



People-Specific LDS Outreach Case Studies

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Prospective LDS Outreach among the Tiv People of Nigeria

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Posted: April 18th, 2015

Overview

The Tiv are a black African people who traditionally reside in northeastern Nigeria in Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau, Taraba, and Cross River States.^[1] This region of Nigeria has been colloquially referred to as "Tivland." The most recent estimates for the number of Tiv range from 3.9 million^[2] to 4.4 million.^[3] There are at least 2.2 million speakers of the Tiv language.^[4] Tiv currently ranks within the five most commonly spoken indigenous languages in Nigeria. The vast majority of Tiv adhere to Protestantism.^[5] The LDS Church maintains no presence within the Tiv homelands and appears to have few, if any, Tiv members despite a large target population that is predominantly Christian.

This case study reviews the history of the Church's administration of the Tiv homelands. Opportunities and challenges for future growth are analyzed. The growth of the Church among other major peoples in Nigeria is reviewed and the size and growth of other missionary-focused Christian groups with a presence among the Tiv is summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

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LDS Background

No LDS congregations operate within the Tiv homelands at present. The Nigeria Enugu Mission Branch in the Nigeria Enugu Mission has administered the Tiv homelands for many years. There have appeared to be few, if any, Tiv who have joined the LDS Church outside their homelands. A map displaying the Tiv homelands and nearby LDS congregations can be found [here](#).

Opportunities

The Tiv people are predominantly Christian and their homelands have had few, if any, recent instances of societal or government abuses of religious freedom. Other missionary-focused groups appear to experience no restrictions on proselytism activities in the Tiv homelands. Conditions appear favorable for utilizing traditional LDS teaching approaches as these approaches have been tailored for individuals with a Christian background. The Tiv are the most populous Nigerian people who do not have an LDS presence, suggesting ample opportunities for missionary activity and growth due to a sizable target population that is predominantly Christian.

The massive surge in the number of members serving full-time missions during the 2010s provides the unprecedented opportunity for mission leadership to mobilize surplus missionary manpower to orchestrate the opening of multiple proselytism areas within the Tiv homelands. The number of members serving full-time missions increased by the tens of thousands from 58,000 in late 2012 to nearly 90,000 in late 2014 and has since stabilized at approximately 84,000. A net increase of members serving full-time missionaries totaling 25,000 represents a 45% increase in the size of the worldwide missionary force within less than three years. Reports from mission leadership throughout Sub-Saharan Africa note that local members have served full-time missions in larger numbers during this surge. These conditions suggests excellent opportunities for international leadership to assign larger numbers of missionaries to serve in Nigeria and open previously unreached areas to missionary work.

The Tiv homelands are predominantly administered by the Nigeria Enugu Mission. A single mission that administers an entire ethnolinguistic people presents good opportunities for mission leaders to extend uniform outreach. The Church has struggled to effectively proselyte ethnolinguistic peoples divided between multiple missions. Additionally, the Nigeria Enugu Mission has the smallest number of stakes and districts among the five LDS missions in Nigeria. Few stakes and districts within the mission

boundaries indicate good potential for the mission to open additional locations to missionary activity and expand the size of the full-time missionary force. The mission appears equipped to handle larger numbers of missionaries and open additional cities to proselytism due to a relatively small administrative burden on mission leadership. The mission has successfully advanced multiple districts into stakes within the past five years indicating that there are immediate opportunities to redistribute mission resources from strengthening local leadership and congregations to expanding missionary activity into previously unreached locations.

The establishment of the Church among the Tiv will begin with visits from mission and area leaders to assess conditions and meet with any members and investigators who reside in Makurdi or other major cities. 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 establishing the Church in the region. 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. Mission 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.

Makurdi is the most populous city within the Tiv homelands and presents the greatest opportunities for initiating LDS outreach among the Tiv. There are a sizable number of Tiv within and nearby the Makurdi area, presenting immediate opportunities for missionary outreach among this people once full-time missionaries are assigned and a member group or branch is organized. Makurdi is easily accessible from other major cities in Nigeria due to its status as the administrative capital of Benue State. This suggests no major challenges with mission leadership frequently visiting the city from mission headquarters in Enugu. Fluency in English also appears higher in Makurdi compared to many other locations within the Tiv homeland, presenting opportunities for missionaries to proselyte in English. Full-time missionaries may be assigned to Makurdi or other major cities such as Gboko and Katsina Ala when this action is approved by area leadership. The greatest successes in baptizing large numbers of converts and achieving high convert retention will require full-time missionaries to regularly open 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 Sunyani, Ghana; Techiman, Ghana; and Daloa, Cote d'Ivoire. Involvement from local members in missionary efforts will be vital towards instilling self-sufficiency in the Church in the Tiv homeland and achieving good convert retention and member activity rates.

Many Tiv speak English as a second language. The utilization of English translations of church materials and scriptures may adequately meet local needs among English-speaking Tiv, especially in the most populous cities such as Makurdi, Gboko, and Katsina Ala. Sizable numbers of bilingual Tiv suggest that integration with other Nigerian peoples who reside in the Tiv homeland may be appropriate.

Humanitarian and development projects appear as one of the most meaningful and effective methods to establish an initial LDS presence due to low living standards. Latter-day Saints could employ strategies for economic self-reliance among the Tiv similar to past and current development projects implemented in other areas of Sub-Saharan Africa such as teaching efficient agricultural techniques, organizing garden projects, holding employment and neonatal resuscitation workshops, conducting clean water projects, and providing small business loans or resources to jumpstart local entrepreneurs. The Church has accomplished noticeable success through poultry and plantation projects in Sub-Saharan Africa where individuals receive a "starter kit" of recently hatched chicks or farming supplies that if properly managed can turn into a self-sufficient business.

Challenges

There are no immediate opportunities for the Church to reach the Tiv people as no LDS congregations operate within or nearby the Tiv homelands. The nearest LDS congregations are located over 50 miles (80 kilometers) from the borders of the Tiv homeland. The lack of an LDS presence in Benue State and nearby areas appears primarily attributed to the centers of strength policy. With only a few exceptions, the Church in Nigeria has avoided the opening of previously unreached cities to missionary work where there is no nearby ward or branch. This has been done to reduce challenges for church administration across large geographical areas where there are few mature members capable of adequately meeting local leadership needs. The Church has struggled to adequately take advantage of good opportunities to further saturate currently reached cities and towns with larger numbers of mission resources, let alone expand missionary activity into additional locations. Additionally, the Church only assigns native Africans to serve in Nigeria due to non-African missionaries presenting greater safety concerns for kidnapping and violence. This has resulted in a more limited body of missionary manpower at the disposal of international church leadership to assign to Nigerian missions. These conditions, combined with an emphasis to assign the majority of mission resources to the Church's centers of strength, have dissuaded national outreach expansion into previously unreached administrative states in Nigeria during the past 15 years. The Church has only opened one Nigerian state (Bayelsa) to missionary activity and assigned the first branch during this period.

Although the Nigeria Enugu Mission has the smallest number of stakes and districts among Nigerian missions, it is the largest mission in Nigeria in terms of geography and population. The Nigeria Enugu Mission administers 83% of the land area of Nigeria and appears to have as many as 118 million people within its boundaries, or 72% of the national population.^[6] The enormous population and geographic area of the Nigeria Enugu Mission is attributed to the mission's inclusion of essentially all the predominantly Muslim areas of Nigeria and locations that have historically been distant from the headquarters of other Nigerian missions. The Church may delay the opening of major cities within the Tiv homeland to missionary work in favor of establishing the Church in other major cities within the boundaries of the mission.

The Church has yet to translate LDS materials or scriptures in Tiv. No Tiv translations of materials or scriptures may pose challenges for the Church to convey a sense that its teachings and organization is compatible with Tiv culture and society. This may especially become problematic considering the Church has translated the Book of Mormon and small numbers of gospel study and church materials into other indigenous Nigerian languages. Some may view the Church as being associated with specific Nigerian peoples such as the Igbo or Efik.

Comparative Growth

The Church in Nigeria has experienced steady to rapid growth among multiple ethnolinguistic groups with populations of at least one million and a sizable numbers of Christians. The Church operates five stakes, two districts, and 73 wards and branches within the Yoruba homelands. Steady growth has occurred in the Yoruba homelands within the past two decades. The Church has translated the Book of Mormon and a small number of gospel study and missionary materials into Yoruba. The Church operates five stakes, five districts, and 91 wards and branches within the Igbo homeland. Within the past decade, rapid congregational growth has occurred in virtually all predominantly Igbo areas of Nigeria. Igbo translations of all LDS scriptures have been available since 2007^[7] and a small number of gospel study and proselytism materials are available. The Church operates six stakes, six districts, and 117 wards and branches among Efik peoples in Akwa Ibom State and Cross River State. Rapid growth has occurred among Efik peoples as the number of congregations in the region increased from approximately 60 in 2002 to 117 in early 2015. Currently 0.75% of Efik peoples in Akwa Ibom State appear to be LDS. Translations of LDS scriptures and materials into Efik are limited to select passages of the Book of Mormon and a handful of gospel study and missionary resources. The Church operates five stakes within the Edo homelands although there are no translations of LDS materials or scriptures into the Edo language. The Church reports one district in the homelands of Ijaw (Izon) peoples. The Church established an initial presence within the Ijaw homelands during the late 2000s and currently reports no translations of LDS materials in Ijaw languages. The Church reports one district in the homelands of the Berom people. Stagnant LDS growth has occurred within the Berom homelands and no LDS materials have been translated into Berom. Additional peoples or people clusters in Nigeria with sizable numbers of Christians, populations of one million or more, and no LDS presence include the Ebira and Igala. The Church has translated General Conference sessions into Yoruba, Igbo, and Edo for many years.

Multiple missionary-focused Christian groups with an international presence maintain a presence among the Tiv. Evangelicals number among the largest religious groups and claim 35% of the Tiv population.^[8] Jehovah's Witnesses have extended specialized outreach among the Tiv and operate 22 congregations that conduct worship services in Tiv. Witnesses have translated their official website, jw.org, into Tiv.^[9] The Seventh Day Adventist Church appears to have a presence among the Tiv as Adventists have a significant presence in Nigeria. Adventists do not print materials into the Tiv language. The Church of the Nazarene does not appear to maintain a presence in the Tiv homelands.

Limitations

No reports were available regarding whether any Tiv have joined the LDS Church. The Church does not publish the number of members by language use for languages not among the 10 most commonly spoken languages among its worldwide membership. The Church does not publish the number and location of its member groups. Consequently it is unclear whether any member groups operate in the Tiv homelands. Limited information was available regarding the recent growth trends of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church among the Tiv.

Future Prospects

The outlook for an LDS establishment among the Tiv appears favorable within the next decade due to a predominantly Christian population numbering in the millions, multiple major cities within their homelands, and the administration of the homelands by a single LDS mission. However, emphasis on the centers of strength policy may deter the establishment of an LDS presence among the Tiv for many more years or decades to come. Opportunities for missionary work and church growth appear strongly correlated with the establishment of congregations that meet within the Tiv homelands. Little to no progress reaching the Tiv will likely occur until congregations begin operating within Benue State. Although the worldwide missionary force has increased by approximately 25,000 within the past three years, this growth may have little impact on larger numbers of mission resources available for national outreach expansion within the Nigeria Enugu Mission as non-African missionary manpower is not utilized to augment the size of the missionary force within Nigeria due to safety concerns.

- [1] "Tiv," www.ethnologue.com, retrieved 3 March 2015. <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/tiv>
- [2] "Tiv," Joshua Project, retrieved 3 March 2015. http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/15505
- [3] "Nigeria," CIA World Factbook, retrieved 3 March 2015.
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>
- [4] "Tiv," www.ethnologue.com, retrieved 3 March 2015. <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/tiv>
- [5] "Tiv," Joshua Project, retrieved 3 March 2015. http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/15505
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- [7] retrieved 4 November 2013. store.lds.org
- [8] "Tiv," Joshua Project, retrieved 7 March 2015. http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/15505
- [9] [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), retrieved 3 March 2015. <http://www.jw.org/tiv/>