

Prospective LDS Outreach Case Studies

>

Opportunities for LDS Outreach Expansion in Togo

Author: Matt Martinich

Posted: April 18th, 2015

Overview

Togo is inhabited by 7.4 million people and located in West Africa. French is the official language and spoken by at least two million as a second language. Commonly spoken indigenous languages include Ewe, Kabiyè, Gen (Mina), Tem, and Moba. Approximately 43 ethnolinguistic groups are native to Togo.[1] Followers of indigenous beliefs account for half of the population. Christians comprise 29% of the population whereas Muslims constitute 20% of the population. The LDS Church in Togo has experienced rapid membership and congregational growth within the past decade. However, LDS missionary activity and the operation of congregations remain restricted to the capital city of Lome.

This case study reviews the history of the Church in Togo. Recent church growth and missionary successes are identified and opportunities and challenges for future growth are explored. The growth of the Church in nearby West African nations is compared to the growth of the Church in Togo. The size and growth trends of other missionary-focused Christian groups that operate in Togo are summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

//

LDS Background

The Church in Togo established its first member group in Lome in 1997 with 25 members. In 1999, the Church organized its first official branch. The Ivory Coast Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan) Mission administered Togo from 1999 to 2005 and from 2008 to 2011. Togo was administered by the Ghana Cape Coast Mission from 2005 to 2007 and from the Ghana Accra Mission from 2007 to 2008. Togo has been administered by the Benin Cotonou Mission since mid-2011.

The Church reported 25 members in 1997. Church-reported membership for Togo reached 122 in 1999, 361 in 2002, 532 in 2005, 793 in 2008, 1,555 in 2011, and 2,801 in 2014. Annual membership growth rates have exceeded 10% for all but four years since the Church began reporting official membership statistics in 1999. Annual membership growth rates ranged from 19.7% and 30.4% between 2009 and 2014.

The number of congregations increased from one in 1999 to two in 2006, three in 2008, four in 2009, five in 2010, six in 2011, ten in 2012, 12 in 2013, and 14 in early 2015. The Church in Togo organized its first district in December 2009 and the district became a stake in December 2013. Provided with year of organization in parentheses, congregations that currently operate in Togo include the Souzanetime Ward (1999), Tokoin Ward (2006), Hedzranawoe Ward (2008), Be-Kpota Ward (2009), Ablogame Ward (2010), Doumassesse Ward (2011), Akodessewa Branch (2012), Anfame Ward (2012), Attiegou Ward (2012), Wuiti Branch (2012), Adidogome Branch (2013), Baguida Branch (2013), Apedokoe Branch (2014), and the Kodjoviakope Branch (2014). Congregational growth has been commensurate with active membership growth.

The Lome Togo Stake includes only urban areas within the Lome metropolitan area. The Benin Cotonou Mission Branch administers all locations in Togo outside the boundaries of the Lome Togo Stake.

Successes

The Church has recently established new branches on the outskirts of the Lome metropolitan area. Although the Church has achieved significant progress saturating Lome with additional congregations, efforts to establish congregations on the outlaying

areas of the Lome metropolitan area constitute the Church's only success expanding national outreach since the establishment of the first branch in Lome. The organization of the Baguida Branch in late 2013 constitutes the best example of the Church expanding missionary activity and establishing new congregations within lesser-reached and previously unreached areas on the outskirts of the Lome area. The Baguida Branch administers a geographical area more than twice the size of the average ward or branch in the Lome area located in extreme eastern areas of Lome stretching from the eastern portion of the city center towards Lac Togo. A separate meetinghouse for the branch began operating within its geographical boundaries as soon as the branch was organized. Missionaries who opened the new branch reported good success in reactivating less active members who resided long distances from the previous meetinghouse. Successes achieved in the Baguida Branch may encourage mission leaders to open additional locations to proselytism where no LDS congregations operate, especially in locations with high population densities or within close proximity of Lome.

Opportunities

The Church has good opportunities to significantly increase the number of full-time missionaries assigned to Togo. The worldwide number of members serving full-time missions mushroomed in the early 2010s from 59,000 in 2012 to 84,000 in early 2015.[2] This has resulted in an unprecedented opportunity to channel surplus missionary manpower into nations where the Church maintains a limited presence. There do not appear to be any challenges for the Church in Togo to obtain larger numbers of foreign missionary visas. Widespread religious freedom and a predominantly Christian population may encourage international LDS leadership to assign larger numbers of full-time missionaries to Togo. Additionally, missionaries have consistently reported that Togolese have exhibited good receptivity to LDS outreach. This indicates that greater growth will likely occur once additional resources are allocated to the country and additional cities open to missionary work.

Togo numbers among the most favorable countries for the Church to organize a new mission due to its population size, recent missionary successes, widespread religious freedom, and opportunities for national outreach expansion. Togo currently ranks as the forty-seventh most populous country in the world without its own LDS mission. Togo is also the country with the tenth most Latter-day Saints without its own mission. Other countries with similarly-sized populations have a significantly larger LDS missionary forces such as Honduras where the Church operates three missions. The establishment of a separate mission to service Togo presents excellent opportunities for mission leaders to further strengthen the evolving LDS center of strength in Lome, identify favorable cities to open to missionary activity, and improve supervision of full-time missionary efforts.

There are currently good opportunities for the Church to open additional cities to missionary work. The Benin Cotonou Mission numbers among the African missions with the smallest number of wards or branches within its jurisdiction. Relatively few congregations within the mission suggest good opportunities for the mission to have the needed resources and vision to expand into additional locations. Additionally, Togo is located within close proximity of Benin thereby reducing concerns with long travel distances to mission headquarters. Widespread religious freedom throughout Togo suggests that missionaries assigned to central or northern areas of the country will likely experience no societal or government interference with openly proselytizing, teaching investigators, or baptizing or retaining new converts.

The most populous unreached cities in Togo present the greatest opportunities for growth. Missionary efforts that target the most populous unreached cities can maximize limited mission resources due to high population densities and easier than smaller cities or rural areas. Additionally, missionary efforts in the most populous cities can also establish additional centers of strength that one day can provide resources and leadership manpower to orchestrate additional expansion in missionary activity to surrounding areas. The Benin Cotonou Mission Branch administers all areas outside of the Lome metropolitan area and appears an effective vehicle for mission leaders to keep track of members who reside outside of the stake boundaries, identify cities most favorable to open to missionary work, hold cottage meetings in these cities with members and investigators, and organize member groups or branches when feasible. Togo has 16 cities with populations of 20,000 or more inhabitants where there are no LDS congregations.[3] Cities that appear most favorable for missionary activity and the establishment of member groups include Aného, Kara, Kpalimé, Sokodé, and Tsévié. A map displaying the status of LDS outreach for cities in Togo with 20,000 or more inhabitants can be found here.

Implementation of church planting strategies in newly opened cities to missionary work has tremendous potential to duplicate the impressive successes achieved by the Church in other West African nations. The simultaneous organization of multiple member groups in cities that open to missionary activity provides for greater saturation of target populations with LDS proselytism resources. The initial doubling of missionary housing as meetinghouse space makes efficient use of limited financial resources. As a congregation becomes larger and outgrows the original space, a new meetinghouse can be secured. Church planting tactics do not require the Church to achieve an arbitrary number of active members prior to the organization of a second or third congregation in a recently opened city to missionary work. Instead, this strategy allows for spontaneous growth that fosters a stronger self of LDS community, effectively proselytes populations throughout the city, and reduces travel time and distance to the nearest meetinghouse. Examples of West African cities where this approach has been effectively implemented include Daloa, Cote d'Ivoire; and Sunyani, Tamale, and Techiman, Ghana.

Challenges

The Church has yet to saturate Lome with full-time missionaries and congregations to adequately harness immediate opportunities for growth. The Lome metropolitan area supports a population of 1.66 million yet there remain only 14 congregations that operate within the area.[4] The average congregation includes approximately 119,000 people within its geographical boundaries - a population that exceeds the second most populous city in the country (Sokodé). Thus, mission

leaders may elect to further saturate Lome with additional branches or member groups prior to exploring options for opening additional cities to proselytism, especially considering the greater ease of opening additional congregations in a city where LDS units already operate.

The Benin Cotonou Mission has been focused on preparing the Cotonou Benin District to advance to stake status since the creation of the Lome Togo Stake. Many of the mission's resources and missionary manpower have been channeled into preparing membership for the responsibilities of a stake and to strengthen branches to operate as wards. Experience in other areas of the world has demonstrated that mission leaders prioritize the maturation of districts into stakes above the opening of additional cities to missionary work. Consequently, the Benin Cotonou Mission may not open additional cities in Togo to missionary activity until the Cotonou Benin District becomes a stake.

The Church in Benin appears to have greater opportunities to open additional cities to missionary work than the Church in Togo. There are several medium-sized cities within close proximity of Cotonou and Porto Novo where no LDS congregations currently operate. To contrast, there are only small cities and towns within close proximity to Lome. This may result in mission leaders exploring opportunities to expand missionary work into additional cities in Benin prior to exploring opportunities to expanding missionary work in Togo.

Delays in opening additional areas of Togo to missionary work may result in previously receptive individuals becoming disciplined into other proselytism-focused Christian groups. Other proselytism-focused groups have made significant inroads in Togo and have likely shepherded many individuals and families who would have previously been receptive to LDS outreach. Many Togolese who have joined other nontraditional churches have become religiously and socially integrated into these denominations. Consequently, many of these individuals and families will likely exhibit reduced receptivity to LDS missionary work since joining other denominations.

The urban population constitutes the minority in Togo. In 2011, approximately 62% of the population resided in rural areas.[5] The development of cost-effective and efficient strategies to place full-time missionaries in rural areas will be warranted to reach these populations. These strategies may include designating some missionary companionships as "traveling missionaries" to visit unreached areas to assess conditions and receptivity for more regular missionary contact, a single missionary companionship servicing large numbers of villages, and the development of effective member-missionary programs.

The Church has yet to translate a sizable number of church materials into Ewe. As of early 2015, the Church had translated only the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith pamphlet into Ewe. General Conference addresses and LDS scriptures have yet to be translated into Ewe notwithstanding Ewe speakers numbering 3.1 million worldwide.[6] A lack of translated materials poses challenges for individuals with limited proficiency in French or English to study the gospel and develop a testimony.

Comparative Growth

The Church has experienced steady national outreach expansion in several West African nations. In Ghana, the Church has experienced rapid national outreach since year-end 2008. The number of congregations has doubled from 99 to 222, dozens of cities have opened to missionary work and have had congregations organized, and the Church has implemented aggressive church planting strategies in which multiple member groups are simultaneously organized when a city opens to proselytism for the first time. The Church in Ghana reported 62,031 members as of year-end 2014 and 225 congregations (109 wards, 116 branches) as of April 2015. The Church in Ghana also maintains four missions, one temple, and one missionary training center (MTC). In Nigeria, the Church has recently opened many previously unreached locations to missionary activity located on the outskirts of major cities where LDS congregations operate. The number of congregations has increased from 260 at year-end 2008 to 425 in March 2015. The Church in Nigeria reported 129,989 members, five missions, and one temple as of year-end 2014. In Benin, the Church has experienced rapid membership and congregational growth within Cotonou within the past five years as evidenced by the number of members increasing from 253 to 1,898 and the number of branches mushrooming from three to 14. The Church opened the first city outside of Cotonou to missionary work (Porto Novo) and organized a branch in 2014. The Church in Liberia and Sierra Leone has experienced rapid congregational and membership growth rates within recent years although there have been only a handful of cities that have opened to missionary work during this period. The Church in Liberia reported 8,929 members, three districts, and 24 branches as of year-end 2014. The Church in Sierra Leone reported 14,776 members, one stake, five districts, and 39 congregations (eight wards, 31 branches) as of year-end 2014.

The LDS Church is the smallest missionary-focused Christian group in Togo among proselytizing Christian denominations with a worldwide presence. Other missionary-oriented groups operate a widespread or pervasive presence in Togo. Evangelicals claim 10.7% of the population and report slow but steady growth.[7] Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a widespread presence in Togo. Witnesses have experienced moderate membership and congregational growth within recent years. In 2014, Witnesses reported an average of 18,158 publishers (active members who regularly engage in proselytism), 797 baptisms, and 269 congregations.[8] Witnesses reported congregations in 50 cities and towns as of early 2015. Witnesses operate congregations in French, Ewe, English, Kabiyè, and American Sign Language. Witnesses have also translated proselytism materials and their official website, jw.org, into these five languages. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church maintains a widespread presence in Togo and has experienced slow but steady growth. Adventist membership has declined within the past decade due to updates in record keeping that removed nearly 5,000 "missing" members in 2010. In 2003, Adventists reported 34 churches (larger or well-established congregations), 94 companies (small or recently-established congregations), 853 baptisms, and 8,287 members. In 2013, Adventists reported 40 churches, 97 companies, 522 baptisms, and 6,385 members.[9] Adventists translate printed materials into Adele, English, Ewe, French, Gen (Mina), Ife, Igo, Kabiyè, Lama, Moba, Ntcham, and Tem. The Church of the Nazarene maintains a widespread presence and has appeared to experience steady growth. In early 2015, Nazarenes in

Togo reported 135 congregations.[10]

Limitations

Although several young full-time missionary reports were available regarding the Church in Togo at present, no local member or church leader reports were available. No recent reports from senior missionary couples or mission presidents were available. The Church does not publish official statistics on the number of converts baptized per country or mission. Consequently it is unclear how many converts join the Church a year in Togo and how these trends have changed over the years. The Church in Togo does not publish membership figures by administrative province or city. There are no official statistics that provide the number of members who reside in locations without a branch. The Church does not publish the location, names, and number of member groups. Information regarding the number of member groups that operate in Togo is unavailable to the public. The Church does not annually publish data on the number of missionaries serving per country or the number of missionaries assigned per country or mission. No official statistics on member activity or convert retention rates are available to the public.

Future Prospects

The outlook for the Church in Togo to expand into additional cities outside of Lome appears mixed within the foreseeable future. Tsévié appears the most likely city to have missionaries assigned and a congregation organized due to close proximity to Lome and its medium-sized population. However, focus from the Benin Cotonou Mission to help the Cotonou Benin District advance to stake status may result in mission leaders delaying the opening of additional cities to missionary work in Togo. Additionally, opportunities for the Church in Benin to open additional cities to missionary work appear greater than opportunities for the Church in Togo to open additional cities to missionary work. The worldwide surge in the number of members serving full-time missions, the Togolese population exhibiting strong receptivity to LDS outreach, and many medium-sized unreached cities throughout the country indicate good opportunities for growth if mission leadership takes advantage of these conditions. Togo appears likely to have its own LDS mission organized within the medium-term. Delays in opening additional Togolese cities to missionary work may result in missed opportunities for growth at a time when conditions appear highly favorable for rapid growth.

[1] "Togo," www.ethnologue.com, retrieved 21 March 2015. http://www.ethnologue.com/country/tg

[2] Lloyd, R. Scott. "LDS Church announces 11 new missions, 2015 mission president assignments," Deseret News, 9 January 2015. http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865619186/Creation-of-11-new-missions-indicates-the-work-continues-apace.html

[3] "Malawi," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 14 January 2015. http://www.citypopulation.de/Malawi.html

[4] "Major Agglomerations of the World," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 23 March 2015. http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html

[5] "Togo," CIA World Factbook, retrieved 23 March 2015. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/to.html

[6] "Ewe," ethnologue.com, retrieved 23 March 2015. http://www.ethnologue.com/language/ewe

[7] "Togo," Operation World, retrieved 23 March 2015. http://www.operationworld.org/togo

[8] "2014 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide," jw.org.

[9] "Togo Mission (1989-Present)," adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 23 March 2015. http://adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldInstID=2603550

[10] "Nazarene Church Data Search," nazarene.org, retrieved 23 March 2015. http://app.nazarene.org/FindAChurch/results.jsp?n=&c=&y=TO&s=&z=&l=&SearchChoice=