

People-Specific LDS Outreach Case Studies

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LDS Outreach among the Mountain Peoples on northern Luzon, Philippines

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Overview

Located in northern Luzon, the Cordillera Central Mountains are one of the most prominent mountain ranges in the Philippines and are home to approximately 35 indigenous ethnolinguistic groups. Known as Mountain Peoples or Cordillerans, these ethnic groups altogether number approximately 730,000 and primarily reside in Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, and Mountain Provinces. Provided with the number of subgroups in brackets and the most recent estimated populations in parentheses, the most populous ethnolinguistic groups include Kankanaey tribes [2] (220,000), Ifugao tribes [4] (130,100), Ibaloi (111,000), Kalinga tribes [7] (83,400), Itneg tribes [6] (57,500), and Bontok tribes [5] (40,700). Other ethnolinguistic groups with smaller populations include the Adasen, Atta (Pudtol), Balangao, Ga'dang, Isnag, I-wak, Kallahan, and Karao.

This case study briefly examines the history and culture of these mountain peoples in northern Luzon and summarizes past and current LDS outreach. Successes, opportunities, and challenges for missionary activity and church growth are discussed. A comparative growth section compares LDS outreach among mountain peoples in northern Luzon to other nontraditional proselytizing Christian groups. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are provided.

North Luzon Mountain Peoples Background

Bontok

The Bontok reside in upper areas of valleys and gorges of the Cordillera Central and are known for their skills and use of irrigation. Traditional religion emphasizes the importance of the spirits of the dead.[1]

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Ibaloi

Located in western areas of the Cordillera Central, the Ibaloi exhibit significant variation in culture and society due to inequality of wealth.[2] Literacy rates are approximately 88% in both a first and second language.[3]

Ifugao

Known for their intricate terraced rice cultivation, the Ifugao appeared to have little contact with peoples outside of northern Luzon until the twentieth century. Rice terraces have been utilized for at least four centuries[4] and continue to support the local economy. Social status largely depends on land and rice terrace ownership.[5] Traditional religious beliefs continue to be widely followed although many have converted to Christianity within the past century.[6] Literacy rates for Ifugao subgroups range between 20-83% for a first language and 55-60% for a second language.[7]

Itneg

The Itneg have assimilated into Ilocano society better than other northern Luzon Mountain peoples.[8] Today the Itneg are

predominantly Christian.

Kankanaey

The Kankanaey engage primarily in subsistence agriculture. Most follow traditional religious beliefs or are Christian. Settlements are scattered on the far western areas of Cordillera Central.[9]

Kalinga

The Kalinga had little contact with non-Mountain peoples until the twentieth century when the American administration of the Philippines facilitated the pacification of the Kalinga. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Kalingas vehemently opposed the Philippine government's attempt to construct several dams within their homeland on the Chico River. The Philippine military intervened but the national government ultimately abandoned plans to construct dams after allegations of human rights violations emerged.[10] The Kalinga continue to rely on subsistence agriculture and hunting for employment and food.[11] Traditional religion continues to be widely practiced and is shamanistic in nature.[12] The Kalinga report some of the highest literacy rates of the various Mountain peoples in northern Luzon as most sub-ethnolinguistic groups report literacy rates between 65-90% in a first language and 65-80% in a second language.[13]

LDS Background

The Church has maintained a presence for as long as two or three decades in a few locations within the six mountain provinces including in Baguio City (one stake), Bangued (one branch), La Paz (one branch), Lagangilang (one branch), Lagawe (one branch), and Tabuk (one branch). However units in Bangued and La Paz appear to have few, if any, Mountain peoples. No specialized proselytism efforts have ever appeared to be conducted among particular Mountain Peoples. Missionaries have been periodically assigned to Tabuk over the past five years. Safety concerns have allegedly limited the number of missionaries assigned and the continuity of their service. In the early 2000s, the Lagawe Branch had a church-built meetinghouse completed.

A map displaying the location where north Luzon Mountain Peoples traditionally reside and the status of LDS outreach for each ethnolinguistic group and prominent city or town can be found here.

Successes

The Church has established branches in several locations traditionally inhabited by Mountain Peoples including the Itneg (Inlaod) via the Lagangilang Branch, the Kalinga (Limos) via the Dagupan Tabuk Branch, the Ifugao (Tuwali) via the Lagawe Branch, and the Ibaloi via seven wards in Baguio City. Several members from these and additional Mountain People groups have joined the Church in small numbers. The Church has maintained a presence in these locations for at least a decade. All three missions that administer the mountain provinces have at least one unit in locations with sizable numbers of Mountain Peoples.

Opportunities

The Church in the Philippines boasts the fourth most nominal members of any country in the world. The size of the Church in the country as a whole provides good opportunities to expand missionary activity among Mountain Peoples utilizing Filipino missionary manpower. Within the past decade, the Church has increased the number of full-time missionaries assigned to northern Luzon as evidenced by the organization of two new missions in Laoag (2004) and Urdaneta (2013). The Ilocano language is widely spoken as a second language by nearly all Mountain Peoples, simplifying initial outreach efforts that can utilize abundant numbers of Ilocano-speaking missionaries to open these locations to proselytism. Most Mountain Peoples exhibit moderate levels of literacy in the Ilocano language, permitting the use of Ilocano translations of LDS materials and scriptures.

There are several cities and towns that appear favorable for the assignment of full-time missionaries or visits from local and mission leaders to assess conditions for opening member groups and branches. The future establishment of the Church in the most populous unreached cities and towns within the six mountain provinces offers good opportunities to reach the largest number of people with the least number of mission resources possible due to high population densities in these locations. Cities and towns that appear favorable for establishing an initial LDS presence include Bauko, Bontoc, Kapangan, Mankayan, Pinukpuk, and Tadian. Initial proselytism efforts in these and other currently unreached locations will most likely be successful if they focus on locating isolated members baptized elsewhere, incorporating local members and leaders from nearby units in finding and teaching efforts, and readily organizing member groups once a sufficiently large nucleus of members and investigators can be established.

Challenges

The five of the six mountain provinces in northern Luzon remain almost totally unreached by the Church at present. Only Benguet has a stake and no other provinces have districts headquartered within their boundaries. Only four of the six provinces have wards or branches within their boundaries (Abra, Benguet, Ifugao, and Kalinga). Excluding Benguet Province, the population of the five municipalities with an LDS congregation within the remaining five mountain provinces (Bangued, La Paz, Lagangilang, Lagawe, and Tabuk) total 194,600 inhabitants, or 22% of the combined population for these five provinces. To contrast, the Church has a widespread presence in other provinces in northern Luzon. For example, Ilocos Norte is located northwest of the six mountain provinces and has the second highest estimated percentage of Latter-day Saints in the provincial population (2.19%) of the 83 provinces in the Philippines.

Mission resources in northern Luzon have been primarily dedicated to reactivation work due to low member activity and poor convert retention rates. Within the past decade the Church discontinued several stakes in non-mountain provinces in northern Luzon such as in Agoo (2004), Bauang (2003), Burgos (2005), and Mangaldan (2003) due to problematic member activity rates and inadequate local leadership sustainability. The diversion of limited missionary resources during the 2000s and early 2010s to reactivation efforts and maintaining an official proselytizing presence in previously opened cities and towns resulted in no progress opening additional locations to missionary activity within the six mountain provinces. Consequently emphasis on strengthening established wards and branches has drawn missionary manpower away from potential assignment to reaching the Mountain Peoples in Cordillera Central.

The Church reported no net increase in the number of congregations within the six mountain provinces between 2001 and early 2013. This suggests that active church membership experienced little, if any, growth during this period as the number of congregations typically increases commensurately with active membership. The Church in the mountain provinces has been unable to meet both its own leadership and administrative needs while simultaneously assessing prospects for expanding outreach. The struggle for local leaders in mountain provinces to grow the Church within their jurisdictions appears rooted in the disconnect between full-time missionary proselytism and local member-missionary efforts. There were fewer wards and branches in the six mountain provinces in early 2013 compared to 2001 as a branch once operated in Lamut (Ifugao Province), an eighth ward previously functioned in the Baguio area called the La Trinidad 2nd (Benguet Province), and two branches once functioned in Pidigan and Tayum (Abra Province) whereas only one new branch was organized in any of these provinces in La Paz (Abra Province).

The Church administers the Cordillera Central by three separate missions. Although more missions often indicates greater availability of mission resources, the division of Mountain peoples by three separate missions challenges efforts to extend coordinated outreach. The high degree of ethnolinguistic diversity poses a major challenge for expanding outreach. Most Mountain Peoples exhibit similar cultural and societal characteristics with one another but have evolved noticeably different culture and society compared to Ilocano and mainstream Filipino culture. For example, traditional religious beliefs are significantly more infused into the society and culture of most Mountain Peoples whereas there are relatively few remnants of traditional religious beliefs in the predominantly Catholic Filipino culture. Some adaptations of teaching and finding approaches may be necessary to facilitate gospel understanding and to respect local customs. The rural environment, rugged terrain, and transportation and logistical challenges combined with unique cultural characteristics has likely dissuaded mission and local church leaders from expanding outreach in the region. These conditions may warrant mission leaders to preliminarily assign only Filipino missionaries to open new proselytism areas in previously unreached cities and towns due to many Filipinos experiencing more similar living and cultural conditions to Mountain Peoples than their non-Filipino counterparts. However, some Mountain Peoples such as the Isnag and some Kalinga subgroups reside in locations too remote and difficult to access and assign full-time missionaries anytime within the foreseeable future.

Past political instability and military conflict in the 1970s and 1980s between Mountain Peoples and the Philippine national government likely deterred LDS outreach in the region. The timing of this conflict coincided with the period in which the Church rapidly expanded outreach throughout the country and opened most cities in which it currently has a presence. Political activism and resistance to national government officials has been pacified in the past two decades but there has been no indication that area and mission leaders have been seriously considering the expansion of missionary activity in the mountain provinces. Other proselytizing Christian groups have maintained a presence among many Mountain Peoples in Cordillera Central prior to military conflict in the late twentieth century and today report a presence in virtually all sizable cities and towns. Many individuals who would have been receptive to LDS teachings have been shepherded into these churches within the past half century resulting in reduced receptivity.

Comparative Growth

The Church extends some of its most limited outreach among Mountain Peoples among non-Muslim ethnolinguistic groups native to the Philippines. Four of the six mountain provinces (Apayao, Ifugao, Kalinga, and Mountain) are the least reached provinces of the approximately 32 provinces of Luzon Island. The Church has translated basic proselytism materials and LDS scriptures into several Philippine languages; only one of which is commonly spoken as a second language by Mountain Peoples (Ilocano).

Evangelicals report a presence among virtually all Mountain Peoples in the Cordillera Central and claim as few as one percent to as high as 15 percent of most ethnic groups.[14] Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a widespread presence among the six mountain provinces. Witnesses report 31 congregations in Abra, 12 congregations in Apayao, 78 congregations in Benguet, 12 congregations in Ifugao, 15 congregations in Kalinga, and 16 congregations in Mountain Province. Virtually all Witness congregations are conducted in the Ilocano language.[15] Witnesses publish proselytism materials into Kankanaey, Ibaloi, and Ifugao.[16] Seventh Day Adventists have maintained a missionary presence among Mountain Peoples in North Luzon since

1939 and in 2012 reported 20,671 members, 106 churches,[17] and approximately 46 companies.[18] Adventists publish church materials into Bontoc (Central), Ibaloi, Isnag, Itneg (Binongan), Kankanaey, and Kalinga (Madukayang).[19]

Limitations

Data on some of the major ethnolinguistic groups native to the mountain provinces of northern Luzon is extremely limited. Consequently little detail on history, culture, demographics, religion, and interethnic relations is provided in this case study due to a lack of reliable sources on historical, cultural, societal, religious, and economic information pertaining to these groups. Few returned missionary reports from members who served in areas within the six mountain provinces were available during the writing of this case study. No reports were available from past or current mission and area leaders regarding the stark contrast between widespread LDS outreach in neighboring provinces of northern Luzon and extremely little or no outreach expansion occurring in the mountain provinces. It is unclear whether the Church previously established branches in additional locations in mountain provinces prior to 2001 as no congregational and mission data was available before 2001. The Church does not report the location of member groups for any countries around the world on its online meetinghouse locator, making it difficult to assess whether any member groups operate in the mountain provinces of the Philippines. Data on the ethnic composition of branches and wards in the mountain provinces was very limited at the writing of this case study.

Future Prospects

Significant increases in the number of full-time missionaries assigned to northern Luzon offers unprecedented opportunities to revitalize outreach among the Mountain Peoples of northern Luzon through assigning missionary companionships to previously unreached cities and towns. Continued focus on further saturating locations already reached by the Church in the region such as Baguio City, Laoag, San Fernando City, Santiago, and Tuguegarao with surplus missionary manpower poses a significant challenge to introducing the Church to many currently unreached peoples in the mountain provinces. Dependence on full-time missionary manpower to accomplish outreach expansion in the Philippines has limited growth due to self-sufficiency problems in local leadership and mediocre member-missionary participation. Greater local member and leader involvement in orchestrating the opening of additional groups and branches in locations within mountain provinces will be critical towards establishing a permanent and more widespread LDS presence among Mountain Peoples.

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[3] "Philippines," www.ethnologue.com, retrieved 3 May 2013. http://www.ethnologue.com/country/PH/languages

[4] "Ifugao - History and Cultural Relations," Countries and Their Cultures, retrieved 2 May 2013. http://www.everyculture.com/East-Southeast-Asia/Ifugao-History-and-Cultural-Relations.html

[5] "Ifugao - Economy," Countries and Their Cultures, retrieved 2 May 2013. http://www.everyculture.com/East-Southeast-Asia/Ifugao-Economy.html

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[11] "Kaiingas - Economy," Countries and Their Cultures, retrieved 3 May 2013. http://www.everyculture.com/East-Southeast-Asia/Kaiingas-Economy.html

[12] "Kaiingas - Religion and Expressive Culture," Countries and Their Cultures, retrieved 3 May 2013. http://www.everyculture.com/East-Southeast-Asia/Kaiingas-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html

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[16] "Publications," jw.org, retrieved 3 May 2013. http://www.jw.org/en/publications/

[17] "Mountain Provinces Mission," www.adventistyearbook.org, retrieved 3 May 2013. http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmField&Year=9999&AdmFieldID=MTPM

[18] "Mountain Provinces Mission," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 3 May 2013. http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10259

[19] " 148th Annual Statistical Report-2010"