditions present an important opportunity to establish an official presence when current legislation upholds religious freedom and presents no major barriers for attaining registration. To contrast, most other countries currently unreached by the Church experience considerable religious freedom restrictions and challenges for obtaining government recognition or registration to formally operate.

N'djamena presents the greatest opportunities for establishing an initial LDS presence in Chad due to its status as the most populous city and national capital of Chad, good accessibility by airplane from many major cities in Central Africa and West Africa, and sizable Christian minority. The N'djamena metropolitan area includes 1.2 million inhabitants, providing a large target

population for prospective LDS outreach.[3] Even though Muslims would likely not be targeted by overt missionary efforts, future missionaries could reach hundreds of thousands of Christians who reside in the capital. Many of Chad's ethnolinguistic groups are represented in the heterogeneous city population, providing opportunities for missionaries to reach many of the peoples in the country. Converts from these groups can later play an instrumental role in the establishment of the Church in their home communities.

Ethnolinguistic groups with a Christian majority present some of the greatest opportunities for LDS outreach due to greater tolerance of proselytism activity and theological similarities with Latter-day Saints. Consisting of approximately one dozen subgroups indigenous to southwestern Chad, the Sara people number over two million and are approximately 90% Christian.[4] LDS outreach that targets the Sara will be essential towards developing a long-term presence in the country and capitalizing on the most receptive populations. Many other missionary-focused groups report a presence in many locations where the Sara traditionally reside. Ordered by population size from largest to smallest, other Christian-majority ethnolinguistic groups with over 100,000 people that may be receptive to LDS outreach include the Musey, Mundang, Marba, Masana, and Tupuri.

The argument made by some that delays in establishing an LDS presence in Chad is attributed to no Christian majority and low levels of economic development are unsubstantiated. Many West African nations with an LDS presence report similar societal conditions as in Chad (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 Chad ($1,700 GDP per capita in Benin versus $2,500 GDP per capita in Chad). 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, the number of congregations increased from two to 12, and the Church organized its first district and stake. According to the most recent estimates available, the percentage of the population living below the poverty line is comparable for Benin and Cote d'Ivoire (40-50%) and significantly higher in Sierra Leone (70%) and Chad (80%). There does appear to be a more visible Muslim presence in N'djamena compared to the largest cities in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Togo, but widespread religious freedom occurs in all five countries.

Recommendations

Locating isolated Chadian members and foreign Latter-day Saints residing in the country will constitute the first step toward establishing an LDS presence in Chad. Visits from mission and area leaders to assess conditions and meet with any members and investigators who reside in N'Djamena will be the most feasible and proactive approach to begin outreach. 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 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 N'Djamena 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 Chad. 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 N'Djamena area, facilitate efforts to register the Church with the government, and to help conduct church services for a member group. 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.

The Church will likely assign Chad to a mission once a senior missionary couple is serving in the country. French-speaking missions appear most likely to have Chad added to their jurisdiction such as the Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan Mission or the Benin Cotonou Mission as both of these mission operate within the Africa West Area. Due to distance from mission outreach centers in West Africa, the Church may reassign Chad to the Africa Southeast Area and assign the country to one of the nearest French-speaking missions in this area such the Republic of the Congo Brazzaville Mission (scheduled to open in July 2014) or the Democratic Republic of the Congo Kinshasa Mission.

Full-time missionaries may be assigned to N'Djamena 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 and Central Africa has experienced impressive results from following a church-planting approach to outreach expansion in newly opened cities to missionary work such as in Daloa, Cote d'Ivoire and Kolwezi, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Involvement from local members in missionary efforts will be vital towards instilling self-sufficiency in the Church in Chad and to achieve acceptable convert retention and

member activity rates.

Prospects for opening additional areas of the country to missionary work will become more likely once multiple church units in N'Djamena develop adequate self sufficiency for local members to head local leadership and when these congregations experience regular increases in the number of members and investigators attending church services.

Challenges

Remote location from the closest cities with an LDS mission or official congregation constitutes one of the greatest barriers to extending future outreach in Chad. Of the six adjacent countries to Chad, three (Libya, Niger, and Sudan) have no known LDS presence, one (Central African Republic) has one branch and no full-time missionaries assigned, (Cameroon) one has two cities with an LDS presence and missionaries assigned but no mission, and one (Nigeria) has hundreds of congregations, five missions, and a temple. All three adjacent countries with an LDS presence have no LDS presence within administrative divisions bordering Chad. Enugu, Nigeria is the closest city where the Church headquarters a mission whereas Bangui, Central African Republic and Bauchi, Nigeria are the closest cities where an official branch operates. Stagnant national outreach expansion has occurred in the Bangui and Bauchi areas as branches in both of these locations have operated for over 15 years. A lack of growth in these locations may dissuade area and mission leaders for seriously considering missionary opportunities in Chad as efforts in the nearest cities to Chad in these countries have yielded few results. Surplus missionary manpower in the region appears most likely to be utilized in Cameroon and Nigeria as outreach expansion opportunities in southern and central areas of Cameroon and Nigeria appear more favorable and feasible than opening Chad to missionary work.

The Church has appeared to have had only a handful of Chadians join the Church in other countries. It is likely that most of these converts have no intentions on returning to Chad due to greater economic and educational opportunities elsewhere. With essentially no Chadian LDS community, the Church will likely experience considerable delays in opening Chad to missionary activity due to the lack of a membership base from which to build upon.

Political instability and military insurgencies have plagued Chad within the past 15 years. A rebellion in northern Chad has periodically flared up and destabilized the country. In the mid-2000s, militant groups from Sudan entered the country and instigated insurrection in eastern Chad. Rebel forces launched two attacks on N'djamena in 2006 and 2008 but failed to capture the city on both these occasions. The city has experienced stability and no major problems from rebel forces since 2008. In May 2013, the government thwarted a planned coup d'état against the president.[5] These conditions have posed safety concerns for area and mission leaders to visit and assign foreign missionaries. Ongoing political instability in eastern areas of the country may restrict initial LDS outreach to N'djamena or a handful of major cities in southern areas of the country.

Low levels of economic development, poverty, and corruption all pose significant challenges for LDS growth. Difficult societal and economic conditions include high infant mortality rates, low literacy rates, the vast majority of the population living below the poverty line, limited infrastructure, and a lack of skilled workers. In 2013, Transparency International ranked Chad within the 15 most corrupt countries in the world.[6] Corruption is pervasive in society and found on all levels of government. Although these conditions do not appear likely to create challenges for the Church to obtain official recognition and assign missionaries, local leadership development and instilling self-sufficiency into the country appear significant challenges.

The Church may experience challenges reaching people groups that are the most receptive to outreach due to many traditionally Christian or animist populations residing in rural areas in southern Chad. Many of the largest cities in southern areas of the country such as Moundou and Sarh are difficult to access from outside of Chad and none have international airports. This will likely require church leaders to travel first to N'djamena in order to find connecting flights to southern areas of the country. Additionally, isolation from the nearest mission and LDS outreach centers poses significant administrative challenges and concerns for initiating in any formal missionary activity in southern areas of the country. Consequently it will likely take many years or even a decade or two for the Church to begin missionary efforts in the predominantly Christian south following the establishment of the Church in N'djamena.

Several of the most populous ethnolinguistic groups are staunchly Muslim and present a poor prognosis for LDS outreach. With 1.72 million people, Chadian Arabs traditionally reside in central Chad and are 95% Muslim and only 5% Christian.[7] With 822,000 people, the Kanembu reside in the N'djamena area and are 90% Muslim and 10% followers of indigenous religions.[8] With 410,000 people, the Maba reside in eastern Chad and are 96% Muslim and 0.04% Christian.[9] The Church has no missionary or teaching resources tailored to those with a Muslim background; creating challenges for properly presenting the LDS gospel witness to the understanding of Muslims. Other missionary-focused Christians report little to no growth among most Muslim peoples in Chad due to low receptivity and difficulty reaching these peoples in their homelands.

Comparative Growth

Most missionary groups with a worldwide presence operate in Chad although the size and growth trends of these proselytizing Christian groups widely varies by denomination. Evangelicals are the most successful proselytism Christian group in Chad. Currently evangelicals claim that their membership constitutes 10% of the population.[10] The Seventh Day Adventist Church has experienced modest growth in Chad within the past two decades. In 1997, Adventists reported 1,428 members, 22 churches (large congregations), 22 companies (small congregations), and 276 baptisms whereas in 2012 Adventists reported nearly 2,500 members, 42 churches, 14 companies, and 158 baptisms.[11] Jehovah's Witnesses have reported extremely slow

growth within recent years. In 2013, Witnesses reported 651 peak publishers (active members), 17 congregations, and 25 baptisms.[12] Neither Adventists nor Witnesses appear to translate materials into indigenous languages. The Church of the Nazarene appears to have no presence in Chad.[13]

Limitations

The Church has never published membership statistics for Chad. 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 N'Djamena. 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 Chadian Latter-day Saints worldwide. There are no details available on whether mission or area leaders have petitioned or planned to open Chad 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 a future LDS presence in Chad appears unlikely for the foreseeable future due to political instability in the region, long distance from the nearest LDS mission and outreach centers, and the lack of Chadian converts worldwide. Prospects appear most favorable for mission and area leaders to visit N'Djamena and assess conditions for organizing a member group and assigning a senior missionary couple once there are multiple Chadian members petitioning for the establishment of an LDS presence and greater political stability is established in the region.

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