



Prospective LDS Outreach Case Studies

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Prospective LDS Outreach in Guinea-Bissau

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Overview

Supporting a population of 1.69 million people, Guinea-Bissau is a small, Portuguese-speaking country located in West Africa. The population is 50% Muslim, 40% followers of indigenous religions, and 10% Christian. Prominent ethnic groups include the Balanta (30%), Fula (20%), Manjaca (14%), Mandinga (13%), and Papel (7%). Portuguese is the official language and no indigenous African languages are spoken by more than a million people. As of early 2014, the LDS Church had not established a presence in Guinea-Bissau notwithstanding the government and society upholding religious freedom, most missionary-focused Christian groups with a worldwide presence operating within the country, small numbers of Bissau-Guineans who have joined the Church in other countries, and historic ties with nearby Cape Verde where the LDS Church has recently experienced rapid growth and has had sizable numbers of members serving full-time missions.

This case study reviews the Church's history of administrating Guinea-Bissau and identifies translations of basic proselytism materials in indigenous languages spoken within the region. 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 Guinea-Bissau is summarized. Limitations to this case study are described and the prospects for an LDS establishment in Guinea-Bissau are predicted.

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LDS Background

In 1998, the newly organized Africa West Area included Guinea-Bissau within its jurisdiction. In 2011, the Church organized the Africa West Area Branch to service Guinea-Bissau and nine additional countries within the Africa West Area that were unassigned to missions. At year-end 2013, there were 45 members in Guinea-Bissau. Guinea-Bissau 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 West Africa. Gospel Principles and The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith are available in three indigenous languages, namely Mandinka and Fula and Futa (two Fulani languages spoken in the region).

Opportunities

There have been no recent reports of societal or governmental abuses of religious freedom. Government and civil authorities have upheld religious freedom for many years. There appear no significant challenges for religious groups to obtain permission to operate within the country as the government regularly grants licenses to religious groups.^[1] 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 Guinea-Bissau. The allotment of even two or three missionary companionships to Bissau 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 establishment of an LDS presence in Bissau presents the only realistic opportunity for the Church to gain a foothold in the country as there are no other major population centers with over 100,000 people. Bissau numbers among the most populous

metropolitan areas in West Africa without an LDS presence, suggesting that future LDS outreach would experience good results due to a large target population and high population densities requiring fewer LDS outreach centers. Christians in Guinea-Bissau are principally concentrated in Bissau and a handful of other prominent cities and towns. As the Church in many Sub-Saharan countries generally experiences the highest receptivity and greatest growth among Christians compared to Muslims or follows or indigenous religions, the Church would likely experience considerable growth among Christian Bissau-Guineans once formal missionary efforts begin in Bissau.

The Cape Verde Praia Mission appears best equipped to orchestrate the opening of Guinea-Bissau to missionary activity due to cultural and historical similarities between Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, a sizable allotment of Portuguese-speaking missionary manpower to the mission, and progress within the mission advancing districts into stakes and freeing resources for outreach expansion efforts. No other mission in West Africa has Portuguese-speaking missionaries. The Cape Verde Praia Mission also has the smallest population serviced by any mission in Africa, Asia, or Europe, suggesting that the addition of Guinea-Bissau to the mission's jurisdiction would not overwhelm mission leadership. Additionally, mission leadership is accustomed to the cultural and societal conditions of former Portuguese colonies in Africa and frequent travel by airplane as mission leaders must regularly visit the many islands in the Cape Verde Archipelago. These conditions indicate few major challenges for mission leaders to add Guinea-Bissau to the travel itinerary. Progress with districts becoming stakes also indicates that mission leadership has greater availability and resources to channel into opening additional locations to missionary work. Unlike districts, stakes do not require mission president supervision and generally have fewer member and leadership-support missionaries. The historically large numbers of Cape Verdeans serving missions also offers mission and area leaders a valuable resource to utilize when beginning initial missionary efforts due to Portuguese language skills.

The small numbers of Bissau-Guineans who have joined the Church in other countries also present a valuable opportunity for mission and area leaders to establish a foothold in Guinea-Bissau. Most of these native converts have appeared to join the Church in Portugal and Spain. Converts who have returned to Guinea-Bissau since their conversion present opportunities for establishing an official church presence and developing a core of local members to provide leadership and fellowship support for future converts.

The argument made by some that delays in establishing an LDS presence in Guinea-Bissau is attributed to no Christian majority and low levels of economic development are unsubstantiated. Other West African nations with an LDS presence exhibit similar societal conditions as in Guinea-Bissau (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 Guinea-Bissau (\$1,600 GDP per capita in Benin versus \$1,200 GDP per capita in Guinea-Bissau). 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 capital 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 formed its first district and stake during this period. The prominence of Islam in Bissau appears comparable to the most populous cities in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Togo, suggesting few challenges for future LDS proselytism efforts in Bissau as the Church has openly proselytized in the most populous city in all four of these nations.

Recommendations

The establishment of the Church in Guinea-Bissau will begin with visits from mission and area leaders to assess conditions and meet with any members and investigators who reside in Bissau. Isolated members and investigators petitioning church leaders to hold church services and assign missionaries will be key for mission and area leaders to determine the need and urgency of obtaining a license from 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. However, recent reports indicate that the Church will likely experience no challenges or delays in obtaining a license to officially operate in the country.

The assignment of one or two senior missionary couples to Bissau 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 Guinea-Bissau. Senior missionaries who originate from Portuguese-speaking countries such as Brazil, Cape Verde, and Portugal appear the most likely to establish an initial church presence as these nations have a diplomatic presence in the country. Assigning senior missionaries prior to young proselytizing elders 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, facilitate efforts to register the Church with the government, and help conduct church services for member groups. The Church may formally assign Guinea-Bissau to a mission at this time. 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 Guinea-Bissau 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, Tamale, and Techiman, Ghana. Involvement from local members in missionary efforts will be vital towards instilling self-sufficiency in the Church in Guinea-Bissau, and achieving higher convert retention and member activity rates.

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 Guinea-Bissau. 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, safety, concerns, and 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. Distance from the nearest country with an LDS mission constitutes another factor that deters an LDS establishment as the Church does not have a presence in Guinea or Senegal - the two adjacent countries to Guinea-Bissau.

Future missionary outreach may experience challenges teaching individuals who are Muslim or followers of indigenous religions. All of the most populous ethnolinguistic groups are predominantly Muslim or followers of indigenous religions. Currently missionary tactics and teaching approaches are tailored to those with a Christian background. These skills and approaches may yield few results among these ethnolinguistic groups as the Church has not developed teaching and missionary approaches tailored to those with a Muslim or animist background. The greatest challenges for proselytism will be encountered by Fula as the population is homogeneously Muslim.^[2] Other groups also pose challenges for LDS proselytism. The Balanta are primarily follows of indigenous religions (56%) and Islam (39%). A small minority adheres to Christianity (5%).^[3] The Manjaca are predominantly followers of indigenous religions (78%) although a sizable minority adheres to Islam (19%).^[4] The Mandinga primarily adhere to Islam (62%) and indigenous religions (32%).^[5] The Papel are predominantly followers of indigenous religions (60%) and Islam (26%).^[6]

The Church in Guinea-Bissau may experience self-sufficiency problems as the small number of Bissau-Guinean members have thus far appeared unable to self-organize and establish a presence in Bissau. To contrast, converts who joined the Church abroad and returned back to their home country have played a central role in the initial establishment of the Church in many other Sub-Saharan African countries despite very limited or no involvement from young, proselytizing missionaries and senior missionary couples. Coordination between the missions in Cape Verde, Portugal, and Spain, and the Africa West Area Presidency will be vital towards identifying members and leaders who can help prepare for the organization of an official branch in Bissau.

The Church may experience challenges assigning senior missionary couples to Guinea-Bissau. The United States does not maintain an official diplomatic presence in Guinea-Bissau,^[7] which may deter the assignment of American senior couples. As Americans constitute the vast majority of senior missionary couples serving worldwide, there may be challenges identifying missionaries from other nations who have the necessary skills, experience, and knowledge to properly establish an initial LDS presence. There are few active, senior-aged Latter-day Saint couples in Portuguese-speaking nations who have the resources and the ability to serve full-time missions, and the high demand for these senior couples in other Portuguese-speaking African nations poses additional challenges for allocating a senior missionary couple to Guinea-Bissau.

There are some societal conditions that suggest future LDS missionary efforts may experience additional challenges. Guinea-Bissau ranks among the most corrupt countries in the world.^[8] Corruption is pervasive in society and government. Guinea-Bissau experiences low levels of economic development and few employment opportunities. These conditions will pose challenges for local leadership development and efforts for the Church to become financially self sufficient. Some Bissau-Guineans hold negative views about Cape Verdeans due to the past tumultuous political involvement of Cape Verdeans and socioeconomic divides. Consequently, these conditions may pose some challenges for Cape Verdean full-time missionaries serving within the country.

Comparative Growth

Evangelicals claim 1.8% of the population and are the largest nontraditional, proselytizing Christian group. The Seventh Day Adventist Church appears to operate in many locations although the number of active members and clergy appears small. In 2012, Adventists reported 2,583 members, four churches (large congregations), 11 companies (small congregations), and 144 baptisms. Adventists have experienced slow membership growth within the past decade.^[9] Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a minimal presence in Guinea-Bissau. In 2013, Witnesses reported an average of 130 active members and eight baptisms.^[10] In

early 2014, Witnesses operated only two, Portuguese-speaking congregations in the entire country that operated in Bissau.^[11] The Church of the Nazarene does not appear to maintain a presence in Guinea-Bissau.^[12]

Limitations

The Church has not regularly published annual membership figures for Guinea-Bissau. 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 Bissau. There are no official membership statistics on country of origin or language use for languages not within the top most commonly spoken languages in the Church. There are no reliable estimates on the number of Bissau-Guinean Latter-day Saints worldwide. There are no details available on whether mission or area leaders have ever petitioned or planned to open Guinea-Bissau 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. The Church does not specify which Fulani and Mandinka sublanguages have translations of LDS materials.

Future Prospects

The outlook for the Church establishing a presence in Guinea-Bissau 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, good conditions for the Cape Verde Praia Mission to begin administering Guinea-Bissau, Bissau supporting a large population with sizable numbers of Christians, recent successes in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire expanding missionary work into previously unreached cities, and unprecedented increases in the worldwide full-time missionary force suggests good prospects for establishing an LDS presence in Guinea-Bissau as soon as church leaders decide to visit the country and take an active stance on 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 West African countries, and the Church not establishing a presence in additional countries in West Africa for over a decade indicate that an LDS presence in Guinea-Bissau may be many years or even decades away from fruition. Isolated members and investigators requesting an official church establishment appears the most likely means for the Church to seriously consider establishing a presence in the country. Within the foreseeable future, it appears most likely for the Church to organize a member group in Bissau and assign the country to a mission, but any proactive measures to assign missionaries may take many years following the assignment of the country to a mission.

[1] "Guinea-Bissau," International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, retrieved 17 April 2014. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208158>

[2] "Fulakunda, Peul in Guinea-Bissau," Joshua Project, retrieved 16 April 2014. http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/11772/PU

[3] "Balanta, Kentohe in Guinea-Bissau," Joshua Project, retrieved 16 April 2014. http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/16118/PU

[4] "Mandyak, Manjaco in Guinea-Bissau," Joshua Project, retrieved 16 April 2014. http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/13493/PU

[5] "Mandingo, Mandinka in Guinea-Bissau," Joshua Project, retrieved 16 April 2014. http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/13491/PU

[6] "Papel, Pepel in Guinea-Bissau," Joshua Project, retrieved 16 April 2014. http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14307/PU

[7] "Guinea-Bissau," International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, retrieved 17 April 2014. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208158>

[8] "Guinea-Bissau," Transparency International, retrieved 18 April 2014. <http://www.transparency.org/country#GNB>

[9] "Guinea-Bissau Mission (1985-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 17 April 2014. http://adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldInstID=2358062

[10] "2014 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses," [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), retrieved 12 April 2014. <http://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/2014-yearbook/>

[11] "Find a Meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses," [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), retrieved 16 April 2014. <http://www.jw.org/apps/index.html?option=FRNsPnPBrTZGT&txtCMSLang=E>

[12] "Nazarene Church Data Search," [nazarene.org](http://app.nazarene.org), retrieved 17 April 2014. <http://app.nazarene.org/FindAChurch/>